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The Kingdom and the Millennium: Is There a Difference?

Dear Brethren,

We hear sermons during the Feast of Tabernacles about God's kingdom. We preach to the world that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about the coming Kingdom of God. We pray daily, "Your kingdom come!" But do we understand what that kingdom is?

As the late Dr. Roderick C. Meredith explained in his booklet *Do You Believe the True Gospel?*, every kingdom has a ruler, territory, subjects, and laws (p. 13). We understand that the Ruler during the Millennium is Jesus Christ (Zechariah 14:9). The territory is this earth (Revelation 5:10), the subjects are flesh and blood human beings (Zechariah 14:16-19), and the laws are God's laws (Isaiah 2:3; Ezekiel 36:26-27). It is perhaps because of this that some assume that the Millennium—with territory, Christ as king, human citizens, and laws regulating those subjects—and the Kingdom of God are synonymous. But the Millennium is *not* the Kingdom of God, and here is why.

A Secret Visitor

When Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, he affirmed that he and the Pharisees recognized that Jesus was no ordinary man. "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). Jesus immediately interjected with this famous declaration: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3).

Some promoting a born-again experience in the flesh claim Nicodemus knew what Jesus meant, but that he played ignorant to justify himself. This is not the man John describes elsewhere. When the chief priests and Pharisees condemned Jesus, Nicodemus came to His defense before that hostile body (John 7:50-51). Many know that Joseph of Arimathea asked

for the body of Jesus after He was crucified and buried Him, but often overlooked is Nicodemus, who helped Joseph. And in assisting in this task, he no doubt risked being ostracized by his peers (John 19:38-42; 9:22). John does not paint a picture of a man who would be playing word games with Christ.

Nicodemus was sincerely perplexed. He understood that Jesus was talking about a birth. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). And Jesus explained in verse 5 that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

We learn here that we can neither see nor enter the Kingdom of God without a rebirth of water and the Spirit. The professing Christian world totally misunderstands this, believing that we are born again in the flesh. Jesus put a nail in that coffin when He explained, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (vv. 6-8).

A Complete Transformation

For those who fail to grasp the profound significance of being born again, the Apostle Paul leaves us with no doubt. He explains that there is a physical man and a spiritual man—one composed of flesh and blood, the other of Spirit.

And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural,

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and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly* (1 Corinthians 15:45–48).

A transformation of our very composition must take place—and that transformation cannot be spiritualized away! “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (v. 49). And this is written in the very context of the Kingdom of God, as in the next verse Paul makes this unambiguous statement that ought to take away any doubt: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

You and I are currently composed of flesh and blood. Human beings who live during the Millennium—the thousand years pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles—will be composed of flesh and blood. Therefore, they “cannot see” (John 3:3), they cannot enter (John 3:5), and they “cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). This is what Jesus meant when He said to Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” A transformation must take place before we can enter the Kingdom of God. We must be changed from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit, something that we can only imagine. But when does this transformation from flesh to Spirit take place? Paul explains:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:51–54).

Our change comes at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the time of Christ’s return (Revelation 11:15). This is when we become immortal Spirit beings, no longer flesh and blood. This is when all pain and sorrow come to an end for us, but not so for the flesh-and-blood humans living during the Millennium. Even with Satan removed, they will still suffer the effects of their own sins.

What then did Jesus mean when He told Nicodemus that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”? The late John Ogwyn explained in the January–February 2003 issue of *Tomorrow’s World* magazine.

In the ceremony of baptism, Christians prefigure the resurrection itself (Romans 6:1–5). It is at the resurrection that we will finally put on immortality and actually inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50–53). We are symbolically buried in a watery grave, and then emerge out of the water to walk in newness of life. In John 3:5, Christ referred to the necessity of being born both of water and of the Spirit. In the Bible, water is often used as a type of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38–39). Emerging from the waters of baptism is a symbolic birth—a type of our actual rebirth at the resurrection (“What Do You Mean—“Born Again”?”).

It is easy to confuse the Millennium with the Kingdom of God. The Millennium is a thousand-year period of time. The Kingdom of God is the Spirit-composed Family of God ruling during that period. Those of us born of the Spirit, as Christ is—born into the Kingdom of God—will rule under Christ over the kingdoms of men. As Dr. Meredith explained in his booklet *Do You Believe the True Gospel?*, “The Kingdom of God will rule the earth’s peoples. But these subject mortals will not be **in** the Kingdom—only ruled *by* it” (p. 26). We look forward to that birth into God’s actual Family, and to the Millennium, when His government will bring peace and blessings to all mankind.



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Are Routines Stifling Our Goals?

Routine is important. It is good to go to bed and get up at the same times each day, as this promotes better sleep and productivity during the day. Most people bathe and brush their teeth at the same times each day. Many have exercise routines, and it is good to block off set times and places each day for prayer and Bible study, as many of us do. Whether they regard sleep, hygiene practices, exercise, or prayer, good habits and routines are beneficial—even essential—to maintaining our physical and spiritual sides of life.

However, being stuck in routines that are outdated or not well thought out can also become traps. This can lull us to complacency and trap us in inefficiencies. Often, they are not thought out at all but are merely habits that we fell into. It has been reported that many people are in the habit of checking Facebook immediately after waking in the morning. This habit becomes their routine. The same thing can be said about watching too much television. Come home from work, turn on the television, catch the news during dinner—and watch it until you practically sleepwalk to your bed.

But routine can be a trap in another way, as well. Over time we tend to drive the same route to work or school, hardly thinking about it. It is automatic—routine. So much so that if starting out the same way for a different destination, we may find ourselves missing the turn to where we are going. I know this has happened to me.

In our *John 3:16* booklet, I wrote of something closely related to this, something we might refer to as mental routine—memorization. “But memorization has a downside.... The problem with memorization is that, once we learn something, our brains stash it away and concentrate on something new. We can pull up that piece of information and recite it, but our ‘thinking cap’ has generally moved on to the next challenge” (p. 41). Routines, habits, memorization—they have an upside and a downside.

Challenging the Status Quo

This past November, I held a staff meeting for all our employees here in Charlotte as well as a few who work remotely. You may rest assured that we have a hard-working, dedicated staff here in Charlotte. I have even encouraged some of them to stop working such long

hours and take care of family or personal needs. But sometimes we all become caught up in routines that have become obsolete over time as circumstances have changed. What worked well in the past may not work well today or in the future.

There was a time when our Church literature might take four to six weeks to arrive after someone ordered it. That may never have been ideal, but it was routine—not only for the Church, but in many businesses, and was acceptable a couple of decades ago. Today, people expect a requested item to arrive on their front porch the next day. One Church lady mentioned to me after the meeting that she had ordered a clothing iron the previous evening and it was on her doorstep sometime between 4:00 and 6:00 in the morning! Talk about service!

In this nearly instant-service environment, four to six weeks is not good enough. That is why I challenged everyone to review their routines, talk to other departments in the pipeline from receiving to sending out requests, and reach a goal to send out 95 percent of all requests on the next business day. I understood that this would not be easy, so I gave them an example of a “can do” attitude.

Find a Way or Make One

Back in 1973, the United States launched Skylab into orbit as a working laboratory for astronauts spending time in space. But once it was in orbit, observers saw that something had gone wrong. One or more solar panels had not deployed properly, compromising the power supply needed for astronauts to live in Skylab. With men set to launch into space within days, what could be done?

The United States Air Force had for years been using satellites to spy on the Soviet Union, using a camera with a powerful lens to take pictures. Every few days, a capsule from the satellite would be jettisoned over the Pacific Ocean, retrieved by planes trailing lines to snag the parachute in the air, landed in Hawaii, and the film put on a plane to reach Washington, DC, all within twelve hours.

All of that is, in itself, pretty amazing, but someone trying to solve the Skylab problem came up with the idea of doing something that had never been done before: Point the spy camera away from the earth and upward into space. By doing so, when the spy satellite and Skylab crossed paths, a picture could be taken and NASA engi-

neers might discover what the problem was. The spy satellite was travelling roughly 18,000 miles an hour in a North-to-South orbit. Skylab was traveling at a similar speed East-to-West, so the timing was incredibly difficult. But the maneuver was successful and the Skylab problem was resolved.

Members of the Air Force squadron involved with the spy program each had a patch on their shoulder that read, “*Aut viam inveniam aut faciam*”—Latin for, “I will find a way, or I will make one.” Some say the Latin expression originated with Hannibal. “He is credited with this response when his generals told him it was impossible to cross the Alps, into Italy, by elephant during the Second Punic War (around 218 BC)” (“I Will Either Find a Way or Make One,” *TheGibsonEdge.com*, September 23, 2016). More commonly, we may say something similar: “Where there is a will, there is a way.”

We are not Amazon, UPS, or FedEx. We do not have all the human resources they have, but I have little doubt that with an attitude of “We will find a way, or we will make one,” our staff can reach the goal toward which I challenged them. Ninety-five percent within one business day is only the first phase, as I hope we can do even better, but we will never get to 100 percent for a variety of technical reasons. For example, when people leave an apartment number off their address, or move without informing us, they end up with a “stop code” on their record because the Post Office returned a previous order. We must correct the address before we can send further literature. This is only one example of why we will never reach 100 percent.

We must also balance cost. For example, to send booklets bulk rate costs around 19 cents per booklet, but to get that rate we must send at least 200 booklets of the same weight at the same time. For First-Class mail, the cost is much higher, ranging from 81 cents to two dollars per booklet. We must balance these priorities: fast service, reasonable cost. One solution involves the size and weight of our booklets. In reviewing this subject, we found that our booklets came in 18 different weights. However, if we can narrow that number to three or four standard weights, we can bundle slower-moving booklets with faster-moving ones and reach the 200 minimum for the lower postal rate each business day.

The question, then, is how do we harmonize our booklet weights? In some cases, it has been a simple matter of increasing the weight—add a sheet (eight pages) or two. We did this with one of Dr. Meredith’s booklets by inserting chapter breaks where there had been none. This not only solved the weight problem without changing the content, but also made the booklet more palatable for most people, who tend to appreciate shorter chapters rather than one long treatise. For other booklets, it is a matter of removing some pictures or removing extraneous content that does

not change the meaning—the latter being less desirable, but occasionally appropriate. To adjust my *John 3:16* booklet, for example, Mr. Thomas White suggested removing two one-paragraph stories, and I approved that. Mr. John Robinson then changed the layout by deleting some pictures and removing a tiny space between the lines. This still does not bring it into weight-harmony with other booklets, but it will save considerable money because we got it below the 3.5-ounce threshold. We can, if needed, send it First-Class for less than the over-3.5-ounce rate.

These changes will take time to implement, as inventory has to be used up and nothing is ever as simple as it might appear. There is currently a paper shortage, so Mr. Lehman Lyons has his work cut out for him to get the same weight of paper that we have been using or our other efforts may be for naught. By working with Messrs. Wakefield and Ruddledsen in accounting and budgeting, it looks as though we may need to purchase a year’s supply of paper at a time to make this work.

But this kind of outside-the-box thinking is essential when finding a way or making one. Challenging our routines and habits can be rewarding mentally and materially.

The Broader Message

But what about *spiritual* routines and habits? What about your prayer and study routines? Do you have set routines? These vitally important Christian practices are easily crowded out by distractions if well-ingrained habits are lacking. Jesus warned us of this in one of His most famous parables. “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

King David and the prophet Daniel set us an example of praying three times each day. “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17). “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10). We may also infer from an incident in the life of Peter that he prayed daily at noon (Acts 10:9). One who takes time to pray around the noon hour likely prays at other times as well.

Incense is symbolic of prayers ascending to God’s throne (Revelation 8:3–4). Regarding our prayers, there may well be a lesson in the sacrificial system, where incense was offered morning and evening (Exodus 30:7–8). There may also be a lesson in the example of Samuel’s parents, who “rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD” before leaving on a long journey home (1 Samuel 1:19).

We know that large crowds often followed Jesus and privacy was clearly an issue in His life. So, it is significant that we read, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). A single passage describing one occasion does not tell us with certainty that Jesus prayed every morning, but it is certainly reasonable to believe that this was His usual practice.

Of course, we must all work out our own salvation based on our individual circumstances. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Some may have work or school situations that make it impossible or impractical to find privacy for prayer during the noon hour, but we must “find a way or make one” each evening and morning.

What About the Feast?

As this is the post-Feast *Living Church News* issue, let us think about our Feast routines. If you have followed God’s instructions to save your second (Festival) tithe, good—don’t stop that obedient practice. But for those of you who have tithable income and *do not* set aside your second tithe, *now* is the time to repent, challenge your flawed routine, and start obeying God’s clear command to do so.

And let us not forget our first tithe. Review Malachi 3:8–10 and remember what God labels those who disobey this command. Both first and second tithe are a part of the Feast lesson to “learn to fear the LORD your God always”—to obey Him in all His commands. This is a good time to talk to God about these things.

It is easy to become settled into a Feast of Tabernacles routine. It is very exciting for the first few years, but the Feast is more than eating steaks and going to the beach. It is also about serving and helping others. Some members attend their assigned site every year so that they can provide essential service and help the coordinator make it an enjoyable Feast for all. Others virtually always transfer to indulge themselves on some new adventure. Perhaps somewhere between these two approaches is a proper balance, but no matter where one goes, it is good to review one’s approach toward service. There really is no end of ways to quietly serve at the Feast.

And There Is More

Are we stuck in other routines that we might do well to challenge? We all have many routines in our lives. Many are well thought out and the result of long-established and healthy practices. But there are no doubt routines in the lives of all of us that can be overhauled, or at least adjusted—what we eat, what time we go to bed and get up, how we use our spare time,

how we spend our money. It is important to have routines, but it is also important to *challenge* them.

This article has already discussed habits of prayer. But *when* we pray is only part of our routine. *How* we pray and *what* we pray can also become too routine. It is good to review Dr. Meredith’s booklet *Twelve Keys to Answered Prayer* and meditate and evaluate how we might improve our prayers. Maybe meditate on what you want to pray about before beginning and make a quick outline of topics you wish to discuss with your Creator.

But there are other routines we need to evaluate. What are our goals in life? Do you want to learn a second language? Do you want to read more books? Do you need to change jobs? Do you feel the need to draw closer to God? To accomplish our goals, we may need to challenge the *status quo*—and if we’re going to make progress, we need to find a way or make one. We can all consider what might be a healthy use of our time, and then do what is easy to see, but hard to put into practice.

As already mentioned, the Feasts, too, can become routine for us. We can fall into the habit of turning them into vacation time rather than fulfilling their purpose: “that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 14:23). A good way to start is by searching for similar expressions of fearing God to find out what that means. There is a lot in Scripture on the subject.

David instructed us in Psalm 34:

“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (vv. 11–14).

Then there is Psalm 115:

You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great. May the LORD give you increase more and more, you and your children. May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (vv. 11–15).

Yes, God will bless us more and more as we draw closer to Him. And He expects us to be His profitable servants, as we see in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Let us resolve not to let our routines lead us into complacency as we strive to do God’s will and do our part in His Work as best as we can. (L)

The Mirage of Materialism



By **Adam West**

“**T**he parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water” (Isaiah 35:7). The phrase “parched ground” is derived from the Hebrew word *sharab*, which refers to the sun’s heat—essentially, a mirage. This mirage will become “a pool,” real water intended to satisfy all who thirst. This millennial passage refers to conditions during the reign of Jesus Christ.

A common illustration is that of the thirsty and weary traveler, shielding his eyes from the sun’s glare, scanning the horizon for any sign of life-giving water. Feet dragging through endless sand, the traveler’s desperate attention is drawn toward the mirage. But every step moves it farther into the distance, until it vanishes away.

Like the thirsty traveler seeking water, so is humanity during this present age. So, also, is the Christian in times of dissatisfaction—tempted toward what seems to offer satisfaction and wholeness, only to discover that it is a mirage and that nothing physical or material will ever truly satisfy our spiritual needs.

The traveler faces the perilous terrain of a scorching desert. Humanity seeks its desires in a world racked by unsustainable problems and influenced by the purveyor of lust, greed, selfishness, and vanity himself, Satan the devil. What is the threat posed by the mirage? In the desert, to simply see an optically fabricated oasis is not, by itself, life-threatening. The danger comes when the traveler *pursues* an optical delusion, departing from the path offering *real* hope. The action may lead to ruin! When trust is placed in the mirage and the traveler’s heading is set on it, he may miss out on the real thing.

The Apostle Peter instructs, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Christ explains, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). As spiritual “travelers,” we must learn to thirst after righteousness, not after the mirage of the things of this world, things which offer only the *appearance* of spiritual satisfaction and value.

Yielding to Cravings

We are living in the most materialistic age mankind has ever sunk into. *Oxford Languages* defines *materialism* as “a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values.” This definition provides insight into the heart of what materialism is from a spiritual perspective.

The Apostle Paul wrote that the experiences of those in the Old Testament were preserved to be a helpful warning for those living at the end of the age, our present time (1 Corinthians 10:11). The children of Israel were drawn out of Egypt to become God’s own special people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Spiritually, that is His will for His New Covenant people, as well (1 Peter 2:9). But just as the children of Israel, after leaving Mount Sinai in the second year after the Exodus, found themselves traveling through the strange and unfamiliar surroundings of a desert, so we can find ourselves in equally disorienting trials and tests. How do we respond when we are faced with these challenges? What can we learn from ancient Israel’s response?

We read, “Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused” (Numbers 11:1). A fire went out from God when these Israelites complained. God is always listening, and He heard those in a state of dissatisfaction gathered in the “outskirts of the camp” (v. 1). This is instructive because safety is greatest in the middle of the camp, not at the outskirts. A lion lurks near the outskirts of herds of its prey because it recognizes where the weak and the lame tend to linger. Satan is a roaring lion seeking those spiritually weak and infirm (1 Peter 5:8). We need to put our minds in the very center of what God is doing in His Work through the Church today. It is the Work that God performs through His Church that is truly satisfying. Indeed, Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

Those witnessing that plague in the wilderness cried out to Moses, who interceded on their behalf. The fire was quenched, but the damage had been done and lives were lost (Numbers 11:1–2). We see that the group had “yielded to intense craving” (v. 4). They were not self-controlled and easily gave in to their fleshly appetites, having extreme discontent

with God's provision, the manna. They romanticized the past, thinking longingly of the provisions that had been afforded them in their bondage (vv. 5–9). The manna, as we see in the New Testament, was a type of Christ. Christ's sacrifice and example are completely sufficient for us. We can feed on the word of God and be satisfied from living His way, and ultimately live forever (John 6:58). God did send quail in response to their request, but those who yielded to inordinate and lustful desire were subsequently stricken. Their burial place was called *Kibroth Hattaavah*, or "Graves of Craving." Yielding to craving is a vain attempt to satisfy our wants or needs and will always end disastrously.

Another example is that of Achan. After the fall of Jericho, God's instruction to the Israelites was clear: The Israelites were not to touch any accursed things from the city (Joshua 6:18–19). God reserved for His treasury all the silver, gold, and vessels of bronze and iron. To take any of these items would be stealing from God—and one man, Achan, did take of these forbidden items. The result? Thirty-six Israelite soldiers died in the next military action, when Ai was attacked. This demoralizing defeat caused Joshua to question whether they should proceed, saying, "Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!" (Joshua 7:7). God told Joshua that the reason for the defeat was sin in their midst, and that it needed to be resolved.

After God inspired Joshua to detect the offending tribe, then family, and lastly Achan himself, the story of what had happened finally came to light. Achan confessed, "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it" (Joshua 7:21). This sin also involved stealing and deception—lying. If one of God's commandments is broken, all are broken (James 2:10). Those sins accompany a covetous attitude. Achan's sin led not only to his own destruction, but his family's also (Joshua 7:24–26). Yielding to craving to satisfy lustful desires will always end in tragedy.

Deuteronomy 5:21 records the command, "You shall not covet." It also contains a sevenfold protection of personal property—seven being the number of perfection or completion. Two similar words in this verse are *covet* and *desire*. The word *covet* is translated from the Hebrew word *avah*, and it means to take pleasure in and desire. The second is *desire*, translated from the Hebrew word *chamad*, meaning to be greedy for and to crave. God's law forbids craving anything in a lustful, uncontrolled manner. In practice, covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

A God-Sized Hole in the Heart

We might think that these are isolated events; however, consider Jeremiah 6:13: "Because from the least of them even to

the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely" (cf. 8:10). Achan wasn't the only one ever to covet. The condition of the nations of Judah and ancient Israel grew just as dire.

God said, "'Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate,' says the LORD. 'For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water'" (Jeremiah 2:11–13).

The modern-day descendants of Israel have continued in their ancestors' footsteps. At the end of every year, we recognize the insanity of Black Friday and Cyber Monday and the shopping frenzy that ensues before the December 25 holiday. All this feeds continually into the materialism and consumerism of this world. It is the unbridled way of get and the endless pursuit of gratification through acquisition of material possessions. People have forsaken the "fountain of living waters"—Jesus Christ—for paltry physical possessions that will never satisfy.

God has created us to worship Him and Him only! Trying to fill the God-sized hole in one's heart with material possessions is like being lost in the desert and seeking water, but chasing after only mirages. Putting the acquisition of physical wealth or possessions above the spiritual values of truth, moderation, generosity, and contentment is a serious sin with a terrible price.

Flee Dissatisfaction

There is a management theory that describes four stages of team development, but can apply to an individual. The four stages are *orientation*, *dissatisfaction*, *integration*, and *productivity*.

Hopes and morale are high during orientation; vision is clear and goals are set. But it isn't long before reality takes its toll; the budget is too tight, teammates may not be as motivated or skilled as we first believed, and goals may seem unachievable. Before long, the team is in the second stage, dissatisfaction. This stage is fertile ground for complaining, criticizing, and feeling general lethargy. The goal is always to move out of dissatisfaction as fast as possible. This takes accepting the reality for what it is, not focusing unduly on how it *should* be. If team members can realign their expectations and establish what needs to be changed in order to succeed, they move into the integration stage, where things begin to look brighter; goals are being achieved and the general outlook is positive, optimistic, and motivated. The fourth stage, productivity, is difficult to achieve—and when it is achieved, it may not last long, as the addition of any new team member or any change in circumstances can have the effect of taking the team, or any one member of it, backward by one stage. If the

whole team goes back, the whole team must move forward, together.

Have you ever been in a state of dissatisfaction—perhaps with your spouse, children, boss, coworker, family member, friend, or circumstance? The key is recognizing that you are in dissatisfaction and then, with prayer and God’s help, striving to move forward to a point of acceptance and positivity. Some find themselves in dire straits when they seek satisfaction in materialism. One way or another, giving in to craving and seeking satisfaction through desires for physical or worldly things will always end badly. We would do well to flee dissatisfaction.

Keys for Overcoming

How can we overcome this world, finding satisfaction in the things of the Spirit? The first key is to understand that satisfaction comes from focusing on things that are *above*. The Apostle Paul wrote, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1–2).

Satisfaction comes from above, but society at large is deceived, thinking that satisfaction comes from doing what you want to do, when you want to do it—doing “what feels right to you.” Paul continues, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (vv. 3–5). Putting to death the covetous tendency of human nature requires that we thirst after righteousness, not after the transient pleasure or limited power offered by a materialistic worldview. We read, “The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied from above” (Proverbs 14:14). We’re also told that “the fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil” (Proverbs 19:23).

Does this mean that we should never want anything, nor buy anything we want? Of course not. Those things are natural and part of our human existence. But we must keep needs and desires in their proper place—beneath our love and devotion to God our Father and Christ our Master.

The second key is to be content with what we have and give thanks often. The Apostle Paul exhorts, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:3–4). Paul also states, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave

you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). If we have an attitude of thankfulness, we will counteract the desires to get newer or better things just for the sake of having them. Paul said elsewhere that he had learned to be content in whatever state he found himself in (Philippians 4:11). This is only possible when we accept that Jesus Christ is our sufficiency. He is “the fountain of living waters” from which our joy and happiness is drawn. The accumulation of wealth and “stuff” is a vicious cycle that can never satisfy. Eventually, the “new” always wears off.

The third key is laying up treasure in heaven; honor God with your possessions. In delivering His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed His disciples to take an eternal perspective. Rather than storing up physical treasures, we are doing things that will add to our reward waiting in heaven—which Christ will bring with Him at His return (Matthew 6:19–21; Revelation 22:12). We should focus more on the lasting, spiritual, giving, and loving aspects of this Christian life and store up a good reward for the time to come.

Proverbs 3:9 tells us, “Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase,” and from the context we see the tremendous blessing in this. Through our faithful tithe-paying, God is teaching us the lessons of generosity and giving, along with the elements needed to resist and overcome a greedy and covetous disposition. Have you become careless in paying God’s tithes? Has the mirage led you away from the godly values of faithfulness and selflessness?

When we put God first, tithe faithfully, and give generous offerings as we are able, we are counteracting the pull of this world and the materialistic nature that is Satan’s. When we put the spiritual things first, blessings naturally flow from that giving way of life. God is not against us having wealth in this life, but a generous, compassionate, and caring heart and attitude should accompany it. “And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8:18).

“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:8–9). During Christ’s millennial reign, the parched ground—the mirage—will become a genuine oasis, pools of satisfying water to satiate every thirst. The age of the mirage of materialism will be over, replaced by a righteous reality.

In the meantime, we must avoid the materialistic attitudes of covetousness and greed. We must focus our minds on things above and on the Work God is doing. We must stir up gratefulness and be content with God’s provision. We must strive to lay up spiritual treasure in heaven and honor God with all we possess. (LM)



Festival 2022: Journeying Toward That Better World

By **Rod McNair**

In 2022, the Living Church of God organized 92 Feast of Tabernacles sites, with 11,434 brethren and guests attending around the world. As God commands in Leviticus 23:34 and 39, “The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD.... On the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest.” What did we learn at this year’s Feast? And what elements of it will we take with us as we face 2023 and beyond? In this article, we’ll highlight some of the elements from Festival 2022 that we can draw strength and inspiration from in the months and years ahead.

Feast sites were chosen that highlighted the beauty of God’s creation. Sites included a forested, lakeside venue in **Mol, Belgium**; deer and other wildlife in the hill country of **Boerne, Texas**; paddy fields of **Imphal, Manipur, India**; sheep grazing in a nearby farm paddock at **Eltham, Taranaki, New Zealand**; and the view of lush green hills from the beach in **Montego Bay, Jamaica**. Coordinator Roger Herbert commented that “watching the full moon rise out of the African bush was indeed millennial” in **Bela Bela, South Africa**. God blessed His people with beautiful, millennial sites at which to worship Him as a family!

Worshipping God and Learning Together

We go to the Feast to worship God. He tells us that the purpose of the Feast is to come before Him and to learn to fear Him always (Deuteronomy 14:23). What did you learn at the Feast? What lessons are you carrying with you as we go forward into 2023?

The Feast of Tabernacles is filled with learning opportunities. We learn each day what it means to distinguish between the holy and the unholy (Ezekiel 22:26) by listening to instructions given in messages prepared by the ministry. If we are asking God to teach us, He will guide our minds to make connections in the messages we hear, and those nuggets can become profound life-changing “gems” we take with us the rest of our lives.

We all learn different things at the Feast—some very personal and some regarding things we need to work on. Brethren

shared their experiences in the Festival survey given at the end of the Feast. A Feast-goer at **Hilton Head Island, South Carolina**, in response to the question, “What did you find especially meaningful at the Feast this year?,” noted, “Our dedication to stay focused on the Feast and shun anything that may interfere with it.” In answer to the same question, a Feast-goer from **New Bern, North Carolina**, commented “that we are all struggling with something. But God the Father called us to win, not fail. And if we don’t quit, God won’t quit on us, so don’t limit God and you will make it!” The urgency of the times we are in were impressed upon a Feast-goer in **Langkawi, Malaysia**, who observed, “It really hammered on me how much work needs to get done and how we all should contribute to reaching as many people as possible, especially with the times we are in and the things looming over the horizon.” (Note other observations shared by brethren, in the box on page 12.)

Every individual member of the Church is important to God, and He is fashioning each one of us to fill a need and position in His Kingdom. As Psalm 33:15 says, “He fashions their hearts individually.” Take a moment—even now—to reflect on the lessons you learned at the Feast and the spiritual truths you took home with you.

How Did You Serve?

Our God and our Savior Jesus Christ serve us—and the whole creation—constantly. Psalm 104 is a wonderful summation of how many ways God serves His creation. In verses 24 and 27 we read, “O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions.... These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season.” Without the bounty and generosity of our Father, we—and the rest of the creation—could not exist.

Perhaps that’s why God emphasizes the importance of serving: Serving is an attribute of His character. We are to become like Him. The Feast of Tabernacles is tailor-made to encourage us to serve God and serve one another, and the Feast in 2022 saw service abound among God’s people.

How did you serve at the Feast? Perhaps you helped in the Business Office? Maybe you drove a brother or sister to the Feast? Or, maybe, you just served by smiling and introducing yourself to those you did not know? Regardless of

how it's done, service is integral to a successful and satisfying Feast, individually and collectively.

Our Festival Site Coordinators related that the Feast this year was full of examples of service among God's people. In **Stilbaai, South Africa**, many brethren offered to help drive those who didn't have transportation, some even offering a spare car for use during the Feast. Coordinator Lawdi Ferreira noted, "No one was left out or excluded in any activity because of the love and generosity of others. It is wonderful to see God's Spirit in action through the fruit of the members of the Body of Christ. Many elderly brethren commented about their appreciation of the young children who eagerly helped them every morning to carry their bags from the car park to the hall."

Regarding the **Nairobi, Kenya**, site, Festival coordinator Simon Muthama said, "The brethren were a total delight—disciplined, friendly, and helpful. There was a palpable positive energy in the congregation all eight days. Those who served did a magnificent job and did their jobs with smiles and joy.... All in all, the Feast in Nairobi this year seemed to capture the essence of what the Feast represents: peace, harmony, generosity, unity, good fellowship, good health, good food, and good fun." There were also many other ways that God's people served one another.

So, how did you serve? As fulfilling, rewarding—and fun—as it was, remember that by doing so you were also *laying up treasure in heaven* (Matthew 6:20). Let it be a springboard for greater service toward our spiritual family in the months and years to come!

Growing Together as a Family

Going to the Feast is not about traveling to an attractive site and having a great vacation. It's about service—as we've noted—but also about growing as a spiritual body and getting to know our family.

We are a spiritual family. That fact is, frankly, more real than the reality of our physical family, when we come to understand it. As 1 Corinthians 12:27 states, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." What did you get out of fellowship this year? More importantly, what did you *give* in fellowship?

Many Festival coordinators commented on the special dimension of warm fellowship at the Feast in 2022. Coordinator Richard Franz noted, "There was something special about the fellowship this year. Many people commented on how warm, positive, and friendly everyone was, making this Feast extra special" (**Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri**). In **Midway, Utah**, many experienced an encouraging and unifying Feast. Festival coordinator Brandon Fall commented, "It seemed that a big spiritual highlight of the Feast in Midway was the love and unity the brethren displayed at the Feast. There was

a lot of mixing and mingling of all ages. Brethren commented that there was an unusual amount of love shown toward one another at the site."

The Church is truly one body, though separated on continents thousands of miles apart. Around the world, there were new sites, and sites where brethren were meeting together for the first time in years. Festival coordinator Lawdi Ferreira reported that **Lake Kariba, Zambia**, was the location of the first-ever Living Church of God Feast site in Zambia. In **Georgetown, Guyana**, brethren were greeted by Pastor Wil Pierre—who made, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first ministerial visit to the country in three years. **Batu** was the Feast site for brethren in Indonesia, meeting together for the first time since 2020.

The Feast is a time to learn spiritual truths and grow in spiritual understanding. But undoubtedly, it also is prime time to grow closer as a body. The 2022 Feast was a tremendous encouragement to brethren around the world, knowing they are not alone but part of a greater, worldwide body.

Building Bonds with Brethren

Why do we have activities at the Feast? Is it just to pass the time? If activities are planned and executed well, they have the potential to bring the family together. Coordinators planned activities with themes as varied as there were sites around the world. From an afternoon of curling and board games in **Drummondville, Quebec, Canada**; to a night of trivia, bingo, and raffles in **Sandusky, Ohio**; from historical outings to Newgrange and the Hill of Tara in **Trim, Ireland**; to sandcastle-building instruction from professional instructors at **South Padre Island, Texas**. Activities to draw Feast-goers together were unique and varied. In **LaGrange, Georgia**, many visited the Biblical History Center. In **Sakhangyi/Myaungmya, Myanmar**, brethren participated in a Bible Quiz night; in **Branson, Missouri**, Feast-goers enjoyed a taco bar and game night.

One bonding activity in **Poconos, Pennsylvania**, was a Progressive Dinner. Coordinator Adam West explains, "Eighty guests travelled to host locations with around 30 hosts receiving them.... This encouraged brethren who may not have met many of the members to do so in a relaxed setting in various host locations both on- and off-site." Jonathan Bueno, the coordinator for **Florence, Oregon**, related that a similar Progressive Dinner was also held there and was a highlight for many brethren.

The brethren in **Batemans Bay, Australia**, immersed themselves in God's creation for one of their activities, adding to their sense of the wonder of God's works: "The Kayak Challenge and Games not only showcased the beauty of God's creation as we paddled through a maze of mangroves with stingrays gliding over the sand beneath, but also provided

much fun and a sense of oneness with the team-building exercises.” At **Great Malvern, United Kingdom**, a favorite activity was brought back from pre-COVID Feasts. Coordinator Simon Roberts explains, “We had a Ceilidh Dance for the first time since 2019, attended by about 100 members and described as good, wholesome fun for everyone.” The brethren in **Chiang Mai, Thailand**, had family craft activities, of which “the primary purpose... was to bring everyone to work together as a team and to recapture the true family values” (Coordinator Htoowah Laybeh).

For those of us who spent the Feast in relative peace and safety, consider another note from Mr. Laybeh regarding the **Kalaymyo, Myanmar**, Feast site: “Due to the internal civil war, we were not able to organize an outing activity.” Despite the dangers of the surrounding area, the brethren rejoiced, enjoying their first Feast ever to have the comforts and conveniences of staying together in a hotel for the Feast. We can be grateful for God’s blessings, which come in many different ways!

How did you grow closer to other members of the body at the Feast? What is the purpose of activities? As assistant coordinator of the site in **Lowlands, Tobago**, David Grant noted regarding a game night activity, “The primary benefit was how it increased and improved our fellowship.” Let’s cherish the memories—and look forward to getting to know each other better, both in the years to come and for all eternity!

Shining Our Light and Loving Our Neighbor

The Feast of Tabernacles is a unique time to shine our light and demonstrate a taste of what the coming Millennium will be like for the whole world. It’s not uncommon for the staff at Festival venues and other establishments to comment on how courteous, polite, and helpful brethren are, and that is a testimony to the legacy of God’s Church. In **Kingsburgh, KZN, South Africa**, coordinator Christo Botha said, “One of the waiters commented that it was a pleasure to deal with our group.” In **Pigeon Forge, Tennessee**, coordinator Ron Poole said, “The manager of the auditorium expressed multiple times what a joy our people are, as well as willing to help move chairs, tables, etc. to assist the staff.” In **San Diego, California**, coordinator Rodger Bardo commented, “The personnel were so surprised in spite of challenges we faced that we were so pleasant to deal with.”

In **St. Augustine, Florida**, Festival coordinator James Sweat related that “the hotel concierge said that LCG brethren, ‘restored her faith and trust in religion.’ [A meal server] told us that she went to our website and ordered some booklets. A waitress at our breakfast table told Mr. Ames, ‘My husband and I went online and watched video of you.’” In **Hervey Bay, Australia**, brethren prayed for a four-month-old girl

in the hospital with seizures, a granddaughter of one of the managers. Coordinator Anthony Mew observed, “During the Feast, her granddaughter was able to return home, well ahead of the doctors’ expectations. She spoke to the Festival Assistant and told him that she knew we’d been praying for them.” As our world spins out of control, many people are confused and discouraged, and sometimes we can be an encouragement in unusual and unexpected ways. The same Functions Manager later came to Mr. Mew, asking to speak with him. Mr. Mew explained, “I sat with her and listened and encouraged her. The next day she told me that she went home after our fellowship evening and had never felt such peace after seeing how our group conducted themselves. While she doesn’t understand many doctrines of the Church, she asked a number of times for us to email and keep in touch.”

Brethren, how we conduct ourselves in the world matters. We may never know what impact we might have on those we encounter. But let’s not underestimate the power of God to use our example in working in their lives. The staff in **Williamsburg, Virginia**, were also impressed with the brethren. Coordinator Lenny Bower related, “They never saw a room left just as clean as it was before we had meetings, so some staff assumed it hadn’t even been used and walked out without checking the trash bins. I also had multiple comments from hotel and catering staff at how joyous, polite, and respectful the brethren were to them all.” Coordinator Alvin Cumberbatch said that the manager of the hotel where many of the brethren stayed for the **Pebbles Beach, Barbados**, site “was struck by the warmth and friendliness of the brethren.... It was great to see the brethren letting their light shine in this way.”

Good examples are not for the purpose of pointing people to ourselves, but for honoring and glorifying God. One day—and it may be sooner than we think—they will come to understand and know that God. What a wonderful picture the Feast paints.

Challenges and Interventions

The Feast is not without its challenges. Just last year, many of our Feast sites had unique challenges as a result of COVID. This year, COVID was less of a factor, and international travel was opened for more countries, but there were still COVID challenges, as the site in **Liverpool, Nova Scotia**, experienced. Coordinator Shane Kruse reported, “This was perhaps one of the best Feasts for learning spiritual lessons. Things began perfectly with a very warm and close group excited to be together, to see each other face to face, and to be able to offer hugs. A few different illnesses occurred.... Then about 20 confirmed cases of COVID.” But with this trial also came the reminder to rely on God. “All these served to cement the brethren’s reliance on God and steadfastness in the face of some difficulties.”

The brethren in **Stilbaai, South Africa**, experienced power outages but also saw God's hand in working through it. "Right before the Feast, everyone in South Africa faced Stage-4 to Stage-6 power outages, which means the power was scheduled to be off 3-4 times a day (2.5 hours at a time). At the start of the Feast, the load shedding was reduced to Level 2 which meant the power was scheduled to go off a maximum of once a day for 2.5 hours and on some days, there was no power outage. We hardly noticed the load-shedding during the Feast as we had no power outages on a number of days and services were not affected except for an expected very quick switch to generator power near the end of one service. The day after the Feast, the country was again moved back to Level-4 load-shedding with three scheduled power cuts per day. We thank God for His intervention and the answered prayers" (Lawdi Ferreira).

Weather can also be a major issue at the Feast. Assistant Coordinator James Populo noted, "On day three, while Mr. Ken Frank, our guest speaker, was giving his sermon, we survived a tornado in the area. According to radar the most severe line of the storm traveling west to east broke apart just

before hitting the resort and reconnected just past the resort where tornadoes came down on the lake" (**Fontana, Wisconsin**). Clearly, God's hand was protecting the brethren, as the Feast site in **St. Augustine, Florida**, also experienced. Assistant Coordinator Ryan Dawson explained, "Hurricane Ian was supposed to hit the area just prior to the Feast. God intervened, leaving the site and surrounding area protected, so God's people could keep the Feast in peace and rejoice where God placed His name!"

A Yearly Gift

The Feast of Tabernacles 2022 is over. But our journey is *not* over. As we make our way into 2023 and the challenges—and opportunities—that lie ahead, let's remember the lessons learned in 2022. God gives us His Feast as a wonderful yearly gift to encourage, uplift, and inspire us. He uses it as a tool to teach us deeper spiritual truths about His way. He designed it to be a bonding experience where we become closer to our spiritual brothers and sisters. And He constantly reminds us that the Feast looks to a better world to come. God speed that day! ^(LN)

"What is one thing you learned at the Feast that you found especially meaningful?"

"How tightly the ministry is in 'sync' and how focused they all seemed to be in 'going all out' as our Kingdom is closer than we think" (**La Grange, Georgia**).

"The Feast is a dress rehearsal for the Millennium" (**Pigeon Forge, Tennessee**).

"Seeing the beautiful Behind the Work in Africa and seeing the work being done there was very encouraging. Heart-warming too!" (**St. Augustine, Florida**).

"I appreciated the focus on the Work that's taking place in other less fortunate parts of the world. It's amazing to see what great works can be ac-

complished when we set egos aside and focus on the Church's mission" (**San Diego, California**).

"When you don't sign up to serve, there are plenty of ways to help and serve. That makes a Feast, by serving" (**Pigeon Forge, Tennessee**).

"Slowing down and being present for each day, not over-planning activities, has made this Feast more meaningful" (**South Padre Island, Texas**).

"The concept of rejoicing and having joy being deeper than just being happy, being beyond a personality trait or short-term reaction" (**Montego Bay, Jamaica**).

"Details of the Millennium made thinking about it easier, as it wasn't so vague in my mind" (**St. Augustine, Florida**).

"You have to reach out to people, and usually they respond positively and are friendly" (**Red Deer, Alberta, Canada**).

"We had an example shared from many years ago of a lady.... She said the whole town looked forward to the Church coming every year because the people lit up the area while they were there. It was so encouraging to hear the positive impact God's people can have, and that it can be remembered for years" (**Midway, Utah**).



Boerne, Texas



Branson, Missouri



San Juan, Puerto Rico



South Padre Island, Texas



La Campana, Chile



Imphal, India



Batu, Indonesia



Drummondville, QC, Canada

Ministerial and Leadership Conferences Held Around the World

In March 2020, a General Ministerial Conference of the Living Church of God had to be cancelled abruptly because of the newly spreading COVID-19 pandemic. In spite of this disappointment, two years later we were greatly blessed to begin conducting in-person conferences again. Between May and August of 2022, we held six ministerial conferences: four in the United States, and one each in Australia and Canada. A leadership conference was also held in the United Kingdom, with online participants from all over the continent of Africa.

Four U.S. regional conferences were held around the country: South Bend, Indiana, (May 15–17), with 30 in attendance; Ogden, Utah, (June 26–28) with 30 in attendance; Little Rock, Arkansas, (August 7–9) with 71 in attendance; and Charlotte, North Carolina, (August 28–30) with 110 in attendance. Many commented that the smaller groups created a particular closeness both in spending time with each other and getting to better know the Headquarters ministry who were present. A total of 241 ministers, wives, and ministerial widows participated in the three-day events, which began with Sunday afternoon sessions and concluded on Tuesday mornings.

Evangelists Gerald Weston and Douglas Winnail conducted the meetings, focusing on our mission as God's Church, how to approach leadership and team building, coordination between pastorates, sermon preparation, and growing as ministers. Particular emphasis was given to how to nurture and bring along prospective members, following Christ's admonition to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). At the Charlotte conference, Evangelist Richard Ames gave an update on the Work and spoke on the fundamentals of prophecy. Other senior ministers conducted sessions on followership, the role of a minister's wife, working with small congregations, empathy and listening, and giving feedback. A number of Question and Answer sessions on doctrinal and administrative points were also conducted. Many expressed appreciation for the unifying content of the sessions and the opportunity to build camaraderie with friends old and new during breaks and over meals.

—Rod McNair

Canadian Conference: The First in Five Years

Ministers and their wives from across the country visited the Regional Office in London, Ontario, on August 22–23 for our first in-person ministerial conference in more than five years. We had 40 individuals physically present for two days of meetings, with seven others tuning in via Zoom link along with Mr. Gerald Weston and Dr. Douglas Winnail, who answered questions from the ministry and gave instructive presentations on growing as ministers and growing as a Church. The conference began with a tour of the London office facilities and included several updates on the state of the Work in Canada. For many, this was their first opportunity to participate in such a conference and it provided a wonderful opportunity for fellowship and growth.

—Michael Heykoop

Unifying UK Leadership Conference

The UK Church Office hosted a successful Church Leadership Conference on July 19–20, 2022. A total of 55 men and their wives were able to participate in the conference: upwards of 20 in the hall itself and another 35 who attended online, either in English or French. Online technology made possible the remarkable reach of the conference, uniting servants of God throughout the United Kingdom, Europe, and various parts of far-away Africa, as well as the United States. African countries connected with the conference included Benin, Ghana, Cameroon, Gabon, Burundi, Kenya, and South Africa.

The conference was organised by the Regional Director for the UK, Europe, and Africa, Mr. Peter Nathan, with guests from Charlotte: Dr. Doug Winnail, Director of Church Administration, and Dr. Scott Winnail, incoming Assistant Regional Director. Many topics about the mission of the Church, the importance of teamwork, and how to deal with this present evil age were discussed. We also heard uplifting updates on preaching the Gospel throughout the region. The participants in Kettering shared the bonding experience of two evening meals spent together, with the prolonged period of COVID-19 restrictions now hopefully behind us. The conference was much appreciated and succeeded on several levels in developing bonds of unity and mutual service. Being able to meet and converse with both Drs. Winnail afforded numerous

opportunities for additional in-depth personal discussions concerning the way forward for the Work in the UK.

—John Meakin

Australasian Ministerial Conference: Growing and Persevering

The Mario Hotel in Adelaide, Australia, was the venue for the 2022 Australasian Regional Ministerial Conference from June 19–22. There were 29 attending in person, including the ministers, their wives, and three ministerial widows. Several others from across the region who could not be there in person were able to tune in via livestream. Regional Director Robert Tyler and Mr. Martin Montgomery, who serves as the Adelaide Associate Pastor and the Director of Media in the Australian office, gave live lectures for the ministry on pertinent topics. We were also able to hear pre-recorded messages from Mr. Gerald Weston and Dr. Douglas Winnail. Two of the main recurring points throughout the conference were to

keep striving for unity and to consider ways that the Work can be built further.

We also heard reports from pastors about their areas of responsibility. Although there have been some challenges faced over the past couple of years by the ministry and members alike due to the global spread of COVID-19 and civil unrest, the reports were positive in that brethren around the world continue to persevere. The Work in Australasia is moving forward, predominantly due to the Regional Office’s efforts using Facebook advertising. This is producing positive fruit in countries that have been difficult to effectively reach in the past, such as India and Fiji. Some of the ministers had not seen each other for several years, so this event was very much needed and appreciated. It was evident that those in the ministry, whether in person or livestreaming, have a passion to grow personally in order to serve the members more effectively in these sobering and challenging times.

—Paul Kearns



Clockwise from left: Australasia Ministerial Conference, Midwest U.S. Ministerial Conference, UK Ministerial Conference, Eastern Seaboard U.S. Ministerial Conference

Living Education: Student Life



By **Kaleb Johnson**

The following article is adapted from four of the Student Life essays available at LCGEducation.org, in which Kaleb Johnson, a student at Living Education–Charlotte, provides insight into aspects of the LE experience. The students enjoy many exciting extracurricular opportunities over the course of this nine-month program, and we hope you’ll enjoy reading about a few!

Student Orientation

Living Education–Charlotte does things a little differently right from the start, with an “Orientation Trip” to Blowing Rock, North Carolina. This was a welcome difference for me, and I found this trip much more engaging than the orientations I had been to during my time in college.

On Sunday afternoon, August 14, nine students, along with student leaders and faculty, piled into three vehicles and took off on the three-hour trip from the dorms in Charlotte to the Blowing Rock cabins in which we would stay. Once we arrived, we found to our delight (or at least mine) that dinner had been prepared, and we had a fine meal together in the main cabin, allowing students to get to know each other and the staff.

On Monday morning, we had breakfast before heading up to a conference room for the instructors to talk to us about the program. Mr. Jonathan McNair began by introducing the principles of the program, and then Mr. Frank gave us the history of education in the Church, highlighting its importance. Following this, Mr. McNair gave us tips on succeeding in the program and in life. Miss Ross then introduced music’s role in the program and gave advice specific to the ladies, before Mr. Ruddlesden focused us on serving the local Charlotte congregation and gave us practical advice for living together in peace. We then took a break for lunch.

In the afternoon, Mr. Tlumak shared some of his life experiences and told us how to get the most out of the program’s nine months. Then, Mr. McNair showed us a motivational speech, explained what the program expects of each of us, and challenged us to really embrace the program and grow as much as we can.

After being well informed and motivated, we went to tour the Blowing Rock park. When we got there, we found a slight issue with the weather that day: *We could not see anything.*

The fog was so thick that we could only see about 30 feet in front of us! This led to jokes regarding objects we could “see” on the horizon, and the visit ended up being a great experience that all of us students share.

On Tuesday morning, we all had breakfast together again before we departed for the Watauga River for whitewater rafting. Mr. McNair politely informed us that the water would be a little bit cold, and when we got into it, we discovered that it was indeed—about 40 degrees Fahrenheit, to be precise. All the students, along with Mr. McNair, Miss Ross, and Mr. Ruddlesden, split up into two rafts and shoved off into the rapids. We felt every splash of water and relished every sunny break on the way down. Despite the frigid temperature, the two rafts engaged in some friendly splashing and water gun fights, and we all jumped in the water to swim around. After we pulled the rafts out of the frosty river, we changed into dry clothes and departed for the dorms in Charlotte.

Living Education–Charlotte doesn’t immediately begin with classes expecting that the students will build friendships along the way, amidst all the stress and distractions that come with the beginning of a semester. Rather, it begins with a little adventure—allowing the new students to get to know each other in a stress-free environment, letting the instructors introduce themselves as individuals and not just teachers, and giving the new students a shared memory to establish relationships that they will continue to build over the course of the year.

Old-Timey Movie Night

On Friday, September 2, the LE students finished their classes at the normal time—but this was no normal day. They had begun to pack up their belongings when two student leaders, Ellie and Kezia, burst into the classroom. Kezia spoke first: There was going to be a movie night the following Sunday. They wanted us to engage with the local singles scene (a terrifying prospect), and they had a plan.

We were given special invitations to pass on, as we were all instructed to invite a date to attend with us. However, we had only that evening and the next day, the Sabbath, to find someone. It was going to be a tall order.

The girls stressed, wondering, “How do you even ask someone out?”

The guys asked, “What if they all say no?”

Kezia and Ellie eventually managed to restore order and explain that the movie was to be a 1930s film—a mystery thriller called *The Thin Man*. To maximize the fun, the students and their dates would have to dress in black and white to match the movie.

The students set about finding dates. They scoured the singles’ Bible Study that night and Church services the next day. Many were obliged to talk with brethren they didn’t know, and through diligent effort, most found a date.

Before long, Sunday night arrived and it was time for the big event. The movie night was held at the girls’ dorm, and the preparations were a whirlwind of activity. Some of the guys showed up early to help, too. By the time all the guests arrived, the venue was lavishly decorated, and the students offered the guests different flavors of popcorn, black-and-white moon cookies, and fruit drink “mocktails.”

Once all the guests got their snacks, we took our seats and settled in for the movie. The students and guests were charmed by the film and laughed throughout the evening, and the element of mystery and thrill added to the mood. The fun did not end with the movie, as the conversation continued long afterward. By the end of the evening, only one mystery remained: When will we be doing this again?

Cats! (Not the Musical)

The students had a lot going on over Labor Day weekend, with a drive-in movie night on Saturday night and a black-and-white movie night on Sunday night. By the time Monday came around, one might think that we had run out of activities to do. Yet we most certainly had not—one of the students had the grand idea to visit a Cat Cafe.

Cat Cafes are little shops that have lounge areas where people can enjoy the company of cats along with their beverages. Most often, these establishments are used to help find homes for kittens and young cats that are sociable and well trained and they raise awareness for an animal shelter that is associated with the cafe. They have become fairly popular in cities these days, and the LE students wanted to see what they were like.

We piled into our cars and drove to the Mac Tabby Cat Café, located in Charlotte’s arts and entertainment district. The cat lounge, which was separated by a glass wall, had about eight cats either strolling or reclining around the room.

The cats reflected our own energy level: mildly exhausted and desiring sufficient time to warm-up to a new environment. Gradually, the cats condescended to become acquainted with us. One decided to take up camp on my lap, which was rather convenient, as we were not allowed to pick them up and I was cold. I sat and sipped my drink, quietly taking in the environment.

The cats had quite adorable names like Kevin, Babe (the youngest), and Ulf Ekberg (my personal favorite). A black cat named Jem just lay in his bed atop a cat tower. He poked his head up a few times and seemed to enjoy being petted—or at least did not actively hate it—yet he never moved from his cozy bed and slept for most of the hour we were there. On the other end of the energy spectrum was the rambunctious adolescent cat Babe, who played vigorously with all the toys that were spread out around the lounge. The staff at the cafe

gave us a laser pointer, and we took turns seeing if we could get Babe to jump on people by

pointing the laser at them. It worked quite successfully on multiple occasions.

When our hour was up, we said goodbye to our newfound feline friends. Overall, it was a great trip that illustrated how, at LE, you are always up to something.

Sunset Beach

On a beautiful, sunny Sunday, the LE students took a trip to Sunset Beach and enjoyed a good day away from the fray.

We began bright and early as we got on the road by 7:30 and arrived at the beach by 11:30, wasting no time starting the fun. The wide beach was picturesque and white, and the water was welcoming. We soon found ourselves lost in a blissful blur of wild waves. We crashed in, out, under, and over the rolling ripples. When we had our fill of swimming, we took a break for lunch. Some of us threw a football around, some of us lounged in the sun, and some of us even played chess on a sandy board beneath the shifting shade of the canopy.

As we all began to feel the fatigue that comes from swimming all afternoon, we took a walk along the seashore and watched the obdurate ocean waves churn. It was a fine chance to get away from the distractions and expectations of day-to-day life.

The LE students left Sunset Beach with fond memories, uplifted hearts, and exhausted muscles. Before we piled into the vehicles again, we stopped to finish the last of the food and snacks. A few of the students even threw a plastic disk around as they ate, seeking to enjoy every last drop of fun. Truly, there is never a dull moment at Living Education–Charlotte. (LW)

The cats had quite adorable names like Kevin, Babe (the youngest), and Ulf Ekberg (my personal favorite). A black cat named Jem just lay in his bed atop a cat tower.

Getting to Know the Council of Elders

By **Editorial Staff**

We all know that “in the multitude of counselors, there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14), and in the Living Church of God, our Presiding Evangelist is supported by a Council of Elders to help him more effectively manage the governance of God’s Church. Just what is the Council of Elders? Who is on it? What are its primary functions?

Under our Presiding Evangelist, Mr. Gerald E. Weston, four other evangelists are members of our Council of Elders: Mr. Richard Ames, Director of Media Operations; Dr. Douglas Winnail, Director of Church Administration; Mr. Stuart Wachowicz, Regional Director of Canada; and Mr. Mario Hernández, Regional Director of Spanish-speaking Regions and Editorial Director of French publications.

They are joined by 15 pastors: Mr. Peter Nathan, Regional Director of the United Kingdom, Europe, and Africa; Mr. Richard Stafford, Regional Director of the Caribbean and Area Pastor of the South Texas congregations; Mr. Robert Tyler, Regional Director of Australasia and the Philippines; Mr. Jonathan McNair, Director of Living Education; Mr. Rod McNair, Assistant Director of Church Administration; Mr. Wallace Smith, Executive Editor of Church Publications; Mr. Dexter Wakefield, Vice President of Finance and Operations; Dr. Jeffrey Fall, Regional Pastor of the Western United States; Mr. Lambert Greer, Regional Pastor of the Mideast U.S.; Mr. Dan Hall, Regional Pastor of the Southeast U.S.; Mr. Rand Millich, Regional Pastor of the Midwest U.S.; Mr. Adam West, Regional Pastor of the Northeast U.S.; Mr. John Strain, Area Pastor of the Charlotte congregation; Mr. Stephen Elliott, Area Pastor of the Arizona and New Mexico congregations; and Mr. Paul Shumway, Area Pastor of the Statesville and Kannapolis congregations in North Carolina, as well as the congregations in Brazil, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Meeting Through Travel and Technology

The Council of Elders typically meets four times per year, with May and November meetings occurring in person in Charlotte, North Carolina, and February and August meetings attended virtually through the Internet.

“When we meet in person, there’s actually a lot that is accomplished outside the Council meetings,” says Mr. Greer. “Meetings take place with the different departments and people who work at Headquarters. There are times when I’ll go talk to somebody in Data Processing, or to somebody who can help me in some area of communication with Headquarters, and that doesn’t really happen in Council meetings themselves. It does facilitate, in a sense, the leadership that serves the ministry throughout the world—having the ability to communicate with Headquarters and ask questions, get them answered, and communicate back to those we work with. So, being in person also has quite a few benefits in the meetings that take place outside of the Council meeting itself.”

In 2022, the Council was able to meet in person for the first time in more than a year, because COVID-19 restrictions had permitted only online meetings. “While the online gatherings usually last only a few hours,” explains Mr. Wachowicz, “they do allow the Council to meet more frequently and enable the Presiding Evangelist and Church Administration to update the Council on new initiatives and developments, as well as get input from Council members on matters that will require the Presiding Evangelist to make a decision. Due to their limited duration, the online sessions are focused on a few specific matters. Some issues requiring immediate action can thus be dealt with in a timely manner by these two online meetings.”

“The online meetings are an invaluable tool,” Mr. Wachowicz says, “but of course do not permit the same level of interpersonal exchange that can occur when people assemble in person.” Mr. Wachowicz added that meeting every three months allows the Council of Elders “to be kept up to date on matters that can have implications for the Church as a whole, and permit discussion and input to Church leadership on a



timely basis. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for the leadership in Charlotte to be apprised of needs and trends that are developing.”

“The online meetings almost always have on their agenda the items that we’re going to discuss when we’re in person,” adds Mr. Lambert Greer. “Those meetings tend to be preparatory discussions about things that we will continue talking about. The frequency of meetings is a part of the reality of our world, where there’s a lot of change taking place and a lot of challenges, and if you’re too far apart, the communication that takes place might not involve everyone being impacted. Meeting every three months allows us to communicate and act in unity, and, if a decision is made, to be aware of it. So, it really has a lot to do with the reality of living in a world that’s fast paced, a world of change.”

Supporting Godly Government

What is the Council’s main purpose? As the Presiding Evangelist is tasked with overseeing the preservation of God’s Truth and the proclamation of the Gospel message, the Council’s main function is to give input and advise him. Mr. Weston asks for the Council’s input on matters involving doing the Work more powerfully and spiritually feeding God’s people across the globe, and he encourages candid discussion. All the Council members are dedicated to helping God’s Work reach farther and hit harder as this age comes to an end.

“One of the primary benefits of the Council is that it adds unity to the Church,” Mr. Greer says. “We are unified because of God’s word, because we believe the same things, but how do you apply that? How do you take a principle and then fit it to modern life, the challenges of today? When you do that with input from others—the ideas that they have, the challenges they’ve faced, the consequences they’ve felt that you would perhaps not think about—you’re much better prepared, and it helps us all work

together. And unity has to start from leadership—of course, that comes from Mr. Weston as the Presiding Evangelist.”

A Council of Elders meeting will begin with a prayer, after which the Presiding Evangelist will give opening remarks. Then he will hear reports from the Regional Directors and Pastors on the state of their regions, and the Council will begin discussing the varied topics on the meeting agenda. Considered and candid comments from the Council members on the various topics all contribute to a bigger-picture understanding of the issues and situations. This is of benefit to all the men and to the Church as a whole.

“I have been most impressed by the degree of unity and support that results from this process,” says Mr. Wachowicz. “I myself have learned a great deal from having had the opportunity to listen to the input from the people around the table. God’s system, when faithfully followed, does produce a harmony and unity of direction that no other process can achieve, largely because God backs it up through His Spirit.”

Mr. Greer agrees wholeheartedly. “The experience lifts you up,” he says. “Dr. Meredith said for years that there’s a kind of a camaraderie on the Council, and all it’s done is get better. The last time we had a Council meeting, it was just outstanding—the laughter we shared, the things that were accomplished. And hopefully they’ll get better and better as we go forward. We’re learning how God’s government works under the leadership of Jesus Christ. We’re going to be kings and priests, but we’re not acting just for ourselves—we’re acting for our Lord and Savior and for God the Father.”

Council of Elders meetings help to ensure that the Living Church of God leadership remains united and active. That unity flows down from the top as all work together, informing and supporting Mr. Weston as he guides the Church forward under its ultimate head, Jesus Christ. May God empower us all to do our part in building and strengthening the unity of His Church! ^{LN}



Top Row, from left: Wallace Smith, Peter Nathan, Lambert Greer, Rod McNair, Dexter Wakefield, Jonathan McNair, Dan Hall, Stephen Elliott, Rand Millich, Jeffrey Fall, Paul Shumway, Richard Stafford, John Strain, Adam West. **Bottom Row, from left:** Stuart Wachowicz, Richard Ames, Gerald Weston, Douglas Winnail, Mario Hernández. **Not pictured:** Robert Tyler

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Charles Bond was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Anthony Stroud and elder Glendon Driver. Mr. Bond serves in the Montgomery, Alabama, congregation.

Mr. Lester Clifton was ordained an elder on November 5 by Area Pastor Martin Fannin and elder Larry Rigling. Mr. Clifton serves in the Etowah, Tennessee, congregation.

Mr. Ricardo Colon was ordained a deacon on the Day of Atonement by Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka and Mr. Rod McNair, visiting minister from Charlotte Headquarters. Mr. Colon serves in the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Andre Donhachi was ordained a deacon on October 15 by Regional Director Peter Nathan and elder Urbain Hazoume. Mr. Donhachi serves in the Yaoundé, Cameroon, congregation in Africa.

Mrs. Barbara Hall was ordained a deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Anthony Stroud and elder

Glendon Driver. Mrs. Hall serves in the Montgomery, Alabama, congregation.

Mr. Karl Harmdierks was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Gary Stein and elders Marshall Moluf and Felipe Torres. Mr. Harmdierks serves in the Dallas, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Jason Hatch was ordained a deacon on November 12 by Area Pastor Martin Fannin and Associate Pastor James Meredith. Mr. Hatch serves in the Crossville, Tennessee, congregation.

Mr. Zacharia Hlalu was ordained a deacon on October 15 by Regional Director Peter Nathan and Area Pastor Lawdi Ferreira. Mr. Hlalu serves in the Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) congregation in South Africa.

Ms. Christina Jackson was ordained a deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Scott Winnail and elder Maynard Marvel. Ms. Jackson serves in the Baltimore, Maryland, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Matthew (Jennifer) Joffrion were ordained deacon and deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets by Area

Pastor Anthony Stroud and elder Glendon Driver. Mr. and Mrs. Joffrion serve in the Birmingham, Alabama, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Denzil (Linda) Krause were ordained deacon and deaconess on October 17 by Regional Director Peter Nathan, Area Pastor Christo Botha, and elder Ryan van der Watt. Mr. and Mrs. Krause serve in the Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, congregation in South Africa.

Mrs. Christine Lewis was ordained a deaconess on September 24 by Area Pastor Ed Breaux and elder Lawrence Johnson. Mrs. Lewis serves in the Jackson, Mississippi, congregation.

Mr. Hendrik Johannes Olwage was ordained a deacon on October 17 by Regional Director Peter Nathan, Area Pastor Christo Botha, and elder Ryan van der Watt. Mr. Olwage serves in the Kimberley, Northern Cape, congregation in South Africa.

Mr. William Williams was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Scott Winnail and elder Maynard Marvel. Mr. Williams serves in the Winchester, Virginia, congregation.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Jake (Heather) Bellwood are pleased to announce the birth of their twin boys born July 14. **Arlo Jude Bellwood** weighed five pounds, ten ounces, and was 18 inches long. **Ford James Bellwood** was born three minutes later, weighing five pounds, seven ounces, and measuring 18.5 inches long. Their big brothers, Ryker and Gage, are loving the new additions to the family. The Bellwood family attends the Dallas, Texas, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson (Catelyn) Brown welcomed their first child, **William Elijah Brown** on July 15. He was eight pounds, 15 ounces, and 18.5 inches long. The family is healthy

and very happy. William is the first grandchild and first great-grandchild on both sides of his family! The Browns are members of the Dallas, Texas, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. CJ (Juniper) Carpenter are happy to announce the birth of their second child, **Kyndra Amber Carpenter**, on August 30. She was seven pounds, eight ounces, and was 20 inches long. Big brother Gideon is happy she is finally here. Kyndra is also welcomed by grandparents Chet and Amber Carpenter of the Fresno, California, area and two sets of great-grandparents: Roger and Cleo Anderson and John and Marjie Adams, who all attend the Helena congregation, as do the baby and her family.

Judah Norman Crouch was born to Mr. and Mrs. Andrew (Ellie) Crouch on May 31. He weighed 3.7 kg (8.2 pounds) and measured 56 cm. Mother and baby are doing well and the Brisbane, Queensland, congregation was delighted to welcome the new addition.

In the very early morning of June 30, Miss **Josephine Sophia Mew** entered the world, born to Mr. and Mrs. Anthony (Melanie) Mew, of the Brisbane, Queensland, congregation. After a short labor at home, Josephine “delivered herself” in the car on the way to the hospital. At 3.35 kg and 49 cm, she was born very healthy and with no complications. Her two older sisters are enjoying her very much.

Mr. and Mrs. Shawn (Lillie) Plagenza are excited to announce the birth of their second baby girl, **Susanna Louise Plagenza** was born July 18. She weighed in at seven pounds, four ounces, and measured 19.5 inches long. Big sister Addi loves her little sister! The Shawn Plagenza family attends the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas (Abby) Plagenza are happy to announce the birth of their first son, **Tyler Owen Plagenza** was born on July 22. He weighed six pounds, nine ounces, and measured 19.5 inches long. He is welcomed into the family by big sisters Lyla, Jenna, and Maggie, and all attend the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Panom (Nyakong) Top are happy to announce the birth of their third son, **Gabriel Panom Koang Top** on July 24. Delivered by emergency caesarean section at 36 weeks, Gabriel was small but healthy and is growing well. Older brothers Goy and Nhial are so delighted to have a baby brother. The Top family is grateful for the prayers of the brethren and all thank God for a safe delivery and healthy child. The family attends the Melbourne, Victoria, congregation in Australia.

Naomi Grace Ulmer was born to Mr. and Mrs. Andrew (Regina) Ulmer on September 24. She weighed nine pounds, six ounces, and measured 20.5 inches long. Big sister Rebekah and big brother Timothy are very excited to have a little sister! The Ulmers attend the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Adam Ajani of Edmonton, Alberta, and **Miss Breanne De Oliveira** of Chilliwack, British Columbia, are happy to announce their marriage in a ceremony officiated by Mr. Stewart Wachowicz on September 30. Family and friends enjoyed the delightful buffet reception which followed. Mr. and Mrs. Ajani attend in Edmonton.

On July 29, longtime members **Mr. and Mrs. Jim (Sue) Bennett** from North Wales, UK, celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary**. Mr. Bennett started reading *The Plain Truth* magazine in the 1960s. They were baptized together in 1978 and ordained deacon and deaconess in 2007. Over the years, they have served the Church diligently in many capacities, from planning socials for the Liverpool congregation in the 1980s to helping organize Feast sites in North Wales in the 2000s. Their marriage has been blessed with four children and four grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Hosea (Gay) Chaney celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on September 1. Mr. and Mrs. Chaney are longtime members of God’s Church, and besides setting an invaluable example of a successful and blessed marriage, they have served as deacon and deaconess in the Athens, Alabama, congregation for many years.

Mr. Jacob Frederick and **Miss Chloe Ciesielka** were united in marriage at a beautiful mountain location in Weaverville, North Carolina, on August 28. The ceremony was performed by the bride’s father, Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka. Family and friends from across the country witnessed the happy couple make their covenant with God and each other and celebrated the joyous occasion. Mr. and Mrs. Frederick attend the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Kris Harrison and **Ms. Virginia Schofield**, both of the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation in Canada, were

united in marriage during a morning ceremony performed by Mr. Stuart Wachowicz on August 28. Guests celebrated the happy event with a lunch in the Rolly View community hall.

After services on March 19, the Brisbane, Queensland, congregation honored the **50th wedding anniversary** of **Mr. and Mrs. Dan (Heather) Love** with a cake and the gift of a golden rose. The congregation appreciates their living example of enduring, selfless love.

Mr. and Mrs. Sydney (Susan) Nelson celebrated **50 years of marriage** on January 8. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson are deacon and deaconess in the Reno, Nevada, congregation. The happy occasion was celebrated at a nice restaurant with their children and grandchildren. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Nelson on 50 years of marriage!

Mr. Jeffrey Rosenthal and **Ms. Lorine Blouin** were joined together in marriage

on July 17 in Smithfield, Rhode Island, by Area Pastor Michael Aviles. Family and friends witnessed the making of this special covenant created by God. Mr. and Mrs. Rosenthal live in Massachusetts and attend the Pawtucket, Rhode Island, congregation. Congratulations to the happy couple!

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Darlene Carkins, 81, died on August 28 at her home. Mrs. Carkins was a longtime member of God's Church and attended the Joplin, Missouri, congregation. She and her husband Cecil were both baptized in 1983. She is survived by her husband of 63 years and three children, and will be greatly missed by her family, friends, and the brethren.

Mrs. Barbara Davis, 72, a member of the Jackson, Mississippi, congregation for 16 years, died on October 27. Mrs. Davis was married to her husband Robert for 42 years. She loved serving in the local congregation in any way she could and performing special music. She will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved her.

Mr. Ronney L. Downs, Jr., 65, died at his home on November 24, due to complications related to chronic lymphocytic leukemia. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Debra, as well as three adult children. Baptized in 1975, Mr. Downs was a longtime member of the Church and served as a deacon in the Chattanooga, Tennessee, congregation. He remained faithful until the end and will be greatly missed.

Mr. Robert John "Bob" Eccles, 73, died on July 5 after a short illness. Baptized in 1974, Mr. Eccles' longevity in the truth was greatly appreciated by the brethren in the Auckland congregation, and he was sought after for historical information about God's Church in New Zealand. A lifelong bachelor, he enjoyed quiet time. However, he served his fellow brethren in various ways, including as choir director for many years. He instilled into the choir members the importance of singing each note correctly and crisply. Mr. Eccles is survived by a sister in Australia and other extended family, as well as, of course, his Church family, who will miss him very much. His memorial service was conducted by Area Pastor Paul Kearns.

Mrs. Ann Edwards, 81, died on June 11 at her home. She attended the Hook, Hampshire, congregation in the UK before her health started to fail. Mrs. Edwards is survived by her daughter Maddie, also of the Hook congregation, who was her main caregiver and who very much appreciates the prayers and concern expressed by the brethren. Mrs. Edwards will be greatly missed.

Mr. Lyle Haga, 82, died peacefully on September 14. He had a full life, including top secret work for the government while in the military. Mr. Haga was baptized into God's Church in

1966 and remained faithful to the end. He enjoyed studying the Bible and was always excited to talk about what he had been reading. A longtime member of the Denver, Colorado, congregation, he served with audio and video recordings for the local brethren. He is greatly missed.

Mrs. Naomi Jean Juby died on October 23 at the age of **103**. She was born in 1919 and baptized into God's Church in 1981. She was part of the Kingston, Ontario, congregation in Canada. Mrs. Juby had five children, three of whom predeceased her, as well as twelve grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren, and twelve great-great-grandchildren. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

Mrs. Aline Kalsai, 70, a longtime member of the Orap congregation in Vanuatu, died on May 18. She is survived by four sons, a daughter, and twelve grandchildren. Her funeral service was conducted by elder Jerry Sam.

Mr. Garth Newman, 85, a deacon in the Mississauga, Ontario, congregation in Canada, died March 9 after a short illness. Born in Jamaica, Mr. Newman immigrated to Canada with his parents and nine siblings when he was 14 years old. He became a mechanical engineer after starting off as a jet engine draftsman. Baptized in 1967, Mr. Newman was known for his thunderous laugh, joy for life, and his zeal for the Work of God. He loved to travel, design, fly gliders, play sports with his grandchildren, and tell exciting stories to captivate the audience. In his retirement years, he spent half his time in Toronto, Canada, and the other half in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his family and grandchildren. Mr. Newman is survived by his wife of 64 years, Una; his daughter, Dawn (Peter) Rothenbacher; three grandchildren; a brother; three sisters; and countless nieces and nephews. Mr. Winston Gosse conducted his funeral in Mississauga, Ontario.

Mr. Bill Olsen, 82, a deacon in God's Church, died on June 19 after a lengthy illness. He was born in San Jon, New Mexico. Mr. Olsen was baptized on February 7, 2004 and ordained a deacon on September 9, 2010. He is survived by his wife, Dorothy, of 60 years; a son, Wade (Stacy) Olsen of Amarillo, Texas; two daughters, Mandy Olsen of League City, Texas, and Melinda (Dusty) Jones of Amarillo, Texas; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Mr. Olsen attended and served in the Springfield, Missouri, congregation.

Mr. Frank Pouyatt, 96, died on September 10. Born in 1925 in Queens, New York, he enlisted in the Navy as a young man and served in the submarine service during World War II. Upon leaving the military, he spent most of his working years as an electrical engineer in the Indianapolis area. He was baptized into the body of Christ in 1983 and for the remainder of his life quietly and faithfully served God and His people. On May 20, 1998, he married his wife, Myrna, who remained faithfully by his side until his Christian race was finished. He will be remembered for his dedication to the truth, his big smile, and for being a true gentleman. He is survived by his wife, one son, and one grandson. Elder Michael Grovak gave a brief memorial service at the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation.

Mr. Todd Ries, 33, died on October 30. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, he was a graduate of Windsor High School and an alumnus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis (BA) and Missouri Western State University (Masters in Applied Science), and was a UX Researcher for Edward Jones Investments. He played tennis and soccer in high school and enjoyed traveling and visiting family and friends. Known for his loyal, kind, and thoughtful nature, as well as his wonderful sense of humor and quick wit, he had many friends. He enjoyed making others laugh. Mr. Ries was preceded in death by all four of his grandparents and one uncle, and is survived by his parents Kurt and Sheri Ries, brother Kyle (Angela) Ries, sister Kristin (Jeremy) Jimenez, and many other relatives. Mr. Ries is greatly missed by very many.

Mr. Lionel Robas, 86, died peacefully on June 13. Mr. Robas first came in contact with God's Church in 1966 in

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and he and his family moved to South Africa to be closer to a congregation. After the collapse of WCG, Mr. and Mrs. Robas moved to New Zealand to be closer to family and shortly afterward heard a telecast by Dr. Meredith. Though far from the congregation in Christchurch, Mr. Robas never lost his zeal or enthusiasm for the truth. His funeral service was conducted by Associate Pastor Tony Leman and was livestreamed to many across the country and the globe who could not join the family and friends who attended. Mr. Robas is survived by his wife Mary Ann, four children, many grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Betty Silsbee, 94, died on October 9. Baptized along with her husband in 1969, she was a longtime member of God's Church. She was predeceased by her husband in 2005. Mrs. Silsbee had a warm, infectious smile and was often the first to greet and welcome visitors to the congregation. The Pensacola, Florida, congregation will greatly miss her.

Mrs. Louisa Marie Torrance, 89, of Big Sandy, Texas, died on November 28. She was born in Wisconsin in 1933. She was married and widowed twice, first to Mr. Harold Ferguson for 34 years, and then to Dr. Lynn Torrance for 11 years. Mrs. Torrance is survived by her three sons, Don, David, and Jeff; one daughter, Sherry; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, as well as her twin sister, Lois. She was preceded in death by several siblings and one son, Lorn. A longtime member, baptized in 1970, Mrs. Torrance was well loved and greatly respected and she will be deeply missed by her family and the brethren.

Finances: 2021 Review

The 2021 Audit was completed by our independent auditors, Cherry Bekaert CPAs, and once again they issued an unqualified opinion—that's good—to the Church: "In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Church as of December 31, 2021 and 2020, 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."

We have an Audit every year to provide financial accountability and transparency. Complete audited statements from 2015 to 2021 can be found on LCG.org/about-us at the bottom of the page.

In 2021, the Church spent \$10,834,573 on preaching the Gospel (45.4 percent), \$11,251,266 on feeding the flock (47.2 percent), and \$1,759,666 on administration (7.4 percent). The

Church is in a strong cash position for 2022 and subsequent years.

Although overall income was down 17.2 percent due to timing of estate and TV royalty income, regular contribution income, which is the metric we use for planning, ended up 8.63 percent over 2020.

Thank you once again for the support of the Work through your prayers and financial support. As we race toward the ending of this present age, we must always be about our Father's business.

—D. Jerry Ruddlesden

Electronic Service Requested

Take Time to Praise God

Recently, driving back from Sabbath services, my daughter and I were struck by the beautiful sunset. A spectacular orange glow was reflecting off the clouds as the sun slipped below the horizon, which was masterfully painted with strokes of blue, purple, pink, and gray. My daughter, curious, asked why God wanted to give us such pretty sunsets, and I said, “He does it because He loves us and He wants us to be happy when we see His creation.” As I answered, I could not help but meditate in praise to God, thanking Him for His love in being attentive to such detail every day for our enjoyment.

But how often do we take time to praise God?

King David was a man in tune with this kind of praise. All through the Psalms, his songs praise a loving Creator who has a great connection with His children. Here’s just one example: “I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High” (Psalm 9:1–2). David knew God was worthy of praise—even the creation itself, God’s handiwork, praises His wonderful glory (Psalm 19:1). God’s creation is an opportunity for us to be awestruck by His love toward us. It shows us how great He truly is and how small we really are.

When was the last time we took time to give God a “round of applause” for His creation, or were completely awestruck by His handiwork? Do we praise God when we witness the orchestrated dance of lightning across the clouds during a storm, or when we stand on the edge of a seashore or on top of a mountain, or when we marvel at the starry magnitude of the night sky? Parents, did we praise

God and find great joy when our children were born? Do we praise Him as we watch them grow? These all help us praise our great and loving Creator.

I find it more difficult, as time presses on, to do this consistently. We live in an age of fast-paced distractions, whether the trials of life, long hours at work, technology, or social networking—either in person or on media. Satan seeks to consume our time, to get even our good priorities out of balance, and to keep us busy and distracted from giving our God due praise. This is a challenge, yet it is a wonderful opportunity for lasting pleasure if we consciously seek time to engage with our Creator and develop a relationship with Him.

Maybe take a lunch break outside for a short picnic. If you live in a city, you might plan to get away from the city for a time to reconnect with God’s handiwork. You can plan to go camping or take a hike, to stand on a mountaintop or a seashore, to sit outside under the stars and get lost in the vast expanse of space, or to just watch some fireflies. If you have children, try to spend time with them in God’s creation and see the natural world through their eyes for a while. Their love of life is contagious and exciting!

These are times when we can be inspired to express great admiration for our Creator. When we see the joy of a child, a whale jumping out of the water, a perfectly painted double rainbow across the sky, a massive and beautifully crafted tree, a majestic mountain, or a beautiful firefly, let us also praise our loving Creator for His job well done. “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:14).

Take time to praise God!

—Justin D. Ridgeway