

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Take Care of the Small Stuff

Dear Brethren,

We recognize that children are sometimes at odds with their parents, to a great degree because there are considerable differences in their experience. A parent naturally knows more than a child, just as a longtime Church member should have a greater perspective of God's Way and the Church—where it has been, how our adversary is working against us, and how small trends grow into big ones.

I often think of my father, a first sergeant in the Air Force, who was responsible for monitoring the morale and readiness of a squadron of 500 men and their families. The overall well-being of the men was his responsibility. He acted as liaison between them and the squadron commander, and he disciplined them when necessary. In many ways, his job was similar to that of a minister, but there were obvious differences. Being a worker for one's joy (2 Corinthians 1:24) is quite different from military discipline.

I give this background to point out a principle my father taught me: "Take care of the small stuff and you don't have to sweat the big stuff." Dr. Kermit Nelson, director of the Summer Education Programs in the Worldwide Church of God, understood this. He implemented policies that guided campers away from trouble. He knew that practical jokes easily escalate, so he instructed counselors to nip such behavior in the bud immediately, rather than wait until it got out of hand. He took care of the "small stuff."

The Bible is not silent on this subject. Solomon wrote, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). He also counseled, "The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a

quarrel starts" (Proverbs 17:14). Yes, it is easier to stop a problem when it is small than to stop it when it has grown large.

I have seen this principle at work in child-rearing when parents think they know more than the One who created us. Young parents desire to do the best they can for their children, so they often look for advice outside of the Bible in programs that sound good. These programs often counsel against any kind of physical punishment and instead advise reasoning with even a very young child. Of course, those of us who are older have seen the results of that approach.

We often hear that we should "follow the money," and this also applies to child-rearing advice. Tapes, books, seminars, and catchy-sounding phrases such as "love and logic" make big money for those promoting them. However, the biblical message from the beginning is that there is a tree of knowledge that involves good *and* evil. These child-rearing programs have some good—otherwise, they wouldn't sell—but they are not based on the truths found in Scripture.

So, when programs such as these fly in the face of the word of God, we must ask: *Do I really believe the Bible is inspired by God? Do I believe it is well-meaning but out of date? If it is wrong about child-rearing, what else is it wrong about? Can I pick and choose what to accept in its pages?* These questions need serious consideration.

God tells us, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). A better translation for *rod* might be *switch*. While the purpose of this verse is not to say that spanking with a rod or switch is *required*, it does tell us that spanking in some form or fashion is a legitimate and helpful tool for disciplining young children. And some of my friends have told me that being told

Volume 27, No. 1



Inside This Issue...

The Council of Elders' Latest Meeting... p. 3
Where Will You Be Next Feast?... p. 6
Feast of Tabernacles 2024... p. 10
HQ Staff Highlight... p. 16

Teaching English in Thailand... p. 18
Kings and Priests—Really!... p. 20
Local Church News... p. 22
The Most Important Job in the World... p. 24

to go out to a tree and spend time finding a good switch that would be used to punish them was very instructive!

God's word advises us to stop a problem while it is still small. "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Proverbs 13:24). Do you believe that? Can physical discipline be administered in love? Do you believe the Bible when it tells us about the chastening inherent in God's love? "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:5-6). Discipline should be motivated by love, not anger. Too often, parents will try ideas that sound good, only to find that in the end they do not work—then finally, out of frustration, some parents will go overboard, spanking in anger.

In our modern world, which clearly does not have a good record of child-rearing, any form of physical discipline is frowned upon—and in some places is illegal, though many jurisdictions allow for spanking on the buttocks with the hand (and even many "experts" agree with this practice). Going against lawful authority can result in a child being removed from the home, which is the worst of all possible outcomes unless there is real abuse going on. Even if such discipline is legal, wisdom dictates that disciplinary action should be carried out in private—and no kind of discipline should ever be excessive or given in uncontrolled anger. And actions that cause real or permanent harm, such as hitting with a fist or drawing blood, are *never* acceptable!

The Biblical Balance

I remember a single mother whose four-year-old was totally out of control. My wife and I were visiting them one day when she volunteered, "I know that this is wrong, but I hate my son." She was frustrated and honest. Reasoning with her child did no good.

While we were there, he was acting up as usual, and I explained to this mother that her son had no incentive to listen to her. She needed to tell him once, then spank him for disobedience if he failed to respond. She followed the advice immediately, but gave him only a gentle "spanking" that

did little but anger him. I then explained that the spanking needed to be enough to provide a little pain on his bottom—not harm, but definitely an unwanted experience. So, she again followed the advice. This time, he let out *not* an angry cry, but a hurt one—and he soon came over to hug her.

This was one of those occasions when someone truly listened and put counsel into practice. Within a few weeks, this four-year-old was transformed into a delight to be around. But if parents do not gain control of a four-year-old, what will they do when he is 14 and his logic tells him that drugs are a good idea? It is important to instill respect for parental guidance early, while any problems are still small.

At the other extreme, some in the past have thought that spanking is all that is needed to raise good children. That is a mistake—spanking is only *one* of the tools needed. Nevertheless, it is an important tool that is too often rejected today. Long before they spank, parents must be spending time with their children. They must teach their children about God as part of everyday family activities. Fathers are warned not to demand so much that their children become discouraged, but to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4; see also Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 78:2-8).

Isaiah wrote, "As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths" (3:12). In my experience, it is often—though not always—the wife who prevents her husband from disciplining their child. When women rule the house, children often become oppressors at home and in society. Fathers must never use harsh discipline, but they *must* take the lead—for the sake of the family.

What it comes down to is whether we see the Bible as the word of God or not. If we do, we will stop a child's rebellion while he is small rather than waiting to try to deal with rebellion when it is far more difficult to do so. If we are diligent to "take care of the small stuff," we will be preparing ourselves and our families for the "big stuff"—the glorious rewards that God has in store for us at the resurrection.



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The Council of Elders' Latest Meeting

Many Church members want to know what the Living Church of God Council of Elders discusses when we convene in person each May and November. In this Editorial I'll share some key points from our November 2024 meeting.

Inevitably, some of what we cover is of interest to only a small subset of members. For instance, at our latest meeting we discussed whether ministers of the Church can perform weddings for family members who are not members of the Church.

The short answer to that question is *no*. As ministers, we must not officiate at weddings of those who are not adherents of the Living Church of God. Why? Because doing so could be seen as setting a legal precedent; if we conducted weddings for people outside of our fellowship, we could jeopardize our stance against officiating at weddings for outsiders in general, including same-sex couples. So, we only perform weddings for those who are adherents—who agree with the Bible as understood by the Church.

Why do we use the term *adherent* rather than *member*? Because not all weddings involve baptized members. Sometimes they involve young people who grew up in the Church, observe the Sabbath and Holy Days, keep the laws of clean and unclean meats, and fully agree with the teachings of the Church as they were brought up to believe, but are not ready to make the commitment to be baptized. They are *adherents*—faithful members of the congregation, but not yet baptized members. Newer attendees may also fall into this category.

“Keeping the Feast at Home”

We also discussed topics that involve a larger segment of the Church. One such discussion involves how we talk about keeping the Feast. We are aware of how language is manipulated to alter how we think on a subject as political correctness is employed to change culture and morality. This is not to say that there is always a sinister motive behind every change in language, but political correctness has made everyone more sensitive about making anyone feel badly about himself, and this may even affect the Church in the way we express ourselves about keeping the Feast. The expression “keep the Feast at home” has crept into our vocabulary in recent decades for a variety of reasons. There was no evil intent

in this expression—but is it biblical, and what are the downsides to using it?

Only in recent decades have we used this expression. Historically, we did not speak of keeping the Feast at home—so how has it become a part of our vernacular? The answer is simple. We have many faithful members who struggle with health issues, often related to age. Out of compassion and a desire to include these members, we have done what was not possible to do until fairly recently—connect them to services through livestreaming. In cases where shut-ins do not have livestreaming available, they are sent DVDs, CDs, or tapes with prerecorded messages that they can play each day during the Feast.

This is a service that we want to give to true shut-ins. We want them to know that they are sincerely loved and not forgotten, and we want to enable them, too, to be edified by the messages given at the Feasts. We desire that they gain as much as possible during the Feasts—but does this mean they are “keeping the Feast at home”?

The point is that this statement carries with it a mindset that distorts what the Feast is about. No one wants to be seen as lacking compassion for those who are physically unable to go up to a place where God has placed His name. I realize that I might be in that position myself someday. But are we unwittingly distorting what God commanded? Let's review that command. “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain.... And you shall *eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide*, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 14:22–23). Note also, the admonition regarding the three pilgrimage seasons each year. “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles” (Deuteronomy 16:16).

It is significant that God did not specify *where* He would place His name—only that He would do so. We know that Jerusalem will be the main location of the Feast during the Millennium, where representatives of all nations will be commanded to appear. However, from a logistical perspective, it is evident that billions of people will not be able to meet in one location. Just as today

in the Church, there will be many locations in all countries where the Feast will be kept.

So, where and how does God place His name? Is it left up to each individual to decide the answer to this question? Nowhere does Scripture indicate that the Feast can be kept just anywhere. I explained this in my September–October 2023 *Living Church News* article titled “How Does God Place His Name?”

In His word, God gives general instructions for the individual. For example, He commands, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8), but He gives only a few instructions on how to do so (vv. 9–11; Isaiah 58:13–14). The ministry should give guidance, but individuals have to make decisions based on the scriptures given and on that ministerial guidance (1 Corinthians 11:1).

However, when it comes to community decisions about Sabbath observance, this is not—and from a practical sense cannot be—left up to individuals. Decisions must be made as to where and when services are held. Everyone cannot decide for himself, and the Bible nowhere indicates that this should be left up to the congregation to debate and vote on.

The Bible is explicit in directing us to go to a location of His choosing. It is also evident from the Bible that He delegates those decisions to His ministry:

Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:18–20; see also 16:19).

Some people misapply verse 20 and think that as long as any two or three people agree on a matter, Christ is in the midst of them. However, they understand neither the context nor what it means to be gathered together “in My name.” “In Christ’s name” means with His authority, and the entire Bible teaches us that God works through His appointed leaders. Nowhere does it teach that decisions involving the Church body as a whole are to be determined by some manner of vote by the membership.

In our Council discussions, it was clear that the overwhelming majority of those who stay home would rather be at the Feast. Most people stay home only out of necessity. We have always understood that the direction for “all your males to appear before Me” allows for pregnant women who are close to giving birth to stay home, and we have likewise understood that women who have just given birth may need to stay home. We have also understood that some members, due to age and infirmity, should not attend. This was espe-

cially relevant when Feastgoers had to travel on foot for many miles. God does not expect us to do what we cannot do.

Notice in all of this how we rightly speak of *attending* the Feast. The injunction for “all your males to appear” does not mean that only males are commanded to attend, with women and children merely given the option. God intends us to take our wives and children—and anyone else who is a part of our household—that we may *all* rejoice before God. “And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, *you and your household*” (Deuteronomy 14:26).

Observing the Feast means more than hearing messages about its meaning. It involves saving our second tithe, rejoicing with others, and sharing our blessings:

Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and *send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared*; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, ‘Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people went their way to eat and drink, *to send portions and rejoice greatly*, because they understood the words that were declared to them” (Nehemiah 8:10–12).

Clearly, “keeping the Feast at home” is *not* what God had in mind. The natural question then arose regarding COVID-related restrictions that affected some parts of our world more than others. Were members in those cases not “keeping the Feast” if they were tuning in online? What is the difference between that and those who choose not to attend in person when there are no travel restrictions?

This brings us back to the question of how God chooses to place His name. As explained earlier in this article, the Bible designates God’s ministry as the decision-makers for this matter. During a very short time in 2020 and 2021, due to what was going on with COVID-19, the ministry decided that it was okay to observe the Feast online in locations that were “locked down”—that is where God placed His name during that unusual time. One can debate whether the various government restrictions were justified. However, we are a law-abiding people who recognize that, just as God has placed His ministry in the Church to keep unity and order, God has also placed carnal individuals in positions of authority, and we are to respect their offices for the good of all (Romans 13:1–5).

So why don’t we simply say that the ministry allows shut-ins to “keep the Feast at home”? There are two reasons. First, when we read the commandment to keep the Feast, it clearly means for us to go out of our homes and to temporary dwellings. Even when the Feast is held in the city or location where

one normally resides, members still move into temporary dwellings, some even exchanging homes with other members.

The second reason is that the expression “keep the Feast at home” *normalizes* the idea that it can be kept at home. We do have individuals who are not shut-ins who see this as an option, and things that start small have a way of growing. Perhaps it is because they don’t want to be burdened by travel and the inconvenience of leaving their own home. Perhaps it is because they have not faithfully saved their second tithe. Some are new and have not had time to save enough—others choose to disobey God’s command, seeing it as optional, and have not faithfully prepared. If you are in that category, I suggest going to *LCG.org* and reviewing Mr. Dexter Wakefield’s November–December 2017 article, “God’s Tithes Are Holy.”

Brethren, we must be faithful in observing the Feast—and do so in the manner instructed. This does not mean that legitimate health-related issues make us second-class citizens in the Body of Christ. But to use the expression “keeping the Feast at home” distorts God’s original intent for the Feast and gives the impression that able-bodied people have the option to remain at home. We simply cannot as individuals decide for ourselves where it is acceptable to keep the Feast. This is a function of God’s ordained ministry.

The Phone-Based Generation

Another topic discussed by the Council involved the influence of modern culture. Many voices are raising the warning about the use of smartphones—especially for children. The Church has given warnings over the last decade—in writing, in sermons, and on telecasts—about the dangers of online activity, but it appears that many still do not see the dangers that social media and the Internet pose.

At the same time, we cannot insulate ourselves from it all. In fact, the Church uses social media and the Internet to preach the Gospel and warn this world of what is coming. Christ prayed to His Father on the night He was betrayed, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:15–16).

Computers and smartphones are not of themselves evil, but there is much evil available on them. In order to sell advertising, very intelligent men have designed these electronic platforms to be addictive and consume as much of our time as they can. Furthermore, our devices are sending us down “rabbit holes” politically, culturally, and conspiratorially. They even change how the brain functions, shortening our attention span.

These are not ideas that only we in the Church have. More people, including some who helped start these platforms, are now publicly raising serious red flags. We will be saying more on this subject in sermons and articles, but I sincerely hope that each of us will look in the mirror and be

honest with ourselves about how these electronic platforms are affecting us. It would also do us well to educate ourselves on *how* these systems work.


Trends and Admonitions

In my final comments at our meetings, I summarized some trends and discussions that came up during the previous two-and-a-half days. There is much for which the Church can give thanks. We are seeing more individuals with a Worldwide Church of God background returning to be with us. Several Council members commented on how people who left the Truth decades ago are coming back. We also saw in 2024 a spike in the number of people attending their first Feast with the Living Church of God. *Tomorrow’s World* Presentations are also showing good fruit, though it takes some people a year or more after showing serious interest to make the move to change their lives. The men also reported that members are very much supportive of the direction the Church is going.

While we are encouraged by the growth, I reminded the men that we must not be discouraged by the fact that our overall impact in this world is still small—and in this regard I recounted Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23), His warning in Luke 14:16–24, and the examples He gave in Luke 9:57–62 to show that most people will not accept what we have to say. I also reminded them of Ezekiel 33:30–33, which tells us of people who will give lip service but not obey God. Ezekiel knew that he was dealing with a hardheaded, stiff-necked people (Ezekiel 3). His prophecies to the house of Israel are for our time, so we should not expect anything else.

I also reminded the men that we are living in the age of Laodicea. Compromise is clearly what is driving many of the problems we now face in the ministry. It is not that we in the Living Church of God must necessarily be Laodicean in attitude, but some Church members are indeed blind to the influences of society and culture around them. Rather than seek truth from those God is using to give guidance, some are influenced by celebrities and sports figures in dress and grooming, and by social media influencers and the world regarding the roles of men and women.

In closing, I admonished Council members to encourage ministers and members to evaluate *why* they do things—*why* they dress and groom the way they do, *why* and *how* they spend time on social media. We must also stay focused on what God has called us to do. He has not called everyone in today’s world, so we must *know why He has called us*. We must understand that, because major problems start small, we must be wary of emerging cultural and societal trends, knowing who is behind the course of this world (Ephesians 2:2). Overall, despite some sobering topics, the meeting was positive and productive, and you will be hearing more as we go forward. (LN)



Where Will You Be Next Feast?

By **Wallace G. Smith**

If you've already looked on the calendar, you know that on October 6, 2025, we'll be gathering again for the Opening Night service at the Feast of Tabernacles. Like me, you may have thought about where you might be then. But, really, it's impossible for any of us to know for sure where we will physically be then—a lot can happen in a year, much of which is outside our control.

But far more importantly, where we will be *spiritually* on October 6, 2025, is something you and I have a *great* deal of control over. So, what can we do to determine what our spiritual state will be when the next Feast of Tabernacles begins? We're living in a remarkably dangerous time, but it is especially dangerous *spiritually*. This is a time to take our walk with God with the utmost seriousness. It's not a time for any of us to be satisfied with spending October 6, 2025, in the same spiritual place we are right now. Instead, this is the time to obey the command to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ—because our lives truly do depend on it.

Let's discuss four principles that, if we apply them over the course of the year, will help us to be in a better spiritual place at this year's Feast than we were at last year's.

Act Now

Ancient Israel had rainy seasons, and one of them, mentioned several times in the Bible, is called the “former rain.” It follows on the heels of the Feast, and it is needed to soften the soil and prepare it for work. God designed the rain after the Feast to make it easier to plow the ground and to plant seed. And it is *vital* to do so.

During the Feast, the soil of our hearts should have been softened—we were corrected, encouraged, and edified. If we want to be in a better place spiritually for 2025's Feast of Tabernacles, we must not wait to take advantage of what God is doing with the soil of our hearts. A good friend of mine used to talk about what he called the three laws of sowing and reaping: You reap *what* you sow, you reap *more than* you sow, and you reap *after* you sow. Our spiritual harvest next Feast is going to depend on what we're planting *right now*.

Scripture warns us, “The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession” (Proverbs 12:27). When a hunter kills an animal, he has a window of time in which to field dress the carcass before it spoils or goes bad in other ways—or even other carnivores or scavengers take it away. The lazy man doesn't quickly work with what he has gained, but the diligent man does so because he recognizes that he only has a small window of time to use and preserve it. That diligence is precious.

We have gone to the Feast, and we have *gained* from what we've taken. Now is the time to process it, to meditate on it, to put it into practice in our lives, to use it to reflect on our lives and shine a light so we can see new things. If we've gone to the Feast, learned about the Millennium, learned more about God's way, and have not been changed by that knowledge, the Feast has been wasted on us. The Feast is there to make a *difference* in us, and the diligent do not waste time.

Proverbs 6:9–11 says, “How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? *A little* sleep, *a little* slumber, *a little* folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.” When armed men show up, you are at their mercy—and unless you act when you should, you will be at the mercy of your needs. The things you *want* to do will be set aside to make room for those things that *must* be done to handle the emergency.

When our first son was born, I fantasized that I would turn him into one of those “wonder babies” who was beginning to read at age three. I worked out a detailed, scheduled plan, and I was excited and passionate about it. But about eight months later, I had done absolutely nothing with it.

Now, maybe God used my procrastination to serve my son, because life isn't always great for super-babies, and all my sons have grown into very capable adults, despite not learning to read before they could walk! Regardless, my failed plan did shock me a bit—how did those eight months go by so quickly? Because every day I made the same decision: to put the plan off for *just one day*. Then, after enough days had passed, it just stopped coming to mind.

That happens far more easily than we might think. Have we ever attended a Passover realizing that, in many ways, we

were the same people we were a year ago—not because we made a decision not to grow for a year, but because we made 365 decisions not to grow for a day? Our relationship with God and our dedication to the Kingdom that He is bringing are far too important to ever neglect. We need to act now.

Take Stock of Yourself

It's very easy to get used to hearing "Examine yourself," because it's a phrase we've heard over and over—and familiarity, while it doesn't always breed contempt, can breed a certain apathy. But we *need* to examine ourselves—that is, look at our own lives in detail and take stock. When the ground has been softened by the former rain, the farmer doesn't just run out into the fields with whatever seed he has and throw it around. He has considered ahead of time, *Is my plow sharp? Do I need to hire more farmhands? Do I have enough seed?* He has taken stock to make sure his effort is well spent. We need to do the same.

Early in his reign, King David was clearly walking with God, and "the LORD preserved David wherever he went. So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people" (2 Samuel 8:14–15). God

Early in his reign, King David was clearly walking with God. God gave him success after success. But less than a decade later, he committed adultery with the wife of one of his most faithful men and orchestrated her husband's murder. **Clearly, David was not where he needed to be spiritually at that time. It's hard to imagine that he was examining himself in the way that he should have been.**

gave him success after success. But less than a decade later, he committed adultery with the wife of one of his most faithful men and orchestrated her husband's murder (2 Samuel 11). Clearly, David was not where he needed to be spiritually at that time. It's hard to imagine that he was examining himself in the way that he should have been.

When I read about that, I have to ask: Can I predict where I'm going to be five years from now, spiritually? Am I continuing to examine myself? How seriously am I taking my spiritual change?

We have an obligation to examine ourselves, as the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." And he took his own medicine, as we see in what he wrote later:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Romans 7:14–23).

Paul recognized that he was a human being who *struggled* with things—and it frustrated him. It can be frustrating to examine ourselves. If we do it right, we see things we don't

like. If you examine yourself and see nothing but things you like, that's not good—you may need to talk to some people who are frustrated with you and find out what you are overlooking. However, if you don't see *anything* you like, that's not good, either—you may need to talk to some people who like you and hear from them a little more. Feedback from others

can sometimes give us insight on ourselves that we wouldn't otherwise have.

Paul continues, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (v. 24). We recognize that there is a direct connection between sin and death, so recognizing sin within ourselves is frustrating and concerning. But there is a solution to that dilemma: "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25). Paul writes that, even when he finds himself frustrated by how he fails to measure up to God's standards, "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1–2).

If we yield to walk in the Spirit with Christ, we have a confidence before God that we would not have otherwise,

because we have the sacrifice and the aid of Jesus Christ. He picks us up and helps us to move forward. We can go *boldly* before the throne of grace—not with our tail between our legs, but with an eagerness to be in the presence of our Father, because Jesus Christ understands what we’re going through and helps us overcome.

But Paul also warns us that “if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his *own work*, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Galatians 6:3–4). It’s our *deeds* that tell God what we value—the sacrifices we’re willing to make. What is our actual pattern of prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation? What are our conversations with other people like?

Inherent in all of this is that we need to be willing to accept responsibility. There is an attractive inner monster that says, *Don’t worry—it’s not your fault*. It’s not that our upbringing and other people don’t affect us. They do. But we cannot control the actions of the people around us—and, in the end, we are always responsible for *ourselves and our choices*, because we have been blessed with freedom of will. God asks through the prophet Ezekiel, “What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel’” (Ezekiel 18:2–3).

Parents can definitely create an environment in which it becomes *hard* for their children to prosper and grow, just as parents can make it *easy* for that. But Scripture highlights that a son, regardless of what his father has done, will stand before God on his own two feet. Your relationship with God is *never* defined by other people. There are no coattails to the Kingdom, nor is it possible for anyone to bar your way.

Pray for Internal Change

I would encourage you to read Nehemiah 8–10, as well as Nehemiah 13. What we find in Nehemiah 8 is a people passionate after the fall Festivals. The people wanted to change, they wanted to grow, and they didn’t want to go into captivity again. They were *serious* about getting close to God. They got together, they signed papers, and they agreed: *We are going to follow God*.

Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding—these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the command-

ments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes: We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year’s produce and the exacting of every debt (Nehemiah 10:28–31).

Then Nehemiah left for a number of years. By the time he came back, everybody was doing all the things they had said they wouldn’t do. On the Sabbath, they were mashing grapes to make wine. They had married pagans and moved one into the temple. The Gentile merchants were pouring in on the Sabbath, because they knew that the Jews were treating it like a shopping day.

So, what did Nehemiah do? He grabbed the people by the hair and said, *What are you doing? This is why we went into captivity!* He then arranged for guards to serve on the Sabbath to prevent the Gentile merchants from entering, warning the merchants waiting to come in that he would “lay hands” on them—and *not* to ordain them (Nehemiah 13:21)!

But this was an externally enforced obedience that was not matched by any sort of inward change or transformation. Eventually, this led to the externalized religion of the Pharisees, filled with outward displays of “righteousness,” but spiritually out of alignment with what God desires. Jesus condemned their hypocrisy, saying they were “like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27).

Change that is only externally enforced is never permanent. External reinforcements will need to be increased again and again, because the human will to sin is great and it almost always finds a way. This doesn’t mean external safeguards can’t be helpful at times—for instance, when it comes to visual immorality on the Internet, there are filters you can use that are meant to provide a kind of hedge. But it’s important to recognize that no hedge is perfect. It can provide, at best, a delay—an opportunity for second thoughts. For real safety and real growth, we must work on our *character*, a change on the *inside*.

If we want permanent change—if we truly want to be in a better spiritual place next Feast—we must focus on *internal* change. Internal change is not something human beings are good at. Yet, as baptized Christians, God dwells in our hearts, ready to engage with us to change our innermost realm. It’s important to ask God to help us with that internal change.

Set a Goal and Make a Plan

There are helpful methods and unhelpful ones for setting goals. The *least* helpful method is to keep the goal solely in

your head, rather than writing it down. Transferring a goal from your mind to something you can read helps you to commit yourself to it. But if we really want a goal that contributes to our progress, one way is to make a “S.M.A.R.T.” goal.

The “S” in S.M.A.R.T. stands for *Specific*. Goals like “Grow close to God,” or even “Grow in faith,” are obvious, but they’re not specific enough to contribute to our success in tangible ways. If possible, it’s more helpful to focus on *actions* you can take than simply to focus on *results*. A goal like “Pray more” is more specific, and therefore more helpful—it *contributes* to the broader goals of growing closer to God and growing in faith. It helps us to focus on our specific actions because, in the end, our desire is to repent of things we need to turn away from and to change what needs to change.

“M” stands for *Measurable*. As opposed to a conceptual goal like “Pray more,” a measurable goal could be something like, “Pray every morning,” if you don’t already. When making a goal, try to think about how you will know, looking back, whether you accomplished it or not!

“A” stands for *Attainable* or *Achievable*. Let’s say you’re struggling with prayer, to such a degree that you let days go by without praying to God. In that case, is it realistic to say, “Starting tomorrow, I’m going to pray on my knees for 30 minutes every day”? Probably not. If you’re struggling to pray at all, it may be more helpful to set a goal of praying

By the time Nehemiah came back, everybody was doing all the things they had said they wouldn’t do. **They had married pagans and moved one into the temple. The Gentile merchants were pouring in on the Sabbath.**

for five minutes every day. While that certainly isn’t as far as you should go in your prayer life as you mature, it’s still *progress*—something that shows we are serious about making changes. We should *never* compromise with sin, but we do need to be realistic and understand that *steady progress* is more achievable and produces more fruit than impulsive and unsustained efforts.

The “R” stands for *Relevant*. If you’re a parent, you might be tempted to set a goal like, “I want my son to start making A’s and B’s in his classes.” But how do you turn that into action that *you* can take? One way is to revise your goal into something like, “I will talk to my son every day this week about his homework and see if he needs help.” That’s relevant—that’s within your sphere, something you can *do*.

Finally, the “T” in S.M.A.R.T. stands for *Time-bound*. This is the difference between “I will go walking more often” and “I will go walking *three times this week*.” When you set a time limit, you can check up on your progress periodically. In fact,

some people go a step further and aim for S.M.A.R.T.E.R. goals—ones they *Evaluate* periodically and *Revise* if they need to.

Ask yourself, *What is one change I can make in my practices, behaviors, or habits that would have a big impact on where I’m going to be next Feast, spiritually?* And don’t assume you know the answer too quickly—give it real thought and ask God to help you see it. Obviously, it’s not wrong to pick two or more changes—but try to keep your goals and your targets narrow enough to actually focus on them.

Suggestions for Growth

Passover will be here before we know it, and I encourage you to consider that coming time as the evaluation period of your goal or goals. We’re all going to be examining ourselves in the days leading up to Passover—now is the time to plant the seeds so that we can check for actual growth when that time comes, to see if the trials in our lives are producing fruit. God has given us a natural timeframe for this.

If you’re baptized, I would encourage you to specifically consider the fruit of God’s Spirit. If we have God’s Spirit, it is supposed to produce specific fruit in our lives. Read through Galatians 5 and consider involving the fruit of the Spirit in your goals.

If you are an adult and not baptized yet, remember that Christ desires you to be baptized. If you don’t know why you’re not baptized yet, it’s a perfect focus for self-examination. Can you write down reasons why you’re not yet baptized? Do you know what obstacles exist between you and baptism? Don’t feel inordinate pressure—but do keep in mind that there’s no third way of life: There was one

goat for the Eternal and there was one goat for the Azazel, but there was no third goat (Leviticus 16). Whether or not you are baptized *does* make a difference. If, as an adult, you have not yet been baptized, consider why that might be.

If you’re a teenager, baptism may not be in your *immediate* future—but, at the same time, your future baptism is still worth your meditation. Dr. Scott Winnail’s article “For Church Youth: How Do I Know When I Am Ready for Baptism?” (*Living Church News*, November-December 2006) is well worth reading and considering.

These days in which we reflect upon the Feast behind us are crucial ones for us. God willing, on October 6, 2025, we will be hearing Mr. Weston talking to *all* of us at that Opening Night service about the eight days that lie ahead. I don’t know where I’m going to be physically, and neither do you—but where each of us will be *spiritually* is what we must focus on now, with the help of God the Father and Jesus Christ, during the days that have already begun. (LW)



Feast of Tabernacles, 2024: A Haven of Peace in a World of Chaos

By **Rod McNair**

“I don’t know where the world will be by the time you see this,” Mr. Gerald Weston said in his Opening Night message for the Feast of Tabernacles, 2024. He highlighted the fact that “events are happening very rapidly, and major events are taking place.” He admonished us all to be faithful and vigilant—and not grow weary living in a world darkened by corruption, hatred, and violence.

With this encouragement, 9,760 Living Church of God brethren and guests observed the Feast in 2024, at 85 sites in 51 countries worldwide. Another 1,382 joined in via livestream or phone hookup, with another 311 shut-ins at home receiving CD or DVD sermons. From **Salima, Lake Malawi**, to **Langkawi, Malaysia**; from **Cavan, Ireland**, to **Imphal, Manipur, India**; and from **Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, U.S.**, to **Orap Village in Vanuatu**, it was a time of celebration and rejoicing. But it was also a time to take things seriously—a time to learn and grow and to take to heart the admonition in the title of Mr. Weston’s Opening Night message: “Know Why You Are Here.”

Indeed, many at the Feast in 2024 clearly took that urgent message to heart. Commenting on the 2024 Feast of Tabernacles in **Branson, Missouri**, Festival Coordinator Phil West noted, “Many realize the magnitude of the times we are living in. There was an overall sense of urgency.... The messages really were the highlight with many focusing on the uniqueness of our calling and the need to be more focused than ever on that calling.”

The Feast of Tabernacles foretells the time when God’s Kingdom will be established on earth—and many inspiring messages at the Feast reflected that. Sermons given at the Feast focused on God’s plan for humanity, as reflected by such titles as, “Seven Misconceptions About the Millennium,” “God’s Plan for the Nations,” “No More Fear,” “Peace in the Millennium,” and “The Last Great Day: The Future of Billions.” One member at the **Kimberley, British Columbia, Canada** site, when asked to relate something learned at the Feast, mentioned “the messages about the ways we may be serving in the Millennium.” A Feastgoer in **Leamington**,

Ontario, Canada, commented, “My knowledge of the overall plan of God grows stronger while listening to the messages and through meditation on such topics.”

The many Feast messages drove home the point that the world of the future will be a place of abundance and blessings, specifically *because* all humanity will be taught to observe God’s laws and seek His ways. The Feast offers such a precious opportunity to be reminded of the awesome future awaiting all mankind!

God’s Protection in a Violent World

That positive message—of celebration and rejoicing despite living in a world of hatred and violence—was especially meaningful for brethren in **Port-au-Prince, Haiti**, who experienced almost daily reminders of the corruption and anger that fills this age. As Coordinator Wil Pierre reported from communication with Haitian member Gary Blanc, “While we had gathered peacefully in Pétion-Ville, looking forward to the festivities... the city center of what’s left of the capital was going through a hellish day. Heavy automatic gunfire was heard in every corner, all day and all night yesterday.... It continued all day today, preventing many Church members from venturing out into the street to take part in the second-day service in our usual hall.”

Conditions in Haiti are a grim reminder of this evil, violent world—yet God put a hedge around His people as they were able to meet together later in the Feast, enabling them to rejoice despite the circumstances. As Mr. Blanc concluded, “Members were very satisfied with the way the [Feast] went, and very grateful to God for His protection in these troubled times.... It’s remarkable how we can be happy with so little and remain positive when everything seems to be falling apart around us. It was a truly exceptional experience.”

Earlier in 2024, brethren around the world were alarmed to hear that Living Church of God members in Myanmar had to flee their homes as a result of civil war. Others faced possible forced conscription into the army. During the Feast, we were delighted to hear this report from Coordinator Htoowah Laybeh, regarding our **Myanmar** brethren: “Despite all the challenges and troubles in neighboring Myanmar, 42 brethren who live in **Kalaymyo City** (Northern Myanmar), an-

other four who live in **Sa Khan Gyi village** (Delta area), and one from Rangoon, have been able to connect to the Thailand livestream daily.”

God also protected brethren from Colombia on their way home from the Feast. As Mr. Cristian Orrego reported:

While traveling back to their homes, the day after the Last Great Day, several members of the congregation of Sevilla, Colombia, had an accident in the small bus that they were traveling in. To avoid colliding with the garbage truck, they went down a small ravine and crashed into a tree. Seeing the magnitude of what happened, and the damage suffered by the bus... it was a miracle of God that no passenger suffered serious injuries.

Jesus Christ *is* coming soon. Until then, we can be grateful for the peace and protection God grants, knowing that His government will soon reign on the earth and last forever. As Mr. Richard Ames used to say, quoting Mr. Herbert Armstrong, “The greatest reality in the universe is that *God reigns supreme!*”

A Reminder of His Power

All over the earth, on almost every continent, God’s people celebrated a foretaste of His coming Millennial reign. This was accentuated by the Behind the Work film, *Behind the Work 2024: The Story of the Little Flock in the Spanish-Speaking World*—one of the highlights of the Feast for many Feastgoers. As one member said, “The Behind the Work video was excellent, informative, and truly showed the sincerity and love of God’s truth by the brethren in Central and South America.”

The Feast of Tabernacles 2024 was truly a joyful reminder of God’s power, His plan, and His purpose for all mankind. As deacon Adenir Teixeira reported from **Moscou Village, Brazil**, Feastgoers there were delighted to have “a big open space to walk around and play with children, and feel the wind in our face, birds singing, and sunshine every day.... God gave us a wonderful time to think about His plan that is taking us to a better time in the world that is coming soon.”

Why does the Church seek to find Feast sites away from the busy noise of city life? Because being in God’s unspoiled creation reminds us that He is in charge and that He is ruler over all. In 2024, brethren in **Hanmer Springs, New Zealand**, were treated to quiet, tranquil garden spaces as well as majestic snow-capped mountains. Feastgoers in **Busselton, Western Australia**, enjoyed “the fresh ocean air of the beach, with a spacious lawn area with trees outside.” Brethren from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador enjoyed the Feast in the beautiful colonial town of **Copán Ruinas, Hon-**

duras, surrounded by beautiful mountains, a river, and lush tropical vegetation with flowers everywhere.

Members and guests in **Parika, Guyana**, enjoyed “the natural setting surrounding the Feast site: trees, the fishpond, and a clear view of the stars in the night sky added to the ambiance at the Feast.” Feastgoers appreciated the charm of the Texas Hill Country in **Boerne, Texas, U.S.** Members and guests in **Montego Bay, Jamaica**, were treated to views of the sun setting on the horizon of the Caribbean, while other brethren enjoyed feasting in a village directly on the Mediterranean at **Port-Barcarès, France**, protected from storms and the flooding of nearby areas. Brethren in **Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, U.S.**, also appreciated the “most stable weather conditions that we have had in any of the four years that we have been in this area,” according to Coordinator Raul Colón.

These beautiful scenes at the Feast are not just for indulging in a relaxing and restful vacation. They serve a greater purpose. Many activities at the Feast are planned to take place outdoors, because being outside puts us in the midst of God’s creation—where we can feast our senses on God’s handiwork and be reminded of His preeminence. Coordinator Graeme Hemphill of the **Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea**, Feast site related that Feastgoers “visited the Nature Park in Port Moresby, a park centred entirely off flora and fauna unique to Papua New Guinea.” Coordinator Jose Arendain noted that the singles nature hike in **Mt. Moriah, Malaybalay, Philippines**, “built the spiritual and social connectedness among young adults in the Church.” In **Forster, New South Wales, Australia**, Coordinator Martin Montgomery said that there were “beautiful beaches with whales and dolphins often sighted.” **Canaan Valley, West Virginia, U.S.** Coordinator Lenny Bower noted, “The herds of white-tailed deer were so accustomed to people and unafraid that they... acted like their nature had already changed. It made it especially Millennial.”

In **Dubuque, Iowa, U.S.**, as Coordinator Mark Sandor described, “The weather was beautiful. The leaves were still in full fall color and the skies generally clear.... In particular, the Family Day picnic was blessed with perfect weather.” In **Glenelg, South Australia**, as Assistant Coordinator Warren Burnett reported, “We received a guided tour of Adelaide Botanic Garden’s ‘Garden of Health,’ which highlighted plants from around the world known for their benefits in health and well-being.” Coordinator Htoowah Laybeh noted regarding the **Khaem Son, Thailand**, Feast site, “This year, we gathered in the picturesque Khaem Son (Camp Sone), Khao Kho District—often referred to as the Switzerland of Thailand.... The site provided the blessings of the cool weather and the scenic mountainous surroundings, which are adding a unique charm to our Feast of Tabernacles.” And in **Quimbaya, Colombia**, as Mr. Armando Orrego reported, “The Feast was

held at a hotel located in the heart of the coffee-growing region in Colombia. The weather during the Feast was ideal—most days were sunny, and some were cloudy with pleasant rains at night and in the early mornings.”

In short, the 2024 Feast of Tabernacles provided a special opportunity to be surrounded by God’s creation, which had a profound impact on us as we worshipped Him together.

Doing Our Part

While God grants us protection, He also expects us to be watchful and vigilant—to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). He expects us to be prudent (Proverbs 22:3) and to watch out for one another (Philippians 2:4). If we are parents, that obviously includes being responsible for our children. It means we monitor our children, not letting them engage in disruptive activity. Children running and weaving around elderly brethren during fellowship can cause a fall and a serious injury.

Truly, everyone plays a part in keeping each other safe. One Feastgoer in **Rockport-Fulton, Texas, U.S.**, who had trouble walking, was particularly grateful on Opening Night when “a lady offered her walker so I could get to my seat without falling. Then another one of the brethren returned her walker to her. Very loving, kind brethren.” Each site coordinator also reviewed safety and security procedures with ushering, greeting, and parking crews to keep brethren safe. In **Arroyo Grande, California, U.S.**, Coordinator Chet Carpenter instituted a “car to seat” program, echoing a similar system put in place in 2023 in **New Bern, North Carolina, U.S.**, by then-Coordinator Wyatt Ciesielka. This system assigns parking attendants, greeters, and ushers to assist those who need extra help from the parking lot all the way to their seat in the meeting room.

Assistant Coordinator Donald Stevens continued the “car to seat” program in New Bern in 2024 as well, and also recruited young people to help assist brethren with mobility issues as they were going through the lines at buffet luncheons. Similarly, one Feastgoer in **Stillbaai, South Africa**, noted, “What I enjoyed the most was the little children standing ready to help with carrying our bags and briefcases into the hall every day.” In **San Miguel de Allende, Mexico**, Mr. Cristian Orrego also established a program to help and monitor people with disabilities, the elderly, and other vulnerable Feastgoers.

In **St. George, Utah, U.S.**, Coordinator Stephen Elliott had special name tags produced for Feastgoers and asked brethren to wear them each day. That way, greeters could easily distinguish Feastgoers from others, enhancing a sense of security for all attendees. Brethren who forgot name tags on any given day were given temporary stick-on tags.

Staying safe requires everyone’s vigilance, and brethren were reminded of this by a special Festival Office brochure

created and distributed for 2024, entitled “Staying Safe at the Feast of Tabernacles.” There are things we can be aware of to keep one another safe in cases of emergency—but, most of all, we depend on God daily for our protection. And it was no different at this year’s Feast. As David wrote, “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped” (Psalm 28:7).

When We Are Sick

Some brethren were not able to attend the Feast this year because of physical ailments. For them, memories of the 2024 Feast of Tabernacles may be from their living room or a hospital bed. Nevertheless, being able to connect to a live service or watch a recorded sermon from Headquarters gave them courage and hope. As one member wrote, “Although I didn’t get to attend, I was very inspired by the sermons. They are helpful to me, as I love to understand the word of God. I felt like I was there.”

Of course, the live streaming doesn’t happen by itself! The sound crews served extra hard, often arriving early and staying late—not only to provide audio-visual services in the hall itself, but also to project the services through phone lines and online streaming. We all are most grateful for their diligent service.

Some Feast sites prepared cards for shut-ins, available for all brethren to sign. One member who could not attend was encouraged to see the service and sacrifice of other brethren in the form of “cards and gifts I received as I couldn’t attend in person.” A Feastgoer in **Great Malvern, United Kingdom**, noted that it was inspiring to see the example of “the lady who hand-made cards for those who weren’t able to attend, and who herself was not present.” We thank everyone who made or prepared the cards, as well as those who took the time to sign them! It’s often hard to appreciate the value of just being at the Feast—until we ourselves are homebound. Cards or phone calls go a long way. As one member in **Gulf Shores, Alabama, U.S.**, noted, “I’m always inspired by those that take the time to sign the cards for brethren that couldn’t make it. It may be us one day.”

By and large, brethren complied with the admonition to stay home if we are sick. Many Feast sites saw virtually no illnesses at all. Others who got sick while attending the Feast correctly stayed back from services and asked for anointing. As one Feastgoer in **Florence, Oregon**, said, “I asked for anointing at the beginning of the Feast. [The anointing elder and his wife] came over to our residence within the hour. It encouraged both my wife and me!”

From **Great Malvern, United Kingdom**, coordinator Hugh Stewart commented on several anointings and healings at the Feast: “There were three... healings where members suffering with pain and one with a neurological condition

were healed overnight and came back the next day rejoicing. One who was in a minor car accident and suffering a headache attested that her headache stopped immediately after she was anointed.” Coordinator Brent Mitchell, of the **Tannersville, Pennsylvania, U.S.**, site, received an anointed cloth request for the husband of a member on the phone hookup: “I sent an anointing cloth, asked the brethren for their prayers, and the next day received a message saying God intervened and healed him in this moment of pain and suffering.”

One little girl had to have an open-heart surgery while attending the Feast in **Branson, Missouri, U.S.**, according to Coordinator Phil West. “Everyone rallied around this little girl, and thankfully the surgery was a huge success and she has since been able to return home from the hospital.”

A few Feast sites experienced a great deal of sickness. In some cases, it may have been because some sick brethren didn’t heed the warning to stay away from services. Especially in close quarters, a few brethren with a virus can infect many others very quickly. It’s vitally important that we heed warnings to stay home when we are sick. Our actions can have profound consequences on our fellow brethren.

One Feastgoer from **Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan, Canada**, noted, reinforcing the Church’s advice every year before the Feast begins, “As I learned the hard way, it is essential to prepare myself before coming to the Feast, especially concerning my physical health, in order to avoid getting sick during the event. Preparation is vital because it allows us to enjoy the Feast and take full advantage of the opportunity to learn and serve throughout the full eight days.” Good advice!

Unexpected Challenges

Despite God’s protection, He does allow His people to face some challenges so we can learn and grow from those experiences—and the 2024 Feast of Tabernacles reinforced this truth. Within a period of about two weeks, the southeast United States was hit by Hurricane Helene on September 24 and Hurricane Milton on October 9. While devastation was widespread, and many brethren suffered downed trees and loss of power, we received no reports of significant damage to homes or any injuries brethren sustained during the storms.

Both storms impacted the Church’s Feast site in **Palmetto, Florida, U.S.** Just about a week before the Feast was to begin, the Palmetto site had to be canceled. But God protected His people and provided for them in unusual ways. Coordinator Ryan Dawson, in response to the impending storm, began looking for other options a couple of weeks before the Feast. Within a week—a remarkable period of time in which to find an entirely new Feast site—an alternative was selected, negotiations were made, and a contract was signed. The site was **Fernandina Beach, Florida, U.S.**

Mr. Dawson noted that the staff of the new hotel went out of their way to provide for the Church’s and the brethren’s needs, knowing the vulnerable situation the Church and Feastgoers were in. Here is Mr. Dawson’s summary of the whole experience:

After Hurricane Milton hit, God opened door after door to direct us to Fernandina Beach. The hotel in Fernandina Beach provided several benefits to us this year at the Feast. The hotel offered 60 courtesy block rooms, only charged us for the meeting space for a few of the days we were there, provided special room rates for our members... included a smaller board room each day at no charge and without us even asking, and waived the daily parking fee (which I would estimate saved the brethren \$14,000 total). The hotel staff were outstanding and accommodating at every step.

And Mr. Dawson observed that the last-minute switch to Fernandina Beach had a marked effect on the perspective and attitude of many Feastgoers:

Just about everyone’s perspective at Fernandina this year was adjusted due to the circumstances—adjusted in the best way, to focus on why we keep the Feast. The shared experience highlighted the lesson that the Feast is not about the activities (even though they are fun) or the place (even though Fernandina was quite Millennial) but the spiritual food and fellowship, and to learn to fear the Lord our God always.

When we attend the Feast of Tabernacles, we are picturing the coming time when God’s Kingdom will reign on earth. And though that time will be filled with joy, it will not be a “magical fairyland” with no day-to-day challenges. Similarly, while we are at the Feast, we must work together to overcome minor inconveniences and difficulties. God protects us and guides us, but He also allows challenges to arise so we can learn and grow. Sometimes that growth takes place in developing what Mr. Herbert Armstrong once described as the fifth law of success, resourcefulness.

Brethren were challenged to be resourceful in **Branson, Missouri, U.S.**, when a hotel elevator stopped working. Coordinator Phil West said, “So many came together to assist those who needed it.... It was an example of spiritual ‘action’—love being exemplified in a very direct way at the Feast.... It was actually a very serious situation as many of the brethren attending were quite elderly and required help up and down the stairs, with some being on the third and fourth floors.”

At the Feast site in **Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, U.S.**, one member relayed how helpful it was when a new member “spent a whole day in helping us replace our car’s alternator, which broke halfway through the Feast, which saved us a great deal of money and time.” And **Dubuque, Iowa, U.S.**, Coordinator Mark Sandor noted, “The hotel mixed up the reservations of some brethren who needed wheelchair-accessible rooms. When their situation became known, some brethren who had a wheelchair-accessible room, but did not need it, were able to get their rooms switched. This was the largest of many acts of service the brethren undertook for each other.”

The plans of ten Venezuelan members to attend the Feast in Colombia could not be carried out due to a decision made eight days earlier by the regime of dictator Nicolás Maduro to restrict the entry and exit of those without a valid passport, a document very few Venezuelans currently have. This prevented the Venezuelan brethren from attending the Feast in **Quimbaya, Colombia**, but they managed to connect to the online streaming of services during the Feast.

In 2024, a new Living Church of God Feast site was held in **Nadi, Fiji**. Forty-two new members attended—many of whom had been in the Worldwide Church of God and had just recently started attending with LCG as a result of *Tomorrow’s World* Presentations in the country. As Coordinator Paul Kearns explained, it was exciting to be “celebrating the first LCG Feast of Tabernacles in Fiji, seeing local members who have roots back to WCG get emotional during the Feast due to joy that they were once again keeping God’s Feasts.” He also reported that, during the Feast, the training and quick thinking of a member prevented a bad situation from turning tragic: “A child not associated with our group was using the venue’s swimming pool and was not being watched and was found floating in the pool. One of our members (a local Fijian) performed CPR and saved the child’s life.”

In **Canaan, Tobago**, as reported by Coordinator Damian Weekes, “We experienced some power outages during the Feast, but it did not impact the brethren’s attitude in an overly negative manner.” In **Baguio City, Philippines**, Coordinator Daniel Osillos reported, “On the eighth day it was raining but we didn’t need to go outside for our lunch because the hotel gave all of us a free lunch!” In **Liverpool, Nova**

Scotia, Canada, brethren “turned lemons into lemonade” regarding noise and hassle from ongoing construction near the site that could have been a source of frustration. Instead, as reported by Coordinator Shane Kruse, “Some even thought that the construction going on near the site might be something we can consider as relating to the renewal and rebuilding happening in the Millennium preparing for the Last Great Day.” That’s looking for the positive!

Why We Go to the Feast

We go to the Feast to learn. We learn by worshipping God and hearing from His ministers. We learn how to function as a group, loving and serving one another. We even learn from the problems and challenges and develop a deeper understanding of “why we are here.” In **Pebbles Beach, Barbados**, Coordinator Alvin Cumberbatch concluded that the 2024 Feast of Tabernacles “will be remembered for the love, unity and selflessness evident amongst the brethren.” Coordinator Firman Bramantyo, of the site in **Batu City, East Java, Indonesia**, observed, “We are happier, more united in harmony, and all the members feel the reward of obedience to God.”

Coordinator Marc Arseneault, of the site in **Quebec City, Quebec, Canada**, commented, “People with little means were invited and were taken care of by others. It was a wonderful thing to see brethren coming with comments like, ‘I was so blessed this year.’” Mr. Humberto Barraza, Coordinator in **Olmué, Chile**, mentioned, “We have had without a doubt the best Feast of our lives, a Feast in unity and love.” And Coordinator Simon Muthama wrote of the **Tororo, Uganda** site, where 29 adults, teens, and children attended, “By the end of the Last Great Day in the afternoon service, we experienced a heavy downpour that depicted blessings to the Tororo congregation members who cherished the opportunity to host the Feast, because it was where God had chosen to make his name abide.”

Let’s thank God for His protection at this past Feast and the blessings He showered upon all of us around the globe. And let’s be grateful for the awesome plan He is working out for all of us. Jesus Christ is about to bring His Kingdom to reign on this earth, and we have the profound privilege to learn about it ahead of time—and to prepare now for His return. (LN)



Porto-Novo, Benin



Forster, New South Wales, Australia



Georgetown, Guyana



Kendu Bay, Kenya



Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, U.S.



Imphal, Manipur, India



Aburi, Ghana



Batu, Indonesia



Gulf Shores, Alabama, U.S.



Nadi, Fiji



Fernandina Beach, Florida, U.S.



Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, U.S.

HQ Staff Highlight: Alex Heykoop and Javid Khan

By **Editorial Staff**

The Living Church of God's World Headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina, has seen an influx of new employees over the past few years, each bringing fresh perspectives and helpful talents to God's Work. Recently, we had the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Alex Heykoop and Mr. Javid Khan, who are serving in the Television Department as Senior Video Editor and Multimedia Designer, respectively. We have enjoyed working with and getting to know them and thought you would appreciate learning about their experiences working at Headquarters.

Mr. Alex Heykoop

Mr. Alex Heykoop now attends in Charlotte with his wife, Rachael, and with their four children. His journey with the Church is rooted deeply in his family's history. "I was born in the Church," he says, "third generation in God's Church. My grandparents on my father's side came in the '70s and my grandmother on my mother's side came in, I believe, in the early '60s." A mechanical engineer by education, Mr. Heykoop's transition to working for the Church was somewhat serendipitous. "My brother back in 2014–2015 had asked me if I was interested in coming to work for the Canadian Office, and that's how I got hired in October 2015."

Mr. Heykoop's role in Canada was multifaceted. "Up there, I was kind of split between three different roles," he says. "I was helping out with the TV department, mainly with doing camera work and some more administrative-type stuff. I was in the Canadian Mail Processing Department, helping to print booklets and do the mailings. I was also helping my brother with maintenance and scheduling on the websites. Over time, they started the Viewpoints in Canada, and I was editing about half of those." This diverse experience prepared him well for his current role. "What brought me down here in large part was that I was born a Canadian-U.S. citizen, so it was easy to come across the border. When some opportunities came up here in the video-editing area, it was an opportunity to focus on one department, one thing, instead of being a jack-of-all-trades. So, at the end of 2019, we came down."



Mr. Heykoop has made significant contributions since joining the team in Charlotte. "Recently, I've become the senior video editor," he explains. "I am responsible for maybe 25 percent of the graphics that go in the telecast. That's one of my main things." His role also involves ensuring consistency and quality. "As the senior editor, it's also my job to make sure that all of the graphics are in a consistent style and that everything's getting done on time. That fits

well with my other role in process improvement—helping Mr. DeSimone figure out how to optimize processes, where we can remove waste, and how we can improve certain aspects without overinvesting our time."

One of Mr. Heykoop's most satisfying achievements is the telecast workflow process. "I got to help put some more of the finishing touches on it," he describes, "getting to where we're building telecasts like an assembly line. Everyone has their job at a specific time; everything goes smoothly that way. Not just so that we can get the quantity out, but also so that we can safeguard our time to spend on the quality aspect, too." This system has indeed allowed the team to produce a greater volume of quality content. "We've been consistently putting out 30 telecasts a year and we've been having time to work on Whiteboards, Behind-the-Work films, semiannual DVDs, and different projects like that."

The feedback Mr. Heykoop receives is a helpful motivator. "I mostly get feedback from the presenters and fellow employees who have watched the telecast," he says, "but every once in a while, we get a YouTube comment or a letter or something and someone mentions, 'Hey, this graphic just really explained the point really well.' We're here to enhance

the information or help explain it visually. It's encouraging to hear that it's been impactful."

Balancing quality and timeliness is a challenge Mr. Heykoop continually navigates. "All of us here want to just make the best, most awesome, over-the-top, cool graphics," he says. "But if we only get ten telecasts out a year, how effective is that going to be? At the same time, there's a time and a place to say, 'Hey, this one's due this week, and it really needs a little more work to push it over the top.'" Another challenge is creating accurate biblical depictions of people, both ancient and modern. "When depicting things from the Bible—how do you know what King David looked like? But then, even just representing traditional Christian families nowadays—it's hard to find footage of people reading a Bible without seven piercings in their ears."

Looking forward, Mr. Heykoop aims to improve the department's graphic capabilities. "I'd love to see us getting even better at graphics," he says, as well as "building a library of accurate biblical depictions."

Mr. Javid Khan

Mr. Javid Khan's path to God's Church began later in life. "I wasn't born in the Church, but I grew up in the Church," he says. "My dad died when I was one. My mom at that time had just myself and my older brother. So, she was left with two small kids, no husband, and she was a stay-at-home mom, as well. She was like, 'How am I going to do this? Why did God do this to me?' She was searching for answers." His mother's journey to the truth was a profound influence on Mr. Khan. "At the funeral, she met someone from the Church, and he was trying to encourage her," he recounts. "He gave her a booklet, and eventually, she started reading more, and in 2000 she decided to come to services. I was ten, and I had no clue what I was doing there. I was hanging out



with other kids, playing during services, but the messages still kind of soaked in. I got baptized in 2014, and that's when I officially became a member of the Church."

Mr. Khan's academic background is in architectural design. "I did my bachelor's degree in Jamaica," he says. "It was a bachelor's in arts. Instead of just going straight into architecture, they taught me principles

for design—and programs and software that you could use to make those designs a reality." He then furthered his education by developing an expertise in project management. "I thought project management would be a nice addition to architecture," he says, "because I was going into the construction field. I went to Canada to do my master's in project management, and eventually got a job and applied for permanent residency there. They granted me permanent residency, so I stayed there for almost a decade until I moved here."

Mr. Khan's career path took a turn not long after Mr. Heykoop's did. "Alex Heykoop left Canada to come over here," Mr. Khan recalls, "so there was a job opening at [the Church's Canadian Regional Office]. I applied for it, and that's when they hired me. I always wanted to work with the Church, because it's something that I am fully convicted of, something that's my core belief, rather than something that's just for a paycheck."

Mr. Khan now attends the Charlotte congregation with his wife, Christina, and with their four children. His role within Television and Digital Media involves work on various projects, from still images for the *Tomorrow's World* magazine to creating graphics for the telecast. "I also do the production of the Whiteboards," he says. "After it's been recorded, they send the audio file to me, and then Dalton Mooney and I actually sit down with Mrs. Rachel Keesee to see if we can storyboard it," a process in which a visual outline of a production is created using a series of images. "Then," Mr. Khan says, "I'll take the storyboard and make all the graphics for it."

Mr. Khan is continually seeking to improve the quality of the productions in which he's involved. "If you watch the Whiteboards, there's a slight change," he notes, explaining that they are now being produced with a different editing software that is more capable of high-quality graphics. "I'm trying to keep the same style," he says. "It's not a different product from what we've been producing, but just a bit more refined." He also looks for ways to make the content more engaging. "I've been designing infographics for the Whiteboards," he says, "so they follow a single graphic that you can move around in and try to understand the whole topic from. I've been creating downloadable infographics as well."

Mr. Khan's passion for graphic design goes back to his childhood. "When I was young, before I went to study architecture in university, I always messed around with Photoshop," he says. "It was like a hobby to me, using these programs to try and create something. I think that has carried over to what I do now. It's fun to me."

With how vitally important television and digital media are to the Work, we're glad to have Mr. Heykoop and Mr. Khan contributing their considerable skills and diligent efforts to preaching the Gospel to the world. Please continue to pray for Headquarters as the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's Great Commission to His Church continues to march forward! (LH)

The LCG Foundation’s Teaching English in Thailand Program: Learning, Serving, and Growing

By **Matthew Griffiths** and **Ishani McLennan**

The opportunity to teach English in Thailand came in the form of middle-of-the-night phone calls, in which Mr. Htoowah Laybeh asked, “Can you [come to Thailand] for nine months?” Both of us said yes, and in the following eight weeks we communicated back and forth, signed papers, filled in visa applications, scanned documents, and made many video calls. Acquiring a visa and work permit in Thailand is not easy, but Mr. Laybeh was determined and overcame many difficulties within the Thai immigration system for us to be here.

Matthew had previously travelled to Thailand and other parts of Asia, but this was Ishani’s first time on the continent. After 15 hours of flying and waiting in airports, we finally made it from the United Kingdom to Bangkok, where the heat made its first impression quite heavy. It was fascinating to behold all the tuk-tuks (rickshaws) and songthaews (brightly decorated pickup trucks with customized shelters) driving people around, and so many roads lined with unique street food vendors.

At a restaurant with Mr. Laybeh, our first meal in Thailand was flavorsome, intense, and delicious, before we went to collect our American counterparts from the airport. These were Living Education students who would be joining us in the Thailand program. Soon enough, we were all floating along the rivers of Bangkok through its “Floating Market.” We glided along a river in slim canoes, as market vendors (also in canoes) tried to sell us their wares.

After a three- or four-hour sleep that night, we were up early to present ourselves as having arrived in the country as voluntary workers and to receive our work permits. The school where we teach is a municipality-run school, so before starting as English Teaching Assistants we met the executive branch of the municipality staff, including the mayor!

Our first class was with kindergarteners (4–5-year-olds), who have limited attention spans. This required us to think on our feet, and even the teachers themselves were not always ready for us.

Here in Thailand, people’s income is low, but there is something the brethren and people have an abundance of—unrelenting positivity. This is not a quality either of us display

naturally, but we are consistently welcomed warmly by the brethren. Stronger bonds are fostered through fellowship and occasionally joining each family for a Friday night meal to begin the Sabbath. Despite not having much themselves, they lovingly prepare delicious food for us. Even the language barrier does not stop us from finding the joys of interacting and creating memories together.

We all share the same beliefs and goal, looking forward to God’s Kingdom. This is highlighted during Sabbath services, in which Mr. Laybeh takes the extra time to translate English sermons into Karen, the native language of the brethren, and vice versa for us.

Mr. Laybeh has been of great help to us and a diligent example, from spending hours working on the documentation necessary for our visas, to helping the Burmese brethren in the refugee camp. He has helped us to realize that, even when we want to give up or put things off until later, the best course of action is to always do what needs to be done first—regardless of how you may feel. As Mr. Laybeh always says, “We work hard to play hard.”

Serving as English Teaching Assistants at Mae Ku School requires self-awareness, patience, and resilience. When we walk into the classroom at the beginning of each class, we must leave our internal struggles at the door. Usually, there’s a beautiful sea of smiling little faces ready to learn. They immediately stand up and greet us in unison, chanting, “Good morning, Teacher!” After lunchtime, though, they often need to be reenergized with an educational game or two. Even as young



adults, we don’t always have the energy for class ourselves—but their smiles and the harmony of their enthusiastic voices cheers us up. Receiving positivity from others makes it easier to keep working, and

the “Land of Smiles” has taught us that a cheerful expression gives others hope, motivation, and the drive to carry on.

Our presence has also been welcomed at several “English Camps,” where we have visited other schools to deliver workshops and games. This alone has brought more interest in the Church’s activities in the area than usual. God has clearly opened a door here.

Mr. Laybeh often encourages us to think about the reason we are here. There are many layers to understanding that, but looking at it purely from an educational viewpoint, it comes down to one thing—motivation. Most Thai children don’t want or need to learn English, but learning a second language brings many benefits, so a crucial part of our role here is to

help students see the *value* of learning English. This is done not merely through teaching vocabulary, but by building bonds with the students.

Once we realized this, it made a lot of sense. After all, the plan of God is based on our having a relationship with Him and with one another as a family. Our relationships give our work meaning, our mutual joy encourages us, and our family ties drive us into His Kingdom. What we’ve learned is that this is God’s program, and we are His tools. We never thought we’d serve the Work in Asia, but despite having come from so far away, we must understand that we are one body and are happy to accept His offer. We look forward to what the coming months will bring us. Stay tuned! (LN)





TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

Kings and Priests—Really!

By **Janth B. English**

As women in God’s Church, we often hear sermons reminding us that we are to become members of God’s Family and will have the awesome responsibility of serving as kings and priests.

This promise is not just for the men in God’s Church; it is a promise that God has made to Christian women as well. Our reward for being faithful is to rule over cities (Luke 19:11–19) as priests of the Melchizedek order (Revelation 5:10; Hebrews 7:17). God has said that we—that includes you and me—will be kings and priests, and it *will* happen.

Yet I have seen, over the years, that many women feel uncomfortable with the idea of being in such high positions of authority. They don’t feel that their present roles and responsibilities can prepare them to take on the challenges of ruling a city and teaching its people God’s way of life. That’s why this article is titled “Kings and Priests—Really!” Yes, really! Let’s briefly examine how our duties as ordinary women prepare us to be kings and priests in tomorrow’s world.

Influential Service

It is generally agreed that leadership, empathy, and communication skills are among the qualities a ruler should exhibit. Believe it or not, our roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers are the perfect training grounds to learn—and then to teach—these skills. Some women may think of a strong leader as one who is bossy or aggressive, which certainly is how many female leaders in modern media are depicted. However, this is not the criterion for a godly leader.

Leadership, as a practical skill, involves the ability to guide, inspire, and influence others. As you interact with your husband, your children, and others in the community, your positive example acts as a light, a guide (Matthew 5:14–16). The words of wisdom you contribute to conversations inspire and encourage others (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Your role as a mother is that of the ultimate influencer as you help to mold and shape the next generation. Believe it or not, we, as Christian women, are leaders.

There are many leadership styles, but the style Christ emphasized is *servant* leadership. Jesus said that the way to

be great in the Kingdom is to serve (Mark 9:33–35). The Living Church of God teaches this principle for all its members—men *and* women. Preparing meals to feed our families, doing laundry, and taking children to appointments may at times seem like drudgery, but all of that is *servicing*. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, set us the example; He came to this earth as a human being to serve all mankind (Mark 10:45).

Through sacrificing our own time and energy to take care of others, we are preparing to be the type of servant leader that God wants as part of His family. Can you think of any job that requires more serving than that of a homemaker? Let’s serve with gladness of heart, knowing that our service not only benefits others today—it also prepares us to rule in the Kingdom of God.

Understanding and Insight

While godly rulers must show leadership, they must temper their judgments with mercy and kindness, showing empathy and compassion for their subjects. Women, especially Christian women, generally seem to have a natural tendency toward kindness and compassion. Why is it that a child who is hurt cries out for his mother? It is because, at those times, no one else can satisfy him—he is looking for sympathy that only his mother can provide.

When you comfort a friend who is troubled, you are practicing what you will be doing as a king ruling with Christ in the Millennium. Can you imagine the emotional and physical pain the survivors of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord will have? They will often need a shoulder to cry on, not always a rod of iron. We, as kings, will comfort them—and we show God our willingness to do so at that time by giving comfort to others now. In this, we are imitating God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are filled with compassion and mercy (Psalm 86:15). We can see clearly that the empathy and compassion we express as Christian women are preparing us to be rulers in the Kingdom of God.

Being able to communicate well is another important trait of a ruler. When we think of the web of interpersonal connections a homemaker has, we can see how God is developing in us good communication skills. We interact with family, teachers, doctors, coaches, friends, and more—often

conveying communications from one person to another in our personal sphere. If you have ever negotiated a truce between siblings, explained house rules to a teenager, or patched things up with a friend, you were learning and practicing communication skills that will serve you well as a ruler over your cities.

Praying, Teaching, and Doing

As members of the God Family, each of us will be part of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). You will be both a king and a priest. Aaron and his sons were chosen by God to be priests, and we can learn much about our jobs as future priests by examining the duties the Levitical priesthood performed.

One of those duties was to intercede with God on behalf of the people by offering sacrifices. Our priestly duties will also include making intercession to God on behalf of the people. We know this because Jesus Christ, our High Priest, makes intercession to the Father for us (Romans 8:34). When we offer intercessory prayers to the Father—for our families, for the Work, for the brethren, and for our nations—we are perfecting the duty we will perform as priests before the Lord.

Another very important responsibility of the Levitical priesthood was to teach the people God's commandments, statutes, and judgments. As the saying goes, you cannot

Often, it is not until we begin rearing our own children that we truly start to realize **the depth of understanding required to teach a subject. This inevitably influences how we study the Bible. How deep is our understanding?**

teach what you do not know. Women in God's Church have the opportunity to "sit at the feet of" His ministers and be taught God's ways. Just as Mary of Bethany chose to sit at Jesus' feet to learn, we can choose to make the most of our opportunities to read Church literature, listen to sermons, and take notes. Do we study the Bible daily? Have we *proven* to ourselves what we believe? Can we explain *why* we believe what we believe?

Often, it is not until we begin rearing our own children that we truly start to realize the depth of understanding required to teach a subject. This inevitably influences how we study the Bible. How deep is our understanding? Being able to memorize facts and phrases is not the same as having an in-depth understanding of God's laws and His way of life—and we will need this understanding to fulfill our priestly responsibilities in tomorrow's world. We must make Bible study a priority; our personal Bible study is preparing us to be priests in the Kingdom of God.

It is vital that we know God's laws, statutes, and judgments, but if the knowledge is not put into action, what have we accomplished? Knowledge just for knowledge's sake leads to pride (1 Corinthians 8:1), and God hates a prideful attitude (Proverbs 6:16–19). The Father is calling His sons and daughters to put into practice the things He is teaching us. By putting knowledge into practice, we gain an even deeper understanding of God's ways and learn to be more effective teachers (Psalm 111:10).

We must strive to live by every word of God and to overcome our human nature through the power of the Holy Spirit that is in us. God is testing us and staying beside us as we struggle through our trials. Just as Christ learned from the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8), our tests prepare us for the awesome responsibility of being royal priests. Those who overcome are promised a position of rulership with Christ (Revelation 3:21).

Be Anxious for Nothing—Be Ready to Lead

Some might be thinking that while what we have discussed so far is all well and good, it is only on a very small scale. You may feel that though you might be fulfilling these duties for your family, you could not fulfill them for a whole city.

Remember, though, that God always starts out small. If you can exercise leadership, show empathy and compassion, practice communicating with others, offer intercessory prayers, study the Bible, and put what you learn into practice in your circle of influence, then God knows He can trust you to do the same on a bigger scale. "He who is faithful in what is

least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10).

Others may be thinking, *Yeah, but I know nothing about global finances, infrastructure, or anything like that.* But we should not worry about these technical details. So many details in God's Kingdom will need to change anyway—because we will be building on a new foundation. What knowledge we lack will be provided. Remember, God knows everything there is to know. He is calling men and women out of this world to learn *His* ways, walk in integrity, and capture the vision that His plan of salvation offers (Isaiah 66:2). What He is concerned about now is whether we are developing godly character (Micah 6:8).

When we consider the roles and responsibilities God has given women, it is plain to see that He really is preparing us to rule in His Kingdom as kings and priests. We will not be given lesser roles because we are women (Galatians 3:28). In fact, one could almost think that God has given women an inside track! Yes, we are to be kings and priests—really! (L)

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Neil (Bria) Amado are happy to announce that their second son, **Mateo Miles Amado**, was born September 29, weighing 8 pounds, 2 ounces, and measuring 20 inches long. Baby and Mom are doing great, and Mateo's big brother is especially excited. The Amado family attends the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Andrew (Ellie) Crouch welcomed **Eevie Morgan Crouch** on June 20, weighing 3.1 kilograms and measuring 52 centimeters long. Eevie has been a delightful addition to the Crouch family and her big brother, Judah, loves having a little sibling to care for. The family attends the Brisbane congregation in Australia.

On the bright, sunny morning of August 31, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest (Sigrid) Gabriel happily welcomed their firstborn child, **FlordeLuna M. Gabriel**. She weighed 6 pounds, 7 ounces,

and measured 20 inches long. Mom and baby are doing very well and so is Dad. The Springfield, Illinois, congregation is delighted to welcome the new arrival.

Mr. and Mrs. Dwayne (Sarah) Wilks are delighted to announce the birth of their third child, **Richard Addison Wilks**, on July 10, weighing 8 pounds, 10 ounces, and measuring 21.5 inches. He was welcomed by his two older siblings, Ariana and Eric. The family attends the Calgary congregation in Canada.

Mr. and Mrs. Ethan (Sarah) Williams are thrilled to announce that their firstborn child, **Harrison Valor Williams**, was born at home on October 28, weighing 7 pounds, 12 ounces, and measuring 22 inches long. Mom and baby are both doing well with Dad's help, and the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation eagerly welcomes another new member.

Ordinations

Mr. Warren Burnett was ordained an elder on September 21 by evangelist Robert Tyler and pastor Martin Montgomery. Mr. Burnett serves in the Adelaide congregation in Australia.

Mr. Jacob Hall was ordained an elder on August 17 by evangelist Stuart Wachowicz and pastor Michael Heykoop. Mr. Hall serves in the Edmonton and Red Deer congregations in Canada.

Mr. Moses Harris was ordained a deacon on March 11, 2023, by pastor Paul Shumway. Mr. Harris serves the Georgetown, Guyana, congregation.

Mr. Lorne Ketch was ordained an elder on October 18 by evangelist Stuart Wachowicz, pastor Shane Kruse, and elder Andre Cutrara. Mr. Ketch serves in the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation in Canada.

Mr. James Kingsmore was ordained an elder on the Feast of Trumpets by evangelist Peter Nathan and pastor John Mur-

phy. Mr. Kingsmore serves in the Belfast congregation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Matt Lyons was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by pastor Mark Sandor and elders Errol Wade and Garrett Steagall. Mr. Lyons serves in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, congregation.

Mr. Mark Nicholas was ordained a deacon on September 16, 2023, by pastor Glen Harrison and elders Ray Joffrion and Keith Wheelahan. Mr. Nicholas serves in the New Orleans, Louisiana, congregation.

Mr. Fred Ziegler was ordained an elder on August 31 by pastor Richard Franz. Mr. Ziegler serves in the Rolla, Missouri, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Congratulations to **Vincent Froehlich** of Malta and **Carolina Padilla-Leon** of London, England, on their marriage on the island of Malta on September 10, officiated by pastor Simon Roberts. Family members and guests witnessed the making of their covenant with God. Living Church of God membership in Malta has now grown to three people—and, a few days after the wedding, what is believed

to be the first live LCG Sabbath service in Malta was held, with ten in attendance.

On April 14, **Steve Toussaint** and **Kim Howell** were married in Plaquemine, Louisiana, at the Island Bistro Club, with pastor Glen Harrison officiating. Mr. Toussaint is the son of Mrs. Carole Gisler and the late Winslow Thomas

Toussaint. The bride is the daughter of the late Ray and Carolyn Joffrion. She was given in marriage by her brothers, Cary Joffrion and Ray Joffrion, the latter being an elder in the Baton Rouge congregation. Mr. and Mrs. Toussaint have made their home on the bayou in Plaquemine and attend the Baton Rouge congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Larry Darnell Anderson, 85, died on September 26. He is survived by his wife, Judith. Mr. Anderson grew up in Illinois and worked for more than 25 years at the University of Northern Illinois where he met his wife, a teacher at the college. They were married in 1973 and baptized together in 2007. He enjoyed the outdoors, especially fishing, and was a lifelong baseball fan. Another favorite retirement activity was taking his wife on motorcycle rides. Pastor Phil West and pastor Davy Crockett of Little Rock, Arkansas, officiated at his memorial service.

Mrs. Rozella Mae Gerber, 78, died on November 11 after a long and productive life of service to her family and God's Church. She was born in Ohio and worked in the secretarial profession until she married her husband, Dale, in 1979. Longtime members of God's Church, they enjoyed traveling and spending time together. Mrs. Gerber was baptized in 1978. Many will remember her love for sewing, playing cards, good books, and spending time with her grandchildren, and she had a special fondness for cats. Predeceased by her husband in 2017, she is survived by a daughter, a stepson, and three granddaughters. She will be missed by family, friends, and members of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, congregation.

Mr. Roger King, 85, died peacefully at home on October 15. Mr. King was called to the Truth in the late 1950s, while stationed overseas in the U.S. Army. After being granted conscientious objector status, he was honorably discharged and was baptized in 1961. Mr. King was a humble, joyful man who

loved God and loved to fellowship with God's people—he was often one of the last to leave after Sabbath services. He will be missed by his family and many brethren, including the members of the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation, where he attended.

Mr. Everett Keith Powers, 63, died peacefully on November 2 at his home and surrounded by his family. Mr. Powers was the son of Mr. Ted Eugene Powers and Winnifred Todd Powers. He was a master electrician with decades of service in the industry in North and South Carolina, and he owned his own business, Powers Electric Company. He enjoyed working with his sons in the family business, as well as fishing, camping, and spending time with his grandchildren. He was a servant of God and a servant in the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation. Mr. Powers is survived by his wife of 43 years, Jerrie; two sons, T.J. (Amanda) Powers and Andrew (Jaimee) Powers; daughter Amber (Chris) Leonard; two grandsons; and six granddaughters. He will be very greatly missed by his family and the brethren.

Mrs. Lydia Rottmann, 73, died peacefully at home with her husband, Ray, at her side, on October 12. Longtime members of God's Church, they had been married for more than 53 years. In addition to her husband, Mrs. Rottmann is survived by their son, Lyndell; their daughter, Regina (Andrew) Ulmer; four grandchildren; and two brothers. She will also be missed by the brethren of the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Electronic Service Requested

The Most Important Job in the World

In the early morning hours of November 6, president-elect Donald J. Trump took a moment to reflect on his victory. It would be hard to deny that he prevailed in a controversial election, and Mr. Trump seemed quite aware of this. He had survived two assassination attempts, and the scope of his victory over his opponent had surprised many. Looking ahead at the tasks facing him, he told a room full of tired-but-exuberant supporters, “There is no job like this. This is the most important job in the world.”

While that may be a worthy sentiment for a newly elected president—and the job of the president of the United States is certainly no easy task—Mr. Trump’s statement couldn’t be further from the truth. That is because there is a more important job, or Work, going on in the world: preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to the whole world and the Ezekiel warning message to the Israelite-descended peoples (Mark 16:15; Ezekiel 3:4–7; 33:7).

In the hustle and bustle of our busy personal lives, it can be easy to forget that the members of the Living Church of God are a part of this great Work. We contribute to it with our faithful tithes and offerings, and our time in prayer is always a vital service. Another resource we can offer is our time—for example, if there is a need for volunteers to help with a *Tomorrow’s World* Presentation coming to your area, that is another way to directly support the Work.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10–11). There’s something important to remember here: The Devil is wily. He has tricks up his

sleeves to try to get through our spiritual armor—so, we need to stay close to God.

I was reminded of this recently as I was listening to some YouTube election coverage on my phone while working around the house. When the phone is in portrait (vertical) mode, the YouTube app will suggest another video below the one that is currently playing. It seemed that God wanted to remind me that the election could be a powerful distraction, as the YouTube suggestion at that moment was a sermon Mr. Gerald Weston gave in January 2022, titled, “Satan: The Master of Distraction.” Needless to say, that caught my attention.

As an organization, the Living Church of God is preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom—or Government—of God. And the Devil wants nothing more than for Church members to be caught up in the distraction of this world’s politics, because if our eyes are on this world’s political systems—and not on the glorious, righteous Government that is coming—we are leaving a gap in our armor that he can exploit. So, be aware of how Satan will attack, and remember your purpose. His playbook is pretty simple, but it has worked for thousands of years.

Yes, God is redeeming a people for a job. There will be perils and battles along the way, as well as opportunities. Whatever the next four years may bring, and whatever events end up defining Mr. Trump’s presidency, we must stay focused on *our* purpose. We must not let Satan distract us—we are on the job, and there is no job like ours. *This* is the most important job in the world.

—James Mooney