

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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A World Filled with Rumors

Dear Brethren,

On November 12, 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article titled “Churches Changed During the Pandemic and Many Aren’t Going Back.” The article discussed declining attendance in mainline churches. “The number of churchgoers has steadily dropped in the U.S.... Covid-19 and its lockdown restrictions accelerated that fall. In-person church attendance is roughly 30% to 50% lower than it was before the pandemic, estimates Barna Group, a research firm that studies faith in the U.S.”

The article went on to say, “Barna Group’s research suggests that tens of thousands of churches are at risk of closing because of membership declines and other long-term problems that the pandemic made worse. A dip in tithes and offerings is forcing some to prepare for permanently smaller budgets, with less real estate, fewer staff members and smaller programs.”

This is not the case everywhere—and we are happy to report that the Living Church of God has bucked the trend. God has blessed us with far more than mere survival. We continue to see the Work of the Church going forward at an increasing pace. One might have expected that finances would drop off with many out of work—preventing us from expanding—but just the *opposite* transpired! Regular tithes and offerings increased, and special donations gave us a real boost. Instead of laying off employees, we took on several new ones, including ministers. We also increased the number of issues of *Tomorrow’s World Magazine* each year from six to ten, and our subscription list increased by more than 230,000 from January 2020 to January 2022! How encouraging it is that the Work shot forward with ever-greater impact during the last two pandemic-stricken years.

This is good—no, *wonderful*—news. But the world around us has also changed dramatically in the last two years, and most of those changes are not so wonderful. Quite the contrary—our world, whether we look close to home or more broadly, is angry and fragmenting.

Look at the Whole Verse

I recently recorded a telecast titled “2022 in Bible Prophecy,” giving Bible-based predictions for the year ahead and elaborating on Ezekiel 7:26. That verse tells us that disaster upon disaster will come on the house of Israel, but there is another prediction in the verse: “and *rumor will be upon rumor*.”

It is easy to focus on the “disaster” part of the sentence and not consider the part about rumors. Was there ever a time when rumors were more prolific than they are in our day? Rumors thrive in times of instability, and social media is a rumor mill on steroids, spreading false information among countless millions. “Fake news” was a political slogan used against the news media, and not without justification, even though the man who made the mantra famous had his own problems propagating fake news. Conspiracy theories have been exacerbated by the politics of the pandemic. Foreign governments and unprincipled individuals routinely post made-up stories for the gullible on Facebook and Twitter, creating confusion and division. Our angry, divided world has become angrier and more divided as a result of the pandemic—all fueled by worldwide electronic media.

This is a challenge for us. As God’s elect, we must strive not to be taken in by rumors. We must not allow ourselves to become polarized over political issues. We must remain objective, not mind-made-up ideologues who take sides, favoring one worldly evil over another. Being convicted about the truth

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of Scripture is a good thing, but polarization over worldly issues creates an atmosphere where one rashly judges some individuals as evil and always wrong, and others as good and always right. If we do not remain objective, we may immediately latch onto reports that reflect our worldview and tune out those with which we disagree—one political party becomes good, the other bad.

No matter how sketchy the source, anti-vaxxers are quick to spread dubious reports on the evils of vaccines, while those in favor spread flowery reports promoting the jabs. Conspiracy theories thrive in this atmosphere, and objectivity is a casualty. In fact, every side deals in lies and fabrications. The same is true in discussions regarding gun rights, protests and riots, border policies, the efficacy of masking, and the lives of politicians and celebrities.

Sadly, this worldliness even seeps into the Church. Some members are little different from their neighbors in this regard. We all have our personal opinions, which is not inherently wrong, and I am happy to say that the overwhelming majority among us are fair-minded, accepting that a brother or sister in Christ may have a different opinion and still be our beloved brother or sister. Sadly, though, in our current atmosphere of division, some forget who is behind the anger, lies, and divisiveness (John 8:44). Truth really has fallen in our streets, just as the Bible foretold (Isaiah 59:14).

Some rumors seek to titillate, tempting us with juicy tidbits about people, and we are drawn to tales that bolster our worldview over someone else's. Other rumors are based on fear or a lack of sound-mindedness. Paul's statement to Timothy can be instructive: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). We are to insulate ourselves with God's Spirit against shadowy and outrageous conspiracy theories, such as those of QAnon. Those of us who have been around for many years have seen such conspiracies come and go—even among members of God's Church.

Don't Let Satan Distract You

Dear brethren, let us never forget whose world this is. The old hymn "This Is My Father's World" may sound good on the surface, but it is a deception—with a bit of truth to disguise

the lie. Yes, God did create our world "of rocks and trees, of skies and seas." But this hymn also subtly implies that God is the *current* ruler of this world. We know that God the Father and Jesus the Christ are all-powerful and rule over Satan, but they established Lucifer's throne on earth in the distant past and will allow him to remain on it until a future time (Isaiah 14:13). On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus reminded His disciples that this evil spirit being is *still* the ruler of this age (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul also reminds us that this being is the "god" of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). God even gave us a Holy Day devoted to the fact that the Devil is real and must be removed from power upon Christ's return (Leviticus 23:26–32; Revelation 20:1–3).

Some Church members are tempted to try to change Satan's world now. But while we are certainly called to "shine our light" as Christians—being honest, caring, and polite; being good neighbors; setting righteous examples; and doing good works when we have the opportunity—it is *not* appropriate for God's people to advocate or vote for a human savior or to march and demonstrate for one worldly cause or another. Our responsibility is to proclaim to this world the better way of life that will come with the Kingdom of God, and to warn mankind of what will surely happen to those who do not turn in a different direction. *Only* when Christ returns will we have the opportunity and the power to change the world! *That* must always be our focus.

Satan is a master of distraction. He cares little which distraction you fall for—only that you get your mind off the great commission to which you are called (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16). Remember, when God explained to Ezekiel that He was setting him as a watchman for the house of Israel, He made it abundantly clear that this was a serious matter—he would be held accountable (Ezekiel 3:17–21). As we know, the house of Israel had gone into captivity more than a century earlier. The commission was for a future Work to carry Ezekiel's message: *Repent of your sins or go into captivity!*

May we not become distracted by rumors, conspiracies, or divisive worldly issues. We have a great Work to do!



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Work to Remember the Lessons of the Feast

The Feast of Tabernacles 2021 is now in our rearview mirror, left further behind as we round another corner and it fades in the distance. This is especially so because the Feast was “earlier” this past year than most years, in relation to the Roman calendar. But the profound meaning of God’s master plan as revealed by the Feast of Tabernacles—and all the Holy Days and Festivals—must never be lost in the traffic of life.

Memories Fade, Meaning Remains

Those in the world will be looking at Christmas in their rearview mirror by the time you receive this magazine. What will be their takeaway? Most likely presents, food, fellowship with family and friends, and warm, fuzzy feelings. They may currently be risking life and limb on an ice-covered ladder taking down elaborate decorations to store again until next year. Then there are the credit card debts to pay off, along with perhaps a dose of buyer’s remorse.

Many of us know what it was like when we ignorantly observed this and other so-called Christian holidays. We did not understand then, and neither do they now. We preach the truth, and God will get their attention at the time of His choosing. We must not forget God’s comment to Jonah: “And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?” (Jonah 4:11).

But our takeaway from God’s Festivals must never be forgotten. Specific details of sermons will likely fade into the distance because that is the reality of being human, but we will no doubt remember snippets here and there for the remainder of our lives. I still remember some points from my first Feast of Tabernacles in 1964 at Squaw Valley, California—such a long time ago! One rather humorous—at least to me—aspect was the special music. One song was sung two or three times during that Feast by a woman with a beautiful voice—“Ready My God Thy Will to See.” I knew that “Freddy” was not my God nor hers, but that is what it sounded like to me!

I have long since forgotten most people I met that year. Also forgotten are all the sermonettes and most of the sermons, but I still remember Dr. Herman Hoeh’s sermon on “The Way of Cain.” I did not understand it then, but I re-

member enough to understand it now. It has stuck with me all these years. I also remember a snippet from a sermon given by another high-ranking minister who related a humorous dream he’d had. He described how in his dream the resurrection was taking place, and while others ascended into the clouds, he was left behind, flapping his arms in a vain attempt to get off the ground.

While memories fade in the rearview mirror, the profound meaning of God’s master plan and learning to fear our God always must *never* be forgotten. No, we cannot preserve the entire Feast in our minds, but some messages and lessons should travel down life’s road with us. We may recall how we felt when someone treated us with kindness, or how much joy came to someone else as a result of a kind word or action on our part. I have learned from many years of keeping the Feasts, as well as from life in general, that it is not the “big” things we do for others that make a difference, but the “little” things that we so easily think nothing of. Isn’t this one of the enlightening lessons Jesus gave, found in Matthew 25:31–46? When we internalize outgoing concern as our way of life, we don’t think of little actions as grand gestures.

Meditate to Remember

So, how do we keep important lessons from completely fading from our view? We often hear whole sermons on prayer, Bible study, and fasting, but less often on meditation. None of these tools, intended to build a relationship with our Creator, should be neglected, but *focused meditation* often is. Yes, we all meditate, as this is merely another way of saying we think about something or roll it around in our mind, but do we focus our meditation on things we hear and lessons we stumble upon? If not, we may forget an important piece of godly wisdom.

What was it that you took away from the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day 2021? Was it a minister’s humorous dream that made a serious point, or a sermon that did not sink in at the time? Have you lost something important as a result of failing to meditate on a message or a life-lesson you experienced or observed? Mr. Ames and others encourage us to review our notes, and if this is accompanied by thoughtful consideration, the messages will last much longer—maybe a lifetime.

We are now just a few months away from Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread—a time for reflection.

We must meditate not only on the past, but also on the future. Will Passover merely be another day to check off our calendar? Or will it bring a greater realization of the enormity and importance of what happened nearly 2,000 years ago? Will the Days of Unleavened Bread be a time to cast off bad habits such as spending excessive time with social media or mindless television? We know that we all need diversions, and these are not necessarily evils, but they *can* be bad habits and evil, depending on how they are used.

One risk that all of us must consider is how much we allow our minds to line up with the course of this world (Ephesians 2:2). The “prince of the power of the air” is directing that course, and, sadly, many Church members fail to distinguish between godliness and worldliness—whether in conduct at the Feast of Tabernacles or in self-examination for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. This is a difficult challenge for each of us—especially, but not exclusively, for young people.

We only know what we are exposed to, so how do we combat Satan’s evil influence? When the problem is stated that way, the words themselves contain a key to the solution. We need to *increase* our exposure to the foundation of truth and decrease our exposure to the culture and course of this world. We can learn to discern the difference if we meditate on what is happening around us and compare it to Scripture. What is Satan promoting? The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15–17). This is the same playbook the devil used on Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:6), and he knows that people still fall for it.

Young people want to fit in, so they are especially vulnerable to the devil’s tactics. Were we not all that way at age 15 or 22? Some are more easily duped than others, depending on the strength of their unique hereditary characteristics as well as family instruction and example—and how wise or foolish they choose to be.

Avoid the Devil’s Deceptions

Television is a good indication of what the devil is selling. He does not say, “Go get a tattoo!” Instead, he induces sports figures, celebrities, and others who are on screen to display their inked skin. He does not say to women, “Wear a short skirt or low-cut blouse.” Instead, he dresses the women our girls, wives, and mothers admire—singers, actresses, and others—in immodest attire. He does not need to tell people to sleep around like alley cats—he simply makes sure as many celebri-

ties as possible set this example, to say nothing of characters on television and in movies.

The devil uses this same propaganda tactic to promote the LGBTQ+ agenda. As Hunter Madsen and Marshall Kirk, two homosexual activists, openly explain in their landmark 1989 book, “Gays must launch a large-scale campaign.... We’re talking about propaganda.... The second characteristic of propaganda is its frequent use of outright lies, a tactic we neither need nor condone” (*After the Ball*, pp. 161–162). However, note their contradictory admission about lying a few pages earlier:

In Conversion, the bigot, who holds a very negative stereotypic picture, is repeatedly exposed to literal picture/label pairs, in magazines, and on billboards and TV, of gays—explicitly labeled as such!—who not only don’t look like his picture of a homosexual, but are carefully selected to look either like the bigot and his friends, or like any one of his other stereotypes of all-right guys—the kind of people he already likes and admires. This image must, of necessity, be carefully tailored to be free of absolutely every element of the widely held stereotype of how [homosexuals] look, dress, and sound.... But it makes no difference that the ads are lies; not to us, because we’re using them to ethically good effect (p. 154).

The prince of the power of the air deceives and manipulates the thinking of whomever he can, including naïve members of the Body of Christ, with these tactics. This especially applies to the young, but we are never too old for his tactics to work against any of us if we let our guard down.

Young people want to fit in, so they are especially vulnerable to the devil’s tactics. Were we not all that way at age 15 or 22? Some are more easily duped than others, depending on the strength of their unique hereditary characteristics (Genesis 16:11–12) as well as family instruction and example (Proverbs 22:6)—and how wise or foolish they choose to be (Deuteronomy 30:19). In the end, we are free moral agents who must choose between good and evil—absolutes that are determined not by a vote of men, but by the word of God. It is through study of that word, and being led by the Holy Spirit as we examine the lessons of life experiences, that we internalize godly values. The greater the godly influence and the less the worldly influence, the more fully we have a taste for the things of God.

The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread remind us of our need for self-examination each year. But the Feast of Tabernacles gives us a unique opportunity to put into practice



God's better way of life under different circumstances. It is remarkable how the Feast reveals generous or selfish hearts. It is easy for less-than-mature Christians to become self-centered: "I deserve to go to a beach site." "Here is what I want to do!" "This is my vacation and I want to..." On the other hand, many Church members go out of their way to share their time, talents, and finances with others. Sharing finances is often easier than sharing time.

Paul's Misunderstood Admonition

How often have you heard people say they want to hear more of the "meat of the word"? They often mean that they want to hear something *new*—especially speculative prophecy. Is that the message the Apostle Paul intended in Hebrews 5:11–14? No, it is not!

Paul first explained that although the audience to which he was writing had been around a long time—they had no doubt attended many Feasts—they were "dull of hearing." Instead of being ready to teach, they needed to go back to the basics of righteous living. They were "unskilled [not in speculative prophecy, but] *in the word of righteousness*." They were acting immature and simple-minded. It is in this context that he states, "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 5:14). But exactly what does that mean in practical application?

Going to the Feast is about more than spending time with friends and family over food and drink. The daily services are essential. Without the messages explaining Scripture and godly principles by which to live, the Feast would be little more than a getaway vacation. No, the Feast of Tabernacles

is about coming to "fear [respect] the LORD your God always" (Deuteronomy 10:20). Through instruction, correction, encouragement, and *practicing* the way of outgoing concern, we internalize a way of life in preparation to be kings and priests in Christ's soon-coming Kingdom.

For sure, we are to enjoy the fruits of our labor, as we read in Ecclesiastes: "I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God" (3:12–13). But we also learn from practice that Jesus' admonition is true: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The context of that quote is this: "I have shown you in every way, by la-

boring like this, that you must support the weak" (v. 35). That goes far beyond monetary support. It involves sacrificing our time and personal desires for the sake of others. This is the Christian standard of which the Apostle Paul reminds us:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:3–8).

Now, *that* is something on which to meditate! It calls for self-examination as we look forward to the Passover and consider the magnitude of what God the Father and Jesus Christ did for us in action and example. It also calls for us to look in the rearview mirror and meditate on how Christ-like we were at the Feast of Tabernacles 2021—and how we can be more so throughout the year and as we look forward to the Feast of 2022.

We live in exciting times. World events confirm that we are living near the end of an age and that the climax of that time is near. Each year brings us closer to the reality of what the Festivals of the seventh month picture. Until then, let us be about our Father's business! (L)



What Is Christian Nationalism?

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

Have you heard of “Christian nationalism”? You may be hearing more about it in the future. It has various definitions—usually presented by its critics—and the movement is diverse. But, as one critic wrote, “Simply put, Christian nationalism is a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life” (Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, 2020, p. 10).

Christianity Today puts it this way: “Christian nationalism is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way.... Christian nationalists do not reject the First Amendment and do not advocate for theocracy, but they do believe that Christianity should enjoy a privileged position in the public square. The term ‘Christian nationalism,’ is relatively new, and its advocates generally do not use it of themselves, but it accurately describes American nationalists who believe American identity is inextricable from Christianity” (“What Is Christian Nationalism?” February 3, 2021).

Christian nationalism is a rapidly growing—and highly polarizing—issue in the United States. It is important that we understand it and the Church’s position relative to it.

Religion in the Nation’s Past

The founding fathers of the United States, like many national leaders since their time, referred inclusively to a “Creator,” “the Almighty,” and “God” in speeches and proclamations. Examples include the statement that President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued on June 14, 1954, upon signing the bill to include the words “under God” in the Pledge to the Flag:

FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our nation and our people **to the Almighty**. To anyone who truly loves America, nothing could be more inspiring than to contemplate this rededication

of our youth, on each school morning, to our country’s true meaning.... In this way we are reaffirming **the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future**; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource, in peace or in war (“Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill To Include the Words ‘Under God’ in the Pledge to the Flag,” The American Presidency Project, *Presidency.ucsb.edu*, emphasis added).

Many presidents have made such statements, which have long been a feature of messages such as Thanksgiving Proclamations. Typically, the statements have made inclusive affirmations of religious faith and the providence of the Creator God, without specific endorsements of mainstream Christianity. The idea of an almighty creator God is common to many faiths. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” and national leaders have usually been careful to remain inclusive when they make general endorsements of religious faith.

But many Christian nationalists see America as being Christian from its *inception*, and many advocate that the U.S. should be declared a Christian nation. That sounds a lot like making mainstream Christianity its national religion. And some go further and see that as specifically meaning evangelical Christianity.

Retired U.S. General Michael Flynn, National Security Advisor in the Trump administration, drew a lot of attention when he stated on a recent political tour, “If we are going to have one nation under God, which we must, we have to have one religion. One nation under God, and one religion under God” (“Michael Flynn calls for ‘one religion’ at event that is a who’s who of the new Christian right,” *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2021).

Dr. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Dallas, gave a controversial sermon on June 14, 2020, in which he stated, “We say without hesitation or apology that America was founded as a Christian nation” (*Taking America Back for God*, pp. 56–57), reasoning that to be the case because the great majority of

the founders professed mainstream Christianity. Despite the diversity of belief—or lack of belief—in the nation today, he asserts that the professed Christianity of the initial colonists means America should still be declared a Christian nation.

But the government of the U.S. is democratic. Former president Barack Obama differed from Jeffress when he said, “Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation—at least, not just. We are also a Jewish nation, and a Muslim nation, and a Buddhist nation, and a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers” (“‘Call to Renewal’ Keynote Address,” June 28, 2006). And politicians today, as in the past, can count votes.

The conflicting views are being played out in a contest of political power in the culture wars—and the secularists appear ascendant.

Secular Nationalists

Christian nationalists’ opponents, generally “secular nationalists,” speak of being in opposition to “Christian dominance,” “Christian hegemony,” and “Christian privilege,” and often characterize the effects of Christian nationalism in terms of the victimization of non-Christians. They assert, “The ‘Christianity’ of Christian nationalism represents something more than religion.... It includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism. It is as ethnic and political as it is religious” (*Taking America Back for God*, p. 10). Secular sociologists who study religion use statistics to try to make a case for those accusations. If many Christian nationalists identify with conservative politics, many secular nationalists speak in the language of progressive politics.

Many in mainstream Christianity were alarmed when Martin R. Castro, named chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights by President Obama in 2011, said, “The phrases ‘religious liberty’ and ‘religious freedom’ will stand for nothing except hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy or any form of intolerance.” These remarks were released in a report on “Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles with Civil Liberties” (“‘Religious freedom,’ ‘religious liberty’ just ‘code words’ for intolerance, Civil Rights chair says,” *The Washington Times*, September 8, 2016).

While Christian nationalists “believe that the U.S. government should unapologetically privilege traditional Christianity” (*Taking America Back for God*, p. 4), secular nationalists believe that the U.S. government should unapologetically privilege secularism. Like Christian nationalism, secular nationalism occurs across a spectrum. The vanguard of secular nationalism often views Christian nationalism through the

lens of progressive politics, and they insist that their view be taken as normative.

They also fear the political reaction and subsequent political development of Christian nationalists. In an essay adapted from *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, Katherine Stewart wrote, “It is still taking your taxpayer dollars, together with the good will of many believers, and using them to mobilize and train a partisan political army bent on rewriting our history, seizing control of the American legal system, disenfranchising voters who don’t agree with their agenda, and undermining our constitutional principles and democracy itself. As the disgraceful events of January 6 should have made clear, moreover, this is a movement that views democratic politics as an option—and even an obstacle—in the pursuit of power” (“The Power Worshipers,” *Free Inquiry*, volume 41, issue 5, August/September 2021). Ironically, Christian nationalists make similar statements about secular nationalists.

Both sides note accurately that the religious landscape of the U.S. is changing. The statistics bear it out. “Strong Christian nationalists are declining in number and this also has important implications. More and more Americans collectively agree that the United States should not favor Christianity formally” (*Taking America Back for God*, p. 4). Many secular nationalists believe religion, especially Christianity, should be excluded from public life.

The influence of mainstream Christianity, and of religion in general, is rapidly being removed from American life and law. Examples of this would include the redefining of marriage and gender in the law. For thousands of years, the institution of marriage has been between a biological male and a biological female—not so now in American law. Also, in the Bible gender is viewed (in today’s sociological terminology) as “binary,” not “fluid.” In addition, more and more young people are self-identifying as “nones,” agnostics, or atheists, rather than the “mainline” denominations such as Catholic, Baptist, or Methodist. Secular nationalists see an opportunity.

The Majority View Has Changed

Times have changed since America’s founding fathers professed their faiths. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, readings from the Bible were part of standard education, and public prayer was common. Today, however, popular culture is usually the antithesis of the values advocated in the Bible, and modern education is often hostile to faith. “It appears that as Americans have moved away from organized religion over the last 10 years, they have begun to make small shifts toward a more oppositional response to Christian nationalism as well” (*Taking America Back for God*, p. 46).

Whereas the culture of mainstream Christianity represented the majority view in the past, today’s society is much

more secular, and as a result, secular nationalists see their view as normative. So, they present Christian nationalists as being extreme and out of the mainstream of society.

A couple of terms are helpful in understanding the problem: *pre-political ethic* and *Judeo-Christian ethic*. For example, if people think robbing banks is wrong, they pass a law against it. Or, if they think that taxation without representation is wrong, they throw some tea into Boston Harbor and form a republic. The point is that political action is usually preceded by a perceived ethic regarding right and wrong. That is called a **pre-political ethic**.

The second term is **Judeo-Christian ethic**. Going back to the Middle Ages, Britain always had a state church—some-

We in God's Church must not become involved in the political struggles of today's world, because they can't be fixed any more than its ruler, Satan, can be fixed. The causes of the world's problems are spiritual, the effects are social and political, and the solutions are biblical. God's Church is set apart from this world. To that world, we preach individual and national repentance—and the good news of the Kingdom of God. **Christ is not coming to reform this world's political systems, but to replace them with His righteous government.**

times Catholic, sometimes Protestant—and as a result, the governing ethic often incorporated some biblical principles. It has long been acknowledged that much of the underlying ethic of English common law was Judeo-Christian, although Enlightenment philosophy influenced it as well. U.S. law is significantly influenced by English common law, and as a result, its *pre-political ethic* is *Judeo-Christian*. In addition, most of the early legislators in the federal and state governments professed Christianity, although many were hardly pious. Some of the original colonies even had denominations of Christianity as state religions, which were later discarded. Most legal scholars have recognized that underlying Judeo-Christian ethic throughout the nation's history, and that is why the Ten Commandments are referenced in a dozen or so places on and in the U.S. Supreme Court Building. Christianity was not recognized as a state religion by the federal government, but the underlying ethic of the nation's law was acknowledged to be Judeo-Christian.

Christian nationalists and secular nationalists both ask the question, "Is America a Christian nation?" and they vigorously debate it. But the question presents a false choice.

The better question is "Did the U.S. Constitution and subsequent law incorporate, at least in part, a Judeo-Christian ethic?" As a fact of history, it did. In modern times, all sides of the question can agree that the Judeo-Christian ethic is being rejected in the popular culture and civil law, so the reaction of Christian nationalists has been to create legal fortifications. Secular nationalists see an opportunity for far-reaching social and political change, and given the secular drift of society, they are in a good position to implement that.

A Moral Tipping Point?

In Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, one character asked another about how he went bankrupt. He replied, "Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly."

That principle holds for both *financial* and *moral* bankruptcy. God's way of life, as defined by His commandments, brings great benefits to both the person and the nation that observes them. God said that He commanded them "for your good" (Deuteronomy 10:13), and He blesses those who keep them (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). But rejection of God's commandments as magnified by Christ and the Apostles has consequences, as well. He will withdraw His blessing from an individual or a nation if they reject Him. And the ruin of

moral bankruptcy, like financial bankruptcy, comes two ways—first gradually, then suddenly.

And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled. Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and **you perish quickly** from the good land which the LORD is giving you (Deuteronomy 11:13-17).

Christian nationalists and secular nationalists may debate whether the U.S. was *once* a Christian nation, but the

evidence is overwhelming that the nation *now* largely rejects God, both officially and societally. The nation is at a tipping point.

Ambassadors for Another Nation

As the Church of God, our strength is spiritual, not political. And if our spiritual strength seems weak to some, consider that God told the Apostle Paul, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for *My strength is made perfect in weakness.*’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. *For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

As a matter of history, the Christianity that Jesus Christ taught was largely abandoned in the second and third centuries AD, in favor of what can be called *Nicene* Christianity after the famous creed. Today, that vast, counterfeit institution is battling with secularists over governmental turf. Through most of its history, mainstream Christianity has been closely allied with governments. Until more modern times, state churches have been the rule, not the exception. By contrast, the Church that Jesus Christ established was not government-affiliated, but rather was persecuted by governments.

Much of mainstream Christianity believes that the Kingdom of God is in human hearts, in heaven, or represented by the government of the Roman Catholic church. The Church of the first century held what theologians call a “premillennial” belief about the Kingdom of God, meaning that they believed that Christ would return to establish a millennial rule on earth. In “premillennialism,” the current age exists prior to or “pre” that thousand-year period of Christ’s rule, which was prophesied throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is the good news of the institution of that coming Kingdom and the preceding redemptive action of its King, Jesus Christ. By contrast, mainstream Christianity teaches a variety of other gospels that focus on the person of Christ, neglecting His prophesied kingdom and focusing instead on one human institution or another.

But the Apostle Paul described those in the Church of God, as it existed in the first century, as ambassadors of a coming Kingdom, a literal Kingdom to be headed by Jesus Christ on earth—a Kingdom foretold by the prophets of old. This good news of the Kingdom of God was preached by Jesus Christ and His apostles and was believed by the Church of the first century. Later, the Roman church and its daughters came to consider that Kingdom an allegory, and even heresy. Today, many theologians refer to the idea of Christ coming to set up a kingdom in Jerusalem as a “political Messiah.” By contrast, the Church of God today continues to

preach the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a witness and a warning to the world.

The Apostle Paul told the Church in Corinth, “Now then, we are *ambassadors* for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Abraham envisioned the Kingdom of God (Hebrews 11:8–10), and it is closer now than it was then. We must have eyes to see and ears to hear, and we must act on what God reveals will happen (Mark 4:23–25).

The Final Outcome

The Bible reveals that this world is currently a kingdom, but not one subject to God. Rather, Christ said, “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (Matthew 12:26), and revealed that “*the ruler of this world is judged*” (John 16:11). Christ Himself said that Satan has a kingdom and is the ruler of this world. Indeed, Satan “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9)—but a deceived world doesn’t know that it is deceived.

The U.S. today is like Israel of long ago, when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Notwithstanding what Christian nationalists assert, this nation has largely rejected God, at both the personal and governmental levels. This is a big reason why the Living Church of God preaches individual and national repentance—though only a few are listening.

We in God’s Church must not become involved in the political struggles of today’s world, because they can’t be fixed any more than its ruler, Satan, can be fixed. *The causes of the world’s problems are spiritual, the effects are social and political, and the solutions are biblical.* God’s Church is set apart from this world. To that world, we preach individual and national repentance—and the good news of the Kingdom of God. Christ is not coming to reform this world’s political systems, but to *replace* them with His righteous government. Ambassadors are not part of the political system of a nation they visit. They are in it, but not of it. Christ’s coming is a miraculous event that we *wait for*—it is *not* one that we cause politically. Our safety is in our sanctity, and we must never abandon our set-apart status to participate in this world’s political conflicts, whether we live in the U.S. or in any of the scores of countries where our brothers and sisters in Christ reside.

Both the Christian nationalists and the secular nationalists are playing a losing game. In this age, whatever happens in politics, Satan is the real winner—but only for now. The “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4) is in his endgame, and the outcome is preordained. Christ will come in power and glory to establish His righteous Kingdom and to rule as King of Kings—*on earth.* (LN)



Festival 2021: Out of the World

By **Rod McNair**

What a year it has been! Against the backdrop of the end time, we have been able to appreciate the precious gift of knowing and keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. Especially as society slides into ever-more-shocking moral depravity, the Feast is a welcome respite, a “spiritual reset.” It’s a refreshing oasis of hope in a world lost in confusion.

In 2021, members and guests of the Living Church of God gathered at 100 sites in 49 different countries. The total attendance was 11,343, with 81 percent attending in person and 19 percent connecting online. It was a time to fellowship and worship God together. Yes, the Days of Unleavened Bread point to our journey out of spiritual Egypt—but that journey doesn’t stop with the Days of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures a time when the whole world will be living God’s way of life, when all humanity will be released from the captivity of the devil. As the prophet Zechariah wrote of that time, “And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9).

We go to the Feast to learn to prepare for that soon-coming age and to reject this present evil world (Galatians 1:4). We live in the world, but we must not be like the world, as Jesus prayed in John 17:15: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.” That is a profound lesson we learn more deeply each year, as we keep the Feast.

So, what about you? What were some of the highlights of this year’s Feast for you? Perhaps it’s good, several months after the Feast, to review Festival 2021 and reflect on the lessons we learned.

Lockdowns and Livestreams

Like the previous year, 2021 was filled with COVID news. While some sites, such as **Great Malvern, United Kingdom**, had only

voluntary, recommended guidelines, other sites and even whole countries were in total lockdown. In **Sri Lanka, Indonesia**, and **Papua New Guinea**, brethren were prevented from travelling and had to keep the Feast at home, watching the livestream from Australia or pre-recorded messages. In **Australia**, brethren were not able to travel across state borders, and kept the Feast in local areas. In the Philippines, brethren in **Central and North-western Mindanao** could not gather in one group as planned but were able to keep the Feast by congregation. In **Davao City, Philippines**, members gathered in nine mini-sites in homes to watch livestreams and videos.

On the other hand, God provided some sites with unusual blessings to enable brethren to meet and keep the Feast together. A last-minute Philippine government policy reversal enabled Manila brethren to meet in **Baguio City** for the Feast. Despite a nationwide ban on meetings, the Church was allowed an exemption in **San Miguel de Allende, Mexico**. In **Ontario, Canada**, the Church benefited from venues being granted “place of worship” status, which meant unvaccinated brethren were allowed to meet as well. In **Langebaan, South Africa**, brethren benefited from last-minute lifting of some of the COVID restrictions. As Festival Coordinator Lawdi Ferreira explained, “The blessings from God before and during the Feast were a great witness to many of their answered prayers. The lifting of COVID restrictions before the Feast that allowed the whole group of about 178 to meet together, and even God’s intervention in the weather, was a highlight.”

Festival Coordinators and their staff came up with creative ways to encourage fellowship despite lockdowns. While some brethren in New Zealand were able to travel to the Feast, those in Auckland were not allowed to leave the city. So, as Festival Coordinator Paul Kearns explained, in **Taupo, New Zealand**, a Talent Show was organized with an online component. “Due to the majority of Kiwis being in lockdown, we were able to stream a Talent Show nationwide where per-

formers pre-recorded their acts, and they were compiled to over an hour of talent-filled fun that those physically at the Feast site and those in lockdown could watch online.” For other brethren, the Feast meant the first time they were able to see one another in many months. This made the Feast a special treat in places like **Drummondville, Quebec, Canada**. As Festival Coordinator Marc Arseneault wrote, one of the highlights was just “being together and fellowshiping with one another after almost 18 months of being confined at home or allowed to meet in very small groups.”

Sadly, not all lockdowns and restrictions disappeared in 2021. But brethren around the world showed resilience and creativity in overcoming these hurdles, rejoicing in the Feast no matter their circumstances. These restrictions were also a reminder that while we are to come out of this world spiritually, we must still function within the laws of the nations where we reside (Romans 13:1).

First Steps on the Spiritual Journey

Each year, brethren new to the Living Church of God join in the Feast for their first taste of God’s Holy days. If this was your first Feast, congratulations! What a joy it is to experience eight days of immersion in the teachings of God as we get a glimpse of Christ’s coming reign. What makes that picture even more compelling is how it contrasts with the pressures and trials of life in our world today.

We had new attendees at Feast sites all over the world. In **New Bern, North Carolina**, Festival Coordinator Wyatt Ciesielka commented, “We had about fifteen first-time Feast attendees. About eight or nine were from recent TWP’s and about six or seven were ‘prospective members’ or first-time Feast guests. It was a joy to be able to fellowship with so many new people.” In **Langebaan, South Africa**, Mr. Ferreira described a special event just for newcomers: “On the evening after the first Holy Day, we hosted a first-timers cheese and wine event for the 16 attendees that attended their first Feast with LCG in South Africa. This was a good icebreaker for them as they formed bonds that were carried throughout the Feast and immediately slotted in with fellowship and activities. It created an ideal opportunity for everyone there to get to know each other and share stories of how they were called.”

Every part of the body is important. As God calls new members into His Church, they bring excitement and energy as they begin their spiritual journey. On the other hand, “old-timers” who have been in the Church for decades bring depth and stability to the congregation. As Festival Coordinator Lee Page pointed out, one of the highlights in **Porto-Novo, Benin**, was simply “talking to the young members who are looking forward to baptism, and talking to the older members about their calling.” What better way to introduce new members to God’s way of life than through attending

the Feast of Tabernacles? Eight days of warm fellowship and sound biblical instruction provided ideal conditions for new brethren building a strong Christian foundation in 2021.

Confidence in God in a Fearful World

Part of the process of coming out of the world is rejecting and overcoming the attitude of fear the world fosters. When stresses mount and anxieties increase, it is easy to get caught up in the world’s spirit of hopelessness and despair. Yet God has called us to have faith, trust, and confidence in Him. When we come to the Feast, we come to learn what it means to have trust and confidence in God—to “fear the LORD your God always,” as we are instructed in Deuteronomy 14:23.

How does the Feast cultivate faith and not fear? For some with health problems, just coming to the Feast during the pandemic took courage. On behalf of those who are more vulnerable, we thank all our brethren for complying with the protective measures the Church put in place. It shows that we care and respect those whose health is compromised, and it shows that we are willing to put up with minor inconveniences for the sake of those more vulnerable.

The Feast is a time to enjoy beautiful and inspiring music, and the power of music to lift us up and encourage us cannot be overestimated. Assistant Coordinator Ryan Dawson commented on the music performed at the site in **St. Augustine, Florida**: “The *a cappella* arrangement of ‘Be Not Afraid’ provided a valuable reminder that God called us to His Feasts to rejoice. That message has never been more valuable in a world filled with division and fear.”

Fearing God also means knowing He can protect us in an increasingly dangerous world. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Timothy 3:1). Some of our faithful ministers deal with dangerous situations as they serve God’s people. Festival Coordinator Rees Ellis and his wife traveled to French-speaking **Burundi** and **Togo** for the Feast, and as he notes in his report, “Our arrival in Burundi was not without a bit of [drama]: There was a rebel attack on the Bujumbura International Airport just hours before Fanny and I arrived in Burundi. The army was all over the place assuring peace and calm. That evening Mr. Juvénal Karibwami, our elder in Burundi, left minutes before a grenade attack, close to where he took his bus, shook the capital Gitega, leaving two dead and more than 30 wounded. He was unharmed.”

Cooperation, Harmony, and COVID

The political and social effects of the pandemic and its resulting divisions reach far and wide. It is hard to avoid seeing or hearing the hostility and hatred that have been stirred up in the age of COVID. The Feast stands in sharp contrast as we learn and practice love, cooperation, and harmony.

Despite the inconveniences of COVID protocols, brethren around the world responded with patience and understanding. Perhaps the greatest test of love and patience came from those who came down with COVID symptoms just prior to the Feast. Some brethren had to make the painful decision not to go to the Feast at the last minute after testing positive for the virus. As Festival Coordinator Bob Rodzaj noted in **Lake Geneva, Wisconsin**, “Some acquired COVID pre-Feast, which delayed their ability to attend. Otherwise, with following the guidelines given to us, our site remained COVID-free.”

Festival Coordinator Ron Poole explained that in **Hilton Head Island, South Carolina**, “there was an atmosphere of reverence, respect, and humility. The COVID protocols were enforced primarily by the greeters, and they said there were no negative reactions to the questions or the daily temperature check.... The daily atmosphere was positive and uplifting.”

Festival Coordinator Alvin Cumberbatch commented that in **Pebbles Beach, Barbados**, “we were not able to have live services or whole-church activities due to government restrictions on the number of individuals meeting physically. This allowed for brethren to serve each other by hosting in smaller groups, which created greater bonds and friendships.” Festival Coordinator Jonathan Bueno, describing the Feast in **Florence, Oregon**, stated, “Everyone cheerfully complied with all regulations. I think everyone was just happy to be there and most served in some capacity.” Festival Coordinator Lenny Bower explained that in **Williamsburg, Virginia**, “there was not one single complaint about temperature-taking or mask-wearing. They just showed up, did what was asked, and smiled.” Festival Coordinator Michael Aviles, describing the **Mount Snow, Vermont**, Feast site, commented, “People seemed to handle the COVID protocols (i.e., wearing masks, taking temperatures at the door) well. People fellowshiped well before and after services, so it doesn’t seem like the masks ‘slowed them down’ too much.”

With the advent of vaccination policies and their potential to divide, brethren in **Drummondville, Quebec**, came up with a creative and positive solution—fellowship in the parking lot! Mr. Arseneault reported, “The restrictions in Drummondville were that unvaccinated people could not enter any of the meeting rooms. They were staying in their hotel room but could not attend services nor be part of the meals and activities we had inside. [However,] members did not fall prey to the spirit of division that the world pushes... brethren used every opportunity to visit one another and encourage one another; some went to the park to play pétanque, others met in the parking lot, others shared meals in the common areas of the hotel.”

The protocols and restrictions are an ever-present challenge. However, as **Taupo, New Zealand**, Coordinator Paul

Kearns explained, we shouldn’t be discouraged, but should instead be grateful for any opportunity we have to be together. This is true especially when we see more challenges on the horizon. “[In Taupo,] those present had to wear masks and social distance whilst at services. Although this was a challenge for most, it reminded us that more challenges are coming, so we shouldn’t complain about the current status quo but appreciate that some of us could at least be together in person.”

In the few Feast sites where COVID cases occurred, contact tracing had to be done. That meant the Festival Coordinator and his staff asking brethren to quarantine themselves if they had come in close contact with infected brethren. Despite the inconvenience this caused, **Midway, Utah** Coordinator Brandon Fall said those involved responded patiently and with understanding: “Two households came down with COVID. We had to quarantine a number of households who were potentially exposed to those who had COVID. It was amazing to see the cooperation and wonderful attitudes of those who were quarantined.... One young man mentioned how he personally had learned from the experience of being quarantined.... Another family who had been quarantined even gave a thank-you card for the Feast experience. Even though being quarantined was not something anyone would want at the Feast, these brethren came through the experience as glowing examples.”

Positive Lights in a Negative World

When we go to the Feast, we are admonished to be mindful of the example we set. Most attendees take that instruction seriously. After the Feast, we often receive positive reports of appreciation from hotel venues and restaurant staff, passed on by Festival Coordinators. This year, there were even more than usual. As the pandemic wears on and as societal norms break down, common courtesy and acts of kindness are becoming rarer, even in the “hospitality industry.” As a result, brethren and guests attending the Feast have the opportunity to shine brighter and brighter.

Note some of the comments received by our Festival Coordinators:

The Feast site hotel commented that dealing with the public during COVID has been so difficult they may not have any more functions in their hall; however, they find the brethren delightful to have, and so we are welcome any time (**Liverpool, Nova Scotia, Canada**).

Our main contact at Kalahari remarked how easy our group was and that she wished all the groups were as easy (**Sandusky, Ohio**).

Hotel staff commented several times how well-behaved our group was. According to them they get a lot of groups that are so unlike us (**San Diego, California**).

Many of the hotel staff commented that they truly appreciated the politeness and “thank yous” of the members since the vast majority of their other customers do not say “thank you” anymore.... On the last meal we asked the kitchen staff to come out and [they] were thanked for the wonderful meals they had prepared for us. The applause lasted almost a minute and the crew really enjoyed it. The maitre d’hotel told us, “Nowadays, people never do this anymore” (**Drummondville, Quebec, Canada**).

The convention center director and some of the staff again complimented us as being a joy to work with, and some of their best guests.... I was in touch with the local hotels and restaurants, and there were a couple problem issues with customers who were *not* Church members that a couple of local establishments informed me of. By contrast, the establishments were very pleased with all of our membership, and the problems with other guests just made us stand out in a positive way even more (**New Bern, North Carolina**).

The management stated numerous times, that we are their “largest group and the most well behaved.” A condo owner at the resort commented that we were the friendliest group of people he had ever seen (**Hilton Head Island, South Carolina**).

A couple of landlords commented that it was the best group and most respectable people that they rented their accommodation to (**Langebaan, South Africa**).

Growing in Love and Care for One Another

In a world becoming increasingly hostile, the Feast of Tabernacles is a unique opportunity for God’s people to grow in caring for one another. Each day we are taught directly from God’s word, and God gives us time to reflect on our lives, get a bigger picture, and strive for a higher standard. What lessons did we take away from the Feast? Did it help us come out of the world spiritually? Have we since slipped back into old habits or patterns?

This is a good time to reflect on what we learned at the Feast. Mr. Rodzaj noted the love and care brethren showed to one another at the Feast: “It was good to see members mix

and spend time with those they didn’t previously know, more than ever before.” Mr. Aviles explained that the **Mount Snow, Vermont**, Feast site was “somewhat of a remote location so there isn’t much ‘hustle and bustle,’ traffic, etc. This is really nice because it contributes to a calm, peaceful atmosphere.... Also, partly due to COVID, we didn’t have a really packed schedule of activities, which allowed for a more relaxing Feast that allowed for personal time and ‘freedom to fellowship.’” Many of us probably had similar experiences—enjoying more free time than we generally have during the rest of the year. The question is, did that extra time to reflect and be refreshed help us to make lasting changes in our relationships back home? Are we showing more love and respect for our families and brethren than we did a year ago?

Many brethren showed their love for others in sharing generously what they had. In **Branson, Missouri**, Festival Coordinator Richard Franz reported on the love and concern brethren had for each other, including the elderly, and that he witnessed unusual generosity this year at the Feast. Festival Coordinator Rodger Bardo, who oversaw the **San Diego, California**, Feast site, commented, “One specific situation stood out: a huge group had their meal paid for, and we still do not know who did it. There were several other situations like this—good works and no one claiming credit.”

Mr. Ferreira expressed the same for **Langebaan, South Africa**: “Some who had more than one car made their extra car available to others who did not have transport to the Feast. Some drove long distances out of their way to offer lifts to others who did not have transport. Others booked larger accommodation in order to share with those who could not afford accommodation for the Feast. No one was excluded in any activities or combined meals, and those who had more to give gave generous donations to help and include everyone in all activities and meals.” The question for all of us is, are we showing that same generosity now that we are home? Do we have a spirit of sacrifice as we go through our daily lives?

The Feast of Tabernacles gives us an unusual opportunity to learn to serve one another. Serving on work crews enriches our lives and builds bonds with other brethren. And there were many examples of such work at the Feast in 2021. As Mr. Fall related, “The unity and teamwork of those who served at the Feast was really inspiring. There were many individuals who saw a need, reached out, and made sure brethren were taken care of. Seeing that unity, attitude of giving, and teamwork gave us a glimpse of what it will be like working together in the Millennium with the same goal.”

As we find ourselves back in our “normal lives,” it’s good to reflect on the lessons learned at the Feast. Now, our journey continues. As we go forward with faith, let’s continue to come out of the world each day of our lives as we look forward to entering the Kingdom of God. (LW)



St. Augustine, Florida



Benin, Porto Novo, Africa



Boerne, Texas



Drummondville, Quebec, Canada



Nairobi, Kenya



South Padre Island, Texas



Mol, Belgium



Punta Leona, Costa Rica



Kingsburgh, South Africa



Great Malvern, United Kingdom



Port-au-Prince, Haiti



Taupo, New Zealand



Ahuachapan, El Salvador



Ukerewe, Tanzania



Tororo, Uganda



San Juan, Puerto Rico

Woman to Woman

Exhorting with All Purity

By **Glory Talbott**

In 1 Timothy 5, the Apostle Paul advises the young minister about how he is to view women, and that advice is extremely helpful to us women, as well. The passage admonishes us to see “older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity” (v. 2). Too often today, women competitively seek to exalt themselves over other women, whether older or younger. A widely held attitude is that younger women are out of touch and naive. Ironically, younger women can have the same view of older women!

As Christians, we are to think the best of others. Young women should learn to deeply respect their elders and appreciate the experiences and the lessons they have learned. Older women should remember their earlier days and recognize that youthful energy and zeal are extremely beneficial if wisely directed. I have found myself on both sides of this issue, being both an older woman among a group of budding youngsters and a younger woman surrounded by seniors.

Shining a Positive Light

When I was a young woman, I was still coming to understand who I was and how I fit into God’s overall plan. Though I had few years of experience, I had learned some things I should repeat and some things I should never do again. Approaching my future with determination and zeal to make the most of it, I wanted to feel that I had something of value to offer at church, in my family, and in life in general.

Once I had children, I soon discovered that I did *not* have everything about parenting figured out. I needed guidance and understanding from wise women. I still strongly remember, from about 18 years past, the example of a thoughtful woman with a hospitable nature. Her one “little” action had a profound effect on me and makes me think of Paul’s expression “with all purity” in the verse mentioned earlier. My toddler had made a huge mess when I had looked away for what seemed like two seconds, and I was concerned someone could fall in the amount of time it took me to clean it up. I hurried to grab a handful of paper towels and rushed back, while this considerate woman noticed it right away and quietly got her own bundle of paper towels. We met eye

to eye on the floor, on our knees, and I don’t think she even said a word. She just helped do what was needful, with all purity. Her motivation came from a pure heart of love to help alleviate the embarrassment. This woman’s humble and gracious act remains with me as an example I want to emulate.

Avoiding a Negative Light

On the other hand, advice given before someone is open to it is usually counterproductive. Unsolicited advice out of nowhere can quickly turn people off. A young woman may just be trying to get through the Sabbath or Holy Day service after a long car ride with a screaming baby. An older woman who approaches her with a welcoming and accepting attitude may be able to defuse the tension and facilitate a better experience at services not only that Sabbath, but in the future as well. “Hello, how are you doing today? (Let her answer.) How was the ride to services? (Let her answer.) You have a lot to carry (baby, baby bag, blankets, etc.) May I help you with anything?” Meeting her at the door without kindness and gentleness can make a bad situation worse, create an awkward situation, or be very discouraging. It can put her on the defensive and discount what she has already learned and accomplished with her children.

We need to give each other some space and approach each other with an attitude of “How may I help you?,” as Mr. Ames explains in his article in the May–June 2021 *Living Church News*. The women I was drawn to when I was young were women who seemed sincerely to care about me, my husband, and my children. I still appreciate those who took time to get to know us and showed a genuine interest in seeing us succeed as a happy, well-rounded family. I also wanted to make sure I got sound advice from a woman who knew something about a matter. Did she seem to have a successful marriage? How did her kids behave, overall? Obviously, no woman has a perfect marriage or perfect children. Still, there were some grown or growing children I was especially impressed with, whose parents had instilled in them character developments I wanted my own children to have. I thought of it as their “fruit,” and a virtuous woman will bear good fruit. I wanted to find out how they had guided their child to grow in

these attributes. On the other hand, those who have learned from mistakes in parenting may be able to give excellent advice on what to avoid doing.

Those years of early marriage and childrearing are past, and my life has changed. When we sing a hymn I am less familiar with, I may glance down at the lyrics and look up and sing the wrong word. Truth is, I cannot see like I used to. I see white streaks peeking out of my brunette hair, and someday mine will match all the other hoary heads at church. It is shocking, comforting, and exciting all at the same time. I feel my age even more when I am around younger people and they are facing things I faced 20 years ago. I get excited and want to share everything I've learned about the subject right away—after all, I lived it for years and it is a subject I have been tried in. And then I remember that if I were that youngster, a too-hasty outpouring of advice would not have made me want to drink in the wisdom that may have been offered. So, I have learned to hold back. I try to approach the situation gently, as a mother who is willing to listen and who shows outgoing concern. I haven't always done this correctly, but over time, I have improved in patience and centering myself in genuine love. When a young woman builds that trust and respect for you, she will even ask your advice! And at that point, too, I must carefully think about my words and give only as much as she may be willing to hear.

Learning from Our Elders

Now I want to address the younger women, including me, since there are people older than me from whom I can learn: Strive to be open to hearing a story you have heard three times before. A story retold is a story that is important to the person, a treasured memory. I have learned that sometimes they will add an important detail that they did not include the previous three times.

Consider also that older people can get lonely. Their kids move away. A spouse can die. They may not have had anyone



to talk with all week, other than a store clerk or the mail carrier. Spending a few minutes visiting with them may be a kind gift to them—and there could be stories you have not heard, containing amazing lessons they have learned. They may have had experiences that can “knock your socks off”!

Years ago, at the Feast of Tabernacles, I saw an elderly man from my congregation. I had only ever talked to him briefly and his speech was hard for me to understand. At that Feast, he roomed with the young man who would become my husband. I remember that, seeing him coming towards me, I quickly looked around to see who else I could talk to before he reached me. But there was no escape, and here I was with this older man whom I liked but didn't really know. He sat next to me and started to reminisce. I strained to listen to his mumbled speech and, as the minutes went by, I was able to understand his words more and more. This man had lived an extremely interesting life! He told me stories about his family, his travels, and even of movie stars he had met. From his wallet he pulled out two pictures. One was of him as a handsome young man, standing next to Elvis Presley! The other was of him standing next to John Wayne! This little man with shoe lifts and a soft voice was a very interesting person, and I learned a lot from him. In addition, I learned more about how I should approach older people.

Appreciating One Another

Every older person has a story. Not everything will interest you, but let me tell you, there's a lot more than meets the eye! Give these elders more of your attention; they will eventually relate an experience or lesson that will really interest you. You can gain a lot from older people's experiences. The more you break out of your comfort zone and talk to those of other ages, the more you will expand your own knowledge. Older women have had gains, losses, joys, and trials with their children. They understand men a little better from being married and having to communicate daily to learn to work as a team. It is a lifelong process to understand the opposite sex—as women, we need all the help we can get, at any age.

Younger women can learn from older women, and gracious older women can learn from younger women. Some young people have had valuable experiences that their elders haven't! We all have godly gifts, different personalities, and much to offer. We can glean from one another, understand our brethren at a deeper level, enjoy fellowship, and experience kindness in our spiritual relationships. We can be godly mothers and sisters to each other. I'm sure God would be pleased to see us being grandmothers, aunts, daughters, and granddaughters to each other, too. Let us come together in unity, treating the other women in the Church with all purity. ^(LN)

From Living Education: A Daughter of Abraham

By Kenneth Frank

Did you know that Jesus exemplified righteous Sabbath behavior by healing a crippled woman? In fact, He used a very special term in referring to her: “daughter of Abraham.” Only Luke’s gospel describes this particular healing event, as Luke paid special attention to stories involving women related to Jesus’ ministry. This article will examine the account of this “daughter of Abraham,” found in Luke 13:10–17, which provides a vital lesson in properly observing God’s Sabbath.

A Sabbath Miracle

We find that Jesus “was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath” (v. 10), as it was customary to invite visiting teachers to deliver the sermon after the reading from the biblical scrolls. While Jesus was preaching, He noticed “a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up” (v. 11). Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14), and the Greek word translated “bent” is, appropriately, a medical term—one indicating curvature of the spine, as if this woman were doubled over from carrying a heavy burden.

Upon seeing her, Jesus immediately set her free from her infirmity by laying His hands on her to heal and straighten her (Luke 13:12–13). The touch of the Master’s hand gave her the help and encouragement she needed to stand up straight. Once she did, she broke into praise of God (v. 13).

The ruler of the synagogue, who should have rejoiced with her, criticized Jesus for healing her on the Sabbath. “There are six days on which men ought to work,” he said to the audience, “therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day” (v. 14).

This ruler clearly considered healing a type of work forbidden on the Sabbath, but Jesus retorted that the law permitted the loosing of one’s animals on the Sabbath for proper feeding and watering (v. 15) and then asked a pointed question: “So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” (v. 16).

Verse 17 displays contrasting responses to this healing: “And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.” The synagogue ruler had tried to publicly shame the woman and Jesus, but Jesus turned the tables on him, defending His breathtaking miracle in front of everyone. The critics of this daughter of Abraham’s healing were shamed before the congregation as their rules of Sabbath observance were shown to be ungodly.

A Lesson in Loosing Burdens

As we have seen, Jesus referred to this woman as “a daughter of Abraham.” This was deliberate, because the term “son of Abraham” was used commonly to stress the worth of men as members of the covenant community. However, the title “daughter of Abraham” was virtually unknown, because women were not seen as citizens of the nation, but rather as members of their individual families. Many regarded women as less important than men.

By contrast, Jesus used this exalted title to stress that this was a woman in the covenant community—God’s highly favored, elect people. She, too, was a descendant of the great patriarch Abraham. Attending Sabbath services despite her 18 years of suffering indicates that she was a firm believer in the God of Abraham who had made a covenant with her people. The Messiah considered her a fitting recipient of His blessing.

Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater—how much more worthy of help was a suffering human being compared to an animal? Both helping animals and helping human beings should be permitted on God’s Sabbath as acts of mercy. Jesus, as “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28), knew how the day should be observed—but His critics did not accept Him as the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, the One who had created the Sabbath.

The Jews of Jesus’ day commonly believed that suffering was always the result of sin. Yet no sin is connected to the suffering of this daughter of Abraham. Instead, Jesus said that Satan had bound this woman with a physical illness. He gave no reason as to why Satan had done so or why God had permitted it, as He had permitted Satan’s afflicting of the patriarch Job. For Jesus, handicaps were opportunities for God to display His power, and Jesus displayed complete mastery over demons, sickness, and disease during His ministry.

What better day could there have been for this miracle than God’s Sabbath? Sabbath observance is not intended as a ritualistic burden, but as a blessing, as Jesus explained: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Some Sabbath-keepers become so legalistic in their observance that they forget the Sabbath’s original intent: to provide rest, rejoicing, refreshment, and renewal during this holy time.

The Sabbath should be enjoyed for its created purpose, and we should take care that, as we strive to obey God’s commands, we do not add to those commands with our own. If the Sabbath ever feels more like a burden than a blessing, we should deeply examine not only our attitude toward it, but also the way that we observe it—which, if we are not careful, may involve more of *our* rules than *God’s* rules! (LM)

2020 in Review— A Leap Forward



By **Jerry Ruddlesden**

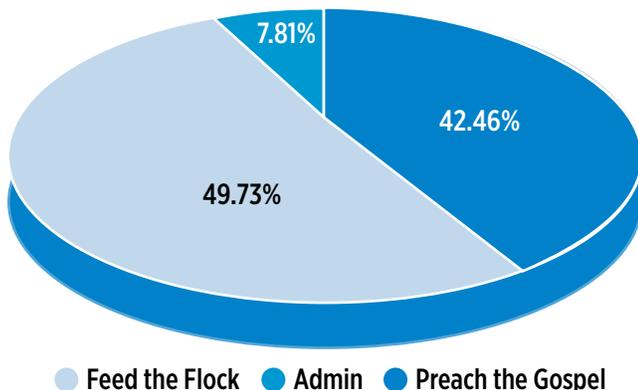
The Living Church of God publishes its “Audited Financial Statements” each year. The complete 2020 Consolidated Financial Statements for Living Church of God can be found in their entirety at LCG.org/about-us at the bottom of the page.

The audit is conducted by Cherry Bekaert, LLP Certified Public Accountants, and the Report of the Independent Auditor states their opinion as follows: “In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present

Regular tithes and offerings grew instead of decreasing, which placed the Church in its best financial position since the turn of the century. The 2020 overall income finished 23.4 percent above that of 2019.

fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Church as of December 31, 2020 and 2019, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

LCG use of funds



In the late winter of 2020, the COVID-19 crisis turned the world upside down. The Living Church of God had never experienced anything like this crisis, and it was unknown how the Work would be affected financially by the widespread shutdown of business and society. We made careful financial contingency plans and prayed and fasted for God’s guidance and for the protection of His people and His Work.

God put a hedge around His people during this difficult time—almost all our members kept their jobs, and some even found better-paying jobs. God also blessed His Work with a large estate donation and royalty income. Regular tithes and offerings grew instead of decreasing, which placed the Church in its best financial position since the turn of the century. The 2020 overall income finished 23.4 percent above that of 2019.

That is why I chose to title this article “A Leap Forward.” Our financial state has allowed us to expand our preaching of the Gospel around the world in television, Internet, and print. We have been able to hire key personnel in the Internet, Editorial, and Television Departments, as well as new full-time ministers to serve the brethren. We have planned this expansion carefully so that it can be supported for several years with the funds that we have received in 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, the Church allocated 42.46 percent of expenses to preaching the Gospel, 49.73 percent to feeding the flock, and 7.81 percent to expenses pertaining to administrative needs.

We recognize fully that, even with the increased resources we have been given, the Work only goes forward as we rely on God. Your support and prayers are a key part of that reliance, as the Work does not sell the truth but strives to fulfill the commission given to the Church to preach the Gospel as God opens the doors to do so. Jesus Christ gave His disciples a command that still applies to the Church today: “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:7–8). Let’s be about the Father’s business! ^{LN}

In Loving Memory

Mr. Paul Assocle, a member of the Porto-Novo congregation in Benin, with much sorrow announces the death of his wife, **Mrs. Brigitte Assocle, 45**. Mrs. Assocle died on July 18 after a short illness. She was baptized into God's Church in 2002. Mr. and Mrs. Assocle were married in 2004 and have three children. Mrs. Assocle is remembered for her life of faith and selflessness in the service of others.

Mrs. Karin Blake, 65, of the Johannesburg congregation in South Africa, died on July 7 of COVID-19. She is survived by her husband Pieter and will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved her.

Mr. Gary Frank Ehman, 84, died at his home in Mint Hill, North Carolina, on October 10, after a short battle with cancer. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on June 19, 1937 and moved with his family to a rural part of the state when he was five years old. After three years of high school, he moved to Victoria, Texas, where he completed and graduated high school while working as an airport line attendant and earning a private pilot's license. After graduation from high school, he joined the United States Air Force and was honorably discharged in 1959.

Returning to Wisconsin, he worked for the local newspaper in various capacities, becoming managing editor in 1975. After leaving the newspaper, he was a project manager developing an employment and training program for the local theater, then served as a news director for two radio stations for ten years, and then became the Communications Director for the Mohican Nation/Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe.

After 30 years as an avowed atheist, he was converted to the truth and baptized in 1969. He married Linda Joan Cole on February 9, 1975. Ordained an elder in 1979, he diligently served several congregations in the surrounding area. Later, he served congregations in a four-state area. In 1998, he was hired full-time by the Church and moved to San Diego, California. When the Church moved its operations to Charlotte, North Carolina, he remained in California, affectionately becoming known as the Desert Circuit Rider as he pastored five congregations in California, Arizona, and Nevada. In 2004, he moved to Charlotte, resuming his position as head of the Personal Correspondence Department (PCD) at Headquarters and pastoring neighboring congregations in Statesville, Asheboro, and Kannapolis. He continued leading and working

in PCD until the time of his death. Mr. Ehman is survived by his wife Linda and mourned by countless people who have known and loved him over the years.

Mr. Frank Farrell, 67, died on August 15 after a short illness. A native of New York, he graduated from high school and university there and worked as a finisher in the construction industry for more than 40 years. Baptized in 1987, he was a longtime member of God's Church, attending congregations in New York and North Carolina, and he and his wife were in the process of moving to Florida. He enjoyed reading the Bible, gardening, and music, and was a tinkerer and an inventor. He is survived by his loving wife, Gloria, now of the Ocala, Florida, congregation; three daughters and two sons; two stepdaughters and one stepson; eleven grandchildren; one brother; and four sisters, as well as other relatives and many friends. Area Pastor Joe Brown conducted his funeral service.

Mr. Robert Charles Fisher, 87, of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, congregation, died on October 26 following a brief illness. He was born on September 26, 1934, in Fort Wayne and lived there most of his life. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy and later worked for many years as a welder. On November 4, 1955, he married the love of his life, Carol, who remained faithfully by his side until his Christian journey was finished. Mr. Fisher was baptized, along with his wife, in 1970 and spent more than half a century quietly serving God and the brethren. He is survived by his wife, one brother, one sister, and many nieces and nephews. His memorial service was conducted by Area Pastor Yancy Taber.

Mr. David "Bam" Glenister, 78, of the Cardiff, UK, congregation, died on May 13, just two weeks before the 60th anniversary of his wedding to Hazel Jean Wood, who survives him. His life was difficult and dangerous, and he rose to the challenge, repairing kilns in a steel works and working as a miner and tunneller. Mr. and Mrs. Glenister began attending services in 1973, traveling 100 miles to Bristol. The Church grew as a result of campaigns, and in 1974 they began hosting Bible Studies and a small congregation in their home. In 1978, they were ordained deacon and deaconess. Mr. and Mrs. Glenister were blessed with four sons and one daughter, and they enjoyed taking family holidays in a camper van. Mr.

Glenister braved difficult health issues for the last 14 years of his life. Besides his wife and children, he is survived by ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Tam-Tam Audrey Hlalu, 71, wife of Mr. Zacharia Hlalu of the Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) congregation in South Africa, died on July 27 of COVID-19 pneumonia. She will be greatly missed, especially by her husband and family.

Mrs. Joy Jones, 87, died peacefully in her sleep on July 24, at her home in North Yorkshire in the UK. Mrs. Jones was introduced to the truth through a campaign conducted by Dr. Roderick C. Meredith and was baptized in 1960. She was preceded in death by her husband Joe, a longtime employee at the Bricket Wood campus of Ambassador College. About six years ago, she moved from Bricket Wood to Yorkshire to be close to her son and his family. She is survived by her son and his family, and by her identical twin sister, Mrs. Gay Symonds of the Birmingham congregation.

Mrs. Patricia Kuhlman, 73, died at her home on October 27, surrounded by her family. Despite her declining health, she was able to attend one last Feast of Tabernacles in 2021. Mrs. Kuhlman was a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother. Baptized in 1976, she faithfully served God for 45 years. She took pleasure in reading her Bible and sharing God's truth. Mrs. Kuhlman loved attending church and fellowshiping with the brethren. She made friends wherever she went and never met a stranger. She enjoyed singing and could be heard singing hymns during the day. She was also a gifted carpenter, beloved woodshop teacher, and talented cook. She liked the ocean and loved to travel. Mrs. Kuhlman is survived by her husband, two sons, two daughters, and five grandchildren. She will be greatly missed.

Mr. Aldridge "Max" Mackenzie, 67, of the Cape Town, South Africa, congregation, died on August 2 after suffering from multiple health problems. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Mr. Christopher Manikam, 75, died on August 2 of COVID-19. He was a much-loved deacon in the Durban, South Africa, congregation. Baptized in 1986 and ordained in 2003, he was a longtime faithful member of and servant in God's Church, and he will be greatly missed.

Mr. Bogdan "Bob" Markovich, 81, died peacefully on October 4. He and his beloved wife Zora were married in 1963 and raised one daughter and two sons. Mr. and Mrs. Markovich were baptized into God's Church in 1974, and God and his family were the center of his life. Mr. Markovich was

good-natured and quiet. He was a deep thinker and when he had something to say, everyone listened. He is survived and greatly missed by his wife, three children, seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, as well as his friends, including the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation.

It is with much sadness that we announce the deaths—after a short illness, within two days of each other—of **Mr. Placide Mthonga Mwanda, 63, and his wife Madeleine**, of the Kinshasa congregation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their funeral was held on July 27. Mr. Mthonga was an ordained minister of the Church of God Seventh Day for 16 years before coming to the Living Church of God. For several years he made the formidable three- to four-day trip to keep the Feast in Kenya and Tanzania. He will be remembered for his joyful disposition and dedication to the brethren. Mr. and Mrs. Mthonga will both be sorely missed by family and friends as well as the brethren.

Mr. Ivan Simpson, 79, died on July 5 of COVID-19. He was baptized in 2013 and was a much-loved member of the Cape Town, South Africa, congregation. He set a fine example of running his race with patience. He is survived by his wife, Tersia, also of the Cape Town congregation.

Mr. David Spurgeon, 81, died on July 12 in his home in Thousand Palms, California. He had been under hospice care for the last year and seven months for heart-related problems. His wife Janice was his caregiver during this time and was with him when he died. Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon began receiving and reading literature from the Radio Church of God in 1966 and attended their first Sabbath in 1967 with the El Monte, California, Radio Church of God congregation. They were baptized in November 1967 in the indoor pool at Ambassador College and were ordained deacon and deaconess in July 2000 by Messrs. Gary Ehman and Don Turk. Mr. Spurgeon served the Palm Springs (now Banning) congregation until his health began to decline. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Janice; son, Penn (Judi); twin daughters, Elana Spurgeon and Elisa Hayes; eight grandchildren; eleven great-grandchildren; and three great-great-grandchildren. Mr. Spurgeon was faithful to the end and is tremendously missed.

Mrs. Helen Sullins, 94, died on October 10 at her residence. Mrs. Sullins loved her family, and she loved her Church family. She attended the Thomasville, Georgia, congregation. Mrs. Sullins was predeceased by her husband, Christopher E. Sullins, Jr., a longtime member of God's Church, and is survived by two daughters, including Ms. Christy Sullins, also of the Thomasville congregation; three grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; and many other relatives. Area Pastor

Joseph Brown conducted her graveside funeral service on October 17.

Mr. Raymond F. “Blackie” Waller, 85, of Key West, Iowa, died peacefully in his sleep at his home on January 25. He was born September 7, 1935, and farmed his entire life. He married Joan on August 4, 1962, and they shared 58 years. Mr. and Mrs. Waller were both baptized May 2, 1970, and he was later ordained a deacon. They attended the Dubuque, Iowa, congregation. Mr. and Mrs. Waller had four children: Wanda (Joseph) Ross; Dale (Shelly) Waller, deceased; Sarah (Dale) Jecklin; and George Waller, deceased. They had 12 grandchildren: Sarah (Ryan) Nicholson, in Australia; Deborah (Travis) Pate in Charlotte, North Carolina; Rebekah Ross in Charlotte, North Carolina; Jonathan Ross, deceased; Elizabeth Ross; Joseph Ross; Justin (Katelyn) Waller; Andrew (Gabby) Waller; Molly (David) Maro; Jakob Waller; Madelyn Jecklin; and Luke Jecklin, as well as four great-grandchildren: Abigail, Sofia, and Caleb Nicholson, and Georgiana Pate. Messrs. Bob Rodzaj and Irv Woelfle officiated at his funeral.

Mrs. Velma Welch, 91, died peacefully at home in Bartlett, Tennessee, on October 25. She was predeceased by her husband Buford. Mrs. Welch served for many years as a deaconess alongside her husband, who was a deacon. Mr. and Mrs. Welch were some of the original members of the Memphis congregation when it was established in the early 1960s. She is survived by one daughter, one son, and one brother, and will be greatly missed by her family, friends, and all others who knew her.

Mrs. Inge van der Westhuizen, 77, from the Durban, South Africa, congregation, died on July 1. Baptized in 1983, she was a longtime, faithful member of God’s Church, and will be greatly missed.

Mrs. Maureen Wilkins, 84, died on July 2 of COVID-19. She was baptized in 2009 and is very much missed by the brethren in the Johannesburg, South Africa, congregation.

Editor’s Note: Two of this issue’s obituaries have been reprinted from previous issues, with corrections. Our thanks is owed to the members’ families for their graciousness and patience.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Darren (Katie) Brinson are happy to announce the birth of their son, **Isaac Isaiah Brinson** was born on October 29 and weighed seven pounds, three ounces. He was 19.5 inches long. The Brinson family attends the Kannapolis, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Joshua (Priscila) Lyons were absolutely thrilled and thankful to God to welcome their first child, **Daniel Scott Lyons**, into their arms and lives on September 10. Daniel made

his debut at seven pounds, five ounces, and 21 inches long. Mom, baby, and dad are doing very well. Mr. Lyons is an elder serving as Assistant Pastor for three congregations in the eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey area.

Mr. and Mrs. Yannick (Sandra) Mouamba of Abu Dhabi announce with great joy the birth of their fourth daughter, **Amira Mouamba**, on July 29. We invite you to join us in thanking our Father in heaven for a healthy

pregnancy and the safe delivery of our dear little girl.

Mr. and Mrs. Damian (Yonnette) Weekes, of the Chaguanas, Trinidad, congregation, are happy to announce the birth of their second daughter, **Kaitlyn Patricia Weekes** on the Sabbath morning of October 9. She weighed 6.7 pounds and measured 20 inches long. Mommy and baby returned home safe and healthy the next day. Kaitlyn’s older siblings can’t seem to contain themselves.

ORDINATIONS

Messrs. James Ackland, Michael Barker, and Ryan Bird were ordained deacons during the Feast of Tabernacles by Regional Director Stuart Wachowicz and Area Pastor Barry Walker. Mr. Ackland and Mr. Bird serve in the Calgary congregation, and Mr. Barker in the Edmonton congregation, all in the province of Alberta, Canada.

Mr. Billy Gosnell was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets

by Area Pastor Ron Poole and Elder Stan Roper. Mr. Gosnell serves in the Asheville, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Willy Naguy was ordained a deacon on the Last Great Day by Mr. Jerry Sam, an elder in Vanuatu. Mr. Naguy serves in the Norsup, Malakula, congregation in Vanuatu.

Mr. Seymour D'Oyley was ordained a deacon on the first day of the Feast

of Tabernacles by Area Pastors Simon Roberts and John Meakin and by Mr. Dexter Wakefield, Director of Business Operations in Charlotte. Mr. D'Oyley serves in the Cardiff, Wales, congregation in the UK.

Mr. Tim Wilson was ordained an elder on October 30 by Area Pastor Yancy Taber and Elders George Dellinger and Michael Grovak. Mr. Wilson serves in the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. George (Myrna) Kornelsen, of the Terrace, British Columbia, congregation in Canada, celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary on October 8. Married in Chihuahua, Mexico, they were blessed with four children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Mr. and Mrs. Kornelsen moved to Canada in 1964, and in May of 2010 they were baptized into God's Church. Congratulations to this lovely couple on reaching the wonderful milestone of 60 years of marriage!

New LCG Members in French-Speaking Africa

In recent years, many brethren have come to LCG from other Sabbath-keeping organizations. We now have almost 2,000 brethren attending 36 congregations in Francophone (French-speaking) Africa. Mr. Rees Ellis pastored congregations in Africa, as well as congregations in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands. For the Feast of Tabernacles, he and his wife Fanny traveled to Burundi and Togo. Here are excerpts from his report:

Our arrival in Burundi was not without a bit of [drama]: There was a rebel attack on the Bujumbura International Airport just hours before Fanny and I arrived. The army was all over the place, assuring peace and calm. That evening Mr. Juvénal Karibwami, our elder in Burundi, left minutes before a grenade attack, close to where he took his bus, shook the capital city Gitega, leaving two dead and more than 30 wounded. He was unharmed.

In Gitega, for the first Holy Day we had a high [attendance] of 162.... Mr. Karibwami and I baptised

three young fellows from the local congregation on the second day of the Feast. On the Sabbath, we had 90 in attendance in the city of Nyanza Lac, at a very nice hall on the western shores of beautiful Lake Tanganyika. We left after services then suffered a flat tire and a traffic jam as we entered Bujumbura. In Mugina, we had 446 attendees—it was quite an affair, with choirs from five different congregations singing welcoming hymns and celebrating the Feast. At Kuka-makara, we had at least 360 people.

We have a huge blessing in having the technology at our disposal to connect the Francophone congregations. Mr. Lee Page set up a platform where French/English texts are available for translators. In Africa, we were able to juggle two separate streaming accounts in five locations on seven computers or telephones to connect all the participants.

All told, Feast sites in 18 different Francophone countries received the livestream from France during the Feast. We're very grateful for the growth of the Church in French-speaking Africa, and for all those serving to support that growth!

—Rees Ellis

Electronic Service Requested

The Little Flock

The bare trees make a silhouette on the horizon in the winter morning light, beautiful to behold in the cold, clear, crisp air. Not much traffic on a Saturday morning, a far cry from the crowded roadways on weekday commutes for most workers.

The radio news is relatively quiet, except for analysis of the still-ongoing political issues and talk about the big games scheduled for the weekend.

Being out early is a regular routine for traveling ministers, who often make trips to visit the small congregations of the Church of God that are sprinkled around the country and the world. There aren't enough ministers for each little congregation to have its own pastor, so most of them are served by ministers who make a circuit to visit these small groups. A Sabbath visit from a visiting minister will involve a sermon based on a biblical topic, such as Christian living, prophecy, or the Holy Days—useful, practical messages that are helpful to those who are striving to live by every word of God.

Some will have questions that the minister will try to answer. Some attendees will request prayer and anointing for healing, a practice found in James 5. Fellowship goes on until folks must leave for their homes, sometimes quite a distance from where services are held. As they head home, most are already looking forward to the next Sabbath when they can be together again.

Why make these journeys to speak to and serve these people? There are precedents found in the Bible. Down through

time, the people dedicated to following God's way of life have often been few and scattered, as they are today.

In ancient times, the prophet Samuel regularly made a circuit to serve the people. "He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places" (1 Samuel 7:16).

Jesus also used this method: "Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching" (Mark 6:6). Later, the Apostle Paul was known for his journeys as he raised up churches and spread the Good News of the Kingdom of God. In 2 Corinthians 11:26, he spoke about being "in journeys often."

Why do this? Why go to the trouble? Jesus made it plain in His instruction to the Apostle Peter before He ascended into heaven: "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter... 'Feed My lambs.... Tend My sheep.... Feed My sheep'" (John 21:15-17).

So, all around the nation, as in many other parts of the world, there are dedicated ministers who are on the go, making regular visits to small congregations, striving to follow the instructions of Jesus Christ by feeding the flock that God has called. You won't find these little flocks in large church buildings or in sumptuous surroundings. Mostly, they meet in rented halls, realizing that a church is not a building but the people *in* the building.

At the end of the day, the bare trees make a beautiful silhouette on the evening winter sky as the circuit-traveling preacher makes his way home, tired, but happy to have been of service to a little flock that was eager to hear what he had to bring them on the Sabbath day.

—J. Davy Crockett III