

SPRING/
SUMMER
2021



engage

A Journal for
Church of God
MINISTRIES

IN THIS ISSUE

Get Ready for the Biggest
Paradigm Shift Ever

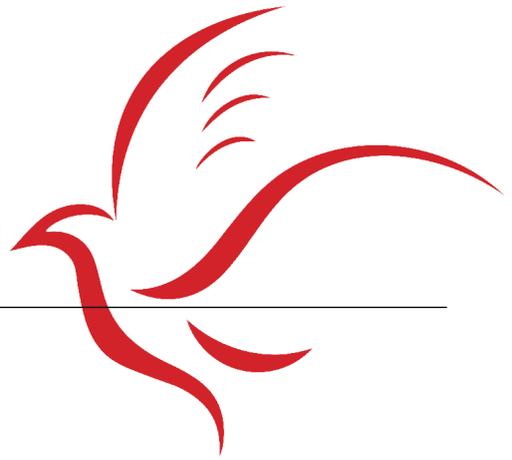
“Where Everybody Knows
Your Name”

Why I Enjoy Sunday
Church Visits

Cremation: The Believer’s
Option?

SPRING/SUMMER 2021
VOL. 17, NO. 2

engage



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A Tribute to Tom George...and More

OVER THE LAST several weeks, there have been some giants of the Church of God who have passed away.

Among them was Dr. Paul Walker, legendary pastor of the Mt. Paran Church of God in Atlanta, who from 1996–2000 also served the Church of God in its highest role as general overseer. He passed away on February 23, 2021, at the age of 89.

Less than a month later (March 21, 2021), the Church of God world was stunned to learn of the sudden death of Dr. David C. Blair. Only 56, he was the sitting international director for Youth and Discipleship. Then on April 15, former international director for Youth and Christian Education, Mark Abbott, passed away as well. The 61 year-old had served in the role from 2004–2008.

In this period, the Church of God has lost many church leaders, from pastors to evangelists, to retired ministers. Another of those lost was a “behind-the-scenes” difference-maker—Rev. Tom George. Tom passed away in his beloved Scottsboro, Alabama, where he spent his last years contributing and editing manuscripts, speeches, book reviews, and other written materials, most of which never bore his name. My first memories of Tom were when he was editor of “Profiles,” a packet of printed materials that was mailed monthly to Church of God pastors and leaders back in the 1990s when email and the Internet were still in their infancy. Profiles “morphed” into *Covenant Resources* in the 2000s and then into *Engage* in 2008.

This issue of *Engage* contains more than 40 pages of ads from the ministries of the Church—ads that resemble those arriving with the Profiles packet back in Tom George’s day. Tom continued to contribute to *Engage*—and to other projects—until his final days. It is his contributions, and others like him, that will continue to sustain the Church of God into the future. Well done, Tom. ■

Engage Journal is published in the interest of providing contemporary aids and resources to pastors and pastoral staffs.

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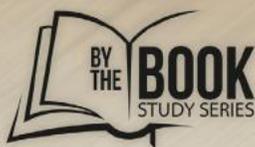


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by J. LEE
GRADY



Get Ready for the Biggest Paradigm Shift Ever

LAST WEEKEND I preached at a thriving megachurch in Newnan, Georgia, near Atlanta. Although Crossroads Church has a Southern Baptist affiliation, the worship is more energetic than many charismatic churches I've visited. Crossroads packs huge crowds into its sanctuary on weekends, although most of the people are masked and socially distanced these days. The pandemic hasn't stopped this church from reaching their community.

The most unique thing about Crossroads is its commitment to small-group ministry. During any given week, people take part in more than two dozen healing ministries—offering everything from divorce recovery to grief counseling to free-

dom from addictions or sexual abuse. New believers gather in small groups, so they can grow in their faith.

The church's pastor, Ken Adams, loves to preach the Word from his pulpit, but he's an unusual leader because he believes Christians can't grow without small groups and close relationships. He knows he's not the star of the show. He knows Sunday morning church isn't enough. That's why he organized a Discipleship Summit last weekend to encourage his members to embrace the call to biblical discipleship.

During the summit, my mentor of 47 years, Barry St. Clair, asked me to join him on the stage. We sat on stools and told the story of how he invited me to be part of a small youth discipleship group when I was only 15. I shared how Barry not only taught

me the basics of the Christian life but also modeled what it means to make disciples. His humble example inspired me to spend most of my adult life mentoring younger people; now my disciples do the same.

When I was at Crossroads this weekend, I could sense that what was happening there was not an isolated phenomenon; it is evidence of a sweeping tsunami that will reshape the church in this decade. All across this nation and the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to reevaluate our core priorities. It has shoved us into an uncomfortable realization that business as usual will never work again.

God is using this crisis to prune away dead branches, so we can bear more fruit. Are you ready for the shift? I've described below some of the ways the Holy Spirit is renewing our wineskins so we can contain what He is sending:

1. We are shifting from quantity to quality. In the days before COVID, pastors measured success by what we called «the ABC's of ministry»—attendance, buildings, and cash. We assumed we were successful if we had big crowds in a nice building. But the apostle Paul said ministry made with wood, hay, and stubble will burn up when tested by God's holiness (see 1 Cor. 3:12-13).

Just because a sanctuary is full of people doesn't mean we are making strong followers of Jesus. Don't evaluate your success by worldly standards.

2. We are shifting from spectators to disciples. Churches that already had strong small group ministry before the pandemic have thrived during this last year. But churches that put all their resources into big congregational events have been shut down or have lost huge percentages of their membership. Church growth expert Thom Rainer predicts that 20 percent or more of marginal churchgoers (who were not connected to any small group) will never return after COVID.

Jesus didn't call us to make churchgoers. He never intended His followers to just sit in pews year after year, listening to the same sermons. He told them, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19 NKJV). He certainly did not want His followers to remain spiritual infants; He invites us all to grow up and do the works that He did.

3. We are shifting from big events to small groups. There's nothing wrong with big gatherings. I love to worship with a crowd. But when we made the church about the crowd, we created a Frankenstein's monster that does not resemble the original church in the Book of Acts. People don't effectively grow if their only input comes from a weekly or monthly 30-minute sermon. They need discipleship in a close-knit environment with supportive relationships.

We live in a world full of fear, loneliness, and abuse. And that's a big reason many people would never set foot in a

big church full of strangers. Their social anxiety prevents them from walking into a concert-style arena to hear a sermon. But they would consider visiting your home for a meal or a small group study. Why are we making it so hard for people?

4. We are shifting from unapproachable celebrities to accessible servants. We have lived through the era of the rock star preacher, and this fad will fade. True ministers of the gospel do not allow people to worship them. When we embrace the idea that all Christians can make disciples—not just the most eloquent

or the highest paid—we will impact the multitudes like the early church did.

Ministers who lead like Jesus aren't afraid to empower others, and they aren't afraid of their followers being more successful than they are. In fact, they want their disciples to surpass them. The faster we shift away from the celebrity model and embrace Christlike humility, the sooner we will reach the world with the gospel. ■

***J. Lee Grady** is former editor of Charisma magazine. Originally published on February 3, 2021.*

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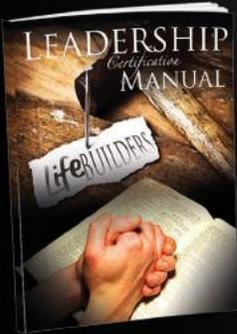
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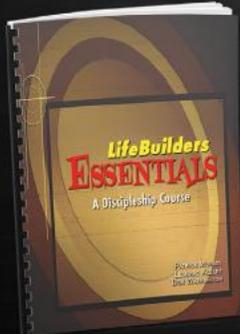
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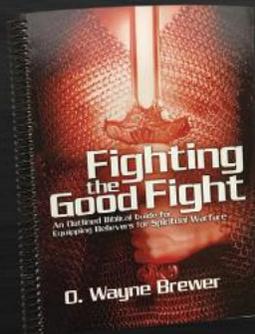
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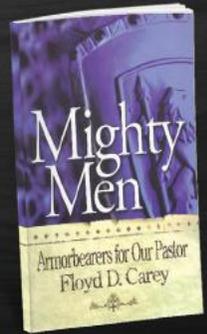
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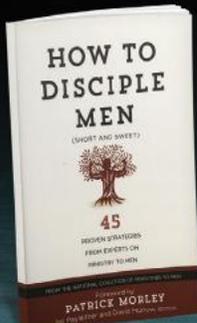


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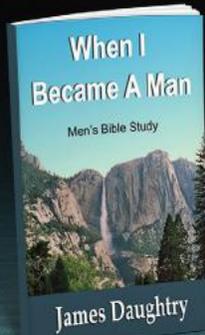
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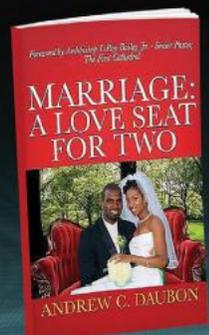
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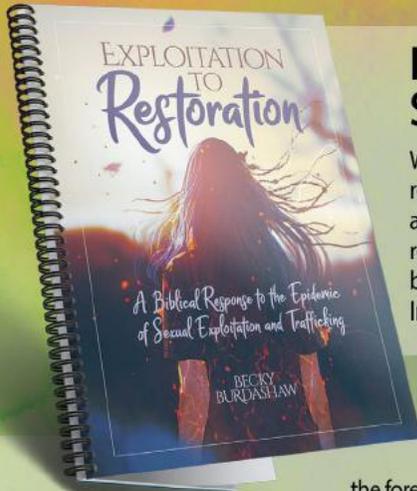
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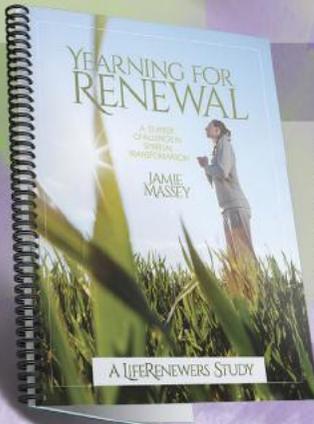
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“WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME”

Why Small Groups Are So Effective in Local Church Discipleship

by O. WAYNE BREWER

THANK GOD! After a “long winter” of a covid pandemic (that has lasted longer than a year), in which in-person church services, Sunday school, and small groups had to be limited or cancelled outright, we finally came back together for Easter; and then, last Sunday our class came back together. Please don’t misunderstand. We watched and heard our pastor most powerfully and relevantly preach the Word online, Sunday after Sunday.

We thoroughly enjoyed our Sunday school class every week via Zoom. However, it really feels good to “assemble together” as the body of Christ again. For myself and my wife, this past year and a half was a time in which (besides our daily devotional time and our pastor’s excellent preaching online), our chosen “small group” (our Sunday school class though Zoom) was a lifeline of community, encouragement, relationship, and absolute spiritual discipleship! We are so thankful for our small group.



WHY SMALL GROUPS?

The fact is that small groups, as a form of ministry, are quite simply the most effective means whereby a local church can grow disciples for Jesus Christ. Whether it is a Sunday school class, a “special interest” group, a Men’s LifeBuilders discipleship group, a women’s Bible study group, or a Wednesday evening discipleship group utilizing topical studies, the fact is, human beings have an in-born spiritual hunger for God, as well as a desire to be with other people to help fulfill the longing for social involvement and relationship. Indeed, 90 percent of Americans surveyed said they are interested in “spiritual things.” Small groups are tailor-made for such longings. As one television theme song from many years ago says, “Sometimes, you want to go where everybody knows your name.” In my small group, I am known, refreshed, loved, accepted, and discipled. Small group ministry within the framework of the local church is a flexible and relational discipleship system that is both natural and enjoyable and which truly responds to the Great Commission of our Lord, when He says in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples” (NKJV).

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF SMALL GROUPS TO THE LOCAL CHURCH?

As noted earlier, in terms of effectively discipling men, women, youth, middle-aged, and the older among us, small groups are by nature relational. Whether a group is multigenerational or spiritually aimed

toward Millennials, Baby Busters, or Baby Boomers, is of less consequence than the fact that people of faith are coming together relationally to share, learn, and grow to become more fruitful, fulfilled, and matured followers of Christ. One study has shown that small groups are, in fact, not only the most effective way to spiritually develop a new believer, but also the most effective way to assimilate new people into the local church! In addition to these exciting findings, it also appears that new guests to a church find small groups to be a positive way to become acquainted with a congregation and be welcomed. It does not stop there. We now know that church members and attenders who are involved in small groups literally have a higher percentage of church tithers than those attenders who are not involved in small groups. Pastors, are you listening? There is an old saying that states, “What people are in on, they are also up on.” It is through small groups that individuals, youth, men, women, and entire families begin to understand, visualize, and support the core values and mission of the local church. Transformative, relational involvement in the small group discipleship process brings men and women into the life of the church while building corporate excitement, fellowship, and “buy-in” to the various emphases of the entire congregation. Small group discipleship is a crucial ministry “delivery system” that effectively bonds believers together and to the sponsoring congregation itself.

WHERE IS MY CONGREGATION WITH SMALL GROUPS RIGHT NOW?

Now, “the rubber meets the road.” Where is my local church in terms of beginning and developing small group discipleship ministry. Think about it. Even before the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus himself had already prepared for His church to disciple the nations by discipling . . . you guessed it . . . a small group of twelve individuals. It was the chosen method of Jesus Christ to make disciples. It is certainly not the only way to disciple people, but it is arguably the most effective way. In a day when the latest research tells us that for the first time in America’s history, church attendance has now dropped below 50 percent of the population, there is still room for real hope. More than 60 percent of Millennials through about age 32 and 42 percent of those who are more than the age of 32 say *they would be willing to study the Bible if a friend invited them to do so!* This is the relationship bridge whereby a believer becomes an instrument of evangelism which naturally and relationally leads to Christian discipleship and assimilation into the body of believers we call “the Church.”

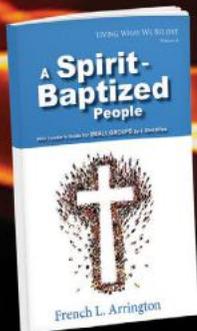
As a pastor, discipleship director, men’s ministry coordinator, youth leader, women’s discipleship leader, or Sunday school superintendent, what plans are you making to utilize Jesus’ discipleship method to fulfill the Great Commission in your city, town, or county? Dream large. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to make connections with potential small group facilitators. We are

called to love people and share our Christian lives with others and through small groups, we can do it together . . . as a group.

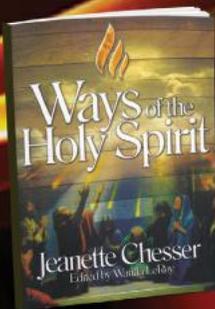
Pentecostal small group discipleship in the 2020s is all about “knowing,” “being,” and “doing” . . . or to put it another way—“head,” “heart,” and “hands.” Church of God Adult Discipleship Ministries provide relevant, practical, and scripturally sound Pentecostal discipleship resources for all adults, as well as for men specifically (lifebuilderscog.com), and women specifically (womensdisciplescog.com). Go to adultdiscipleshipcog.com and check out the “Living What We Believe” series, “Discipling Pentecostals” series, “Kindle the Power” series, or the “Enliven” Bible book study series. People want purpose, truth, and personal growth while enjoying a feeling of genuine community with others. Discipling believers through small group ministry is a transformative and rewarding ministry of the church as a whole. Our harvest is a gathering of individuals who want truth and relationship and to be part of a community where they are known in a personal way. Do you remember the words to the television theme song I mentioned earlier? Well, the words from the last verse of the same song also inform us of our ongoing mission through small groups as well. It mentions you not only like to go where they know your name, but also where they “are always glad you came.” ■

O. Wayne Brewer, D.Min. is Co-director of Church of God Adult Discipleship and International Director of Church of God Men’s Discipleship

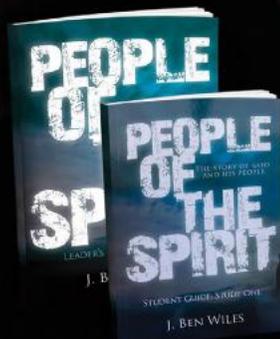
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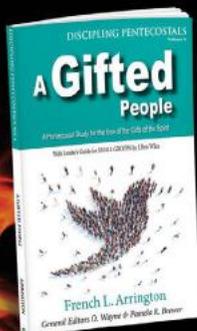
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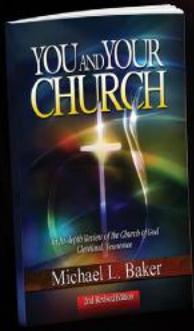
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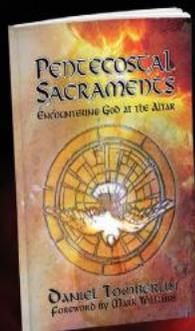
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by TIM HILL

WHY I ENJOY SUNDAY CHURCH VISITS

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is a reprint of a social media post by General Overseer Hill from April 18, 2021.)

SINCE THE beginning of 2021, for one half of my Sunday appointments, I have been blessed to be with churches of less than eighty congregants in attendance. Several of these appointments actually were attended by less than 50 people, and I have thoroughly enjoyed being with all of them. I have met some pastors and families with some of the most amazing life stories I have ever heard.

Recently, I was with a pastor who worked at Ground Zero as part of the emergency recovery teams three days after the New York City Twin Towers tragically fell on 9/11. His wife was working right there with him—rescuing, caring, providing food, and engaging in overall ministry to first responders. One day they were within a few feet of then President George W. Bush. In past years, this pastor has served numerous dignitaries and celebrities as a security guard. Most interestingly, the pastor's wife has served as a key administrator

and employee at the Austria Zoo as well as the famous San Diego Zoo. In the last few years, God has used this couple to help reinvigorate a church that is more than 80 years old, and now it is growing again as they provide a thriving benevolence outreach to their community and preach the love of Jesus to hurting people in their small town.

Not long ago, I was at another church out of which the Lord has raised up more than 20 pastors, missionaries, music ministers, pastors' companions, and on and on it goes. The morning I was there, I may have spoken to 35 people. People of heritage, dedication, and love for the harvest—and I might add—the Church of God. They sing songs from the *Church Hymnal* and teach out of the *Evangelical Sunday School Commentary* provided by Church of God Publications.

Most recently, I spent my Sunday with a pastor and his precious family who left me feeling that I had made a lifelong brother and friend. First of all, we had a great service. Second, in some ways, it reminded me of my old home church near Ft. Worth when Dad would take prayer requests and make the weekly announcements.

In this case, it was the announcements that got my attention. Remember, this was another church of less than 80 people. Every announcement had to do with something the church was doing in the community to reach other people beside those who regularly attend their services. Youth, children, schools, nursing homes, and more—and I emphasize “more.” I was impressed with their community outreach.

This church, as all the others I have been to recently, was immaculate. The building is almost 70 years old, but it looks brand new. Every building on the campus had a similar attractive appearance. I heard about their rich history and recalled the names of former pastors that I had only heard of but never met—faithful men and women now in heaven. I met their sons and daughters who remained

as church members after their parents had retired from pastoral ministry. Such tremendous loyalty and faithfulness to God and the Church.

My favorite part of this particular day was the afternoon tour and lunch with the pastor, his family, and about 25 folks from the church. Their stories, testimonies, and even the laughter reminded me of how great the people of the Church of God really are.

The pastor and his wife have married children, their eldest is about 28. Then about five years ago, they adopted a beautiful little girl when she was only one year old. A beautiful child with the hope of a good life because a ministry couple cared and loved. God has blessed this pastor with a landscaping business and from what I saw, he and his team of employees are amazing at their craft. By his own testimony, he feels



that God has blessed him in a great way, enabling him to give back to the church and to the work of the Lord.

I felt energized when I left them. Truthfully, I usually do. When I witness the passion, recognize the calling, and observe the gifts of men and women across the Church of God, it never ceases to amaze me. Our denomination is truly a tapestry of multi-gifted people with amazing backgrounds and work ethics that God integrates into their current calling. It reminds me of growing up and watching my own father before I could fully comprehend all that it really took to have the cares of the church constantly on his shoulders and in his heart. While at the same time, he delivered mail or drove a school bus or painted houses to provide for our family.

These visits remind me of my first church and how having 80 people on a good day was special. It reminds me of what it took to make it work and operate with effectiveness. Admittedly, those 80 people deserved better than what they got from me at that time in my life. Yet, they endured, and we did not kill each other. They taught me, loved me, and to the best of their ability, blessed me at every turn. Just as thousands of similar churches are doing today throughout the Church of God—they made an impact in their community.

Tonight on my flight home, I cannot help but celebrate these pastors and these congregations. Churches of all sizes and composition have a glorious place to fill in God's kingdom and in the FINISH Commitment—the Great Commission. ■



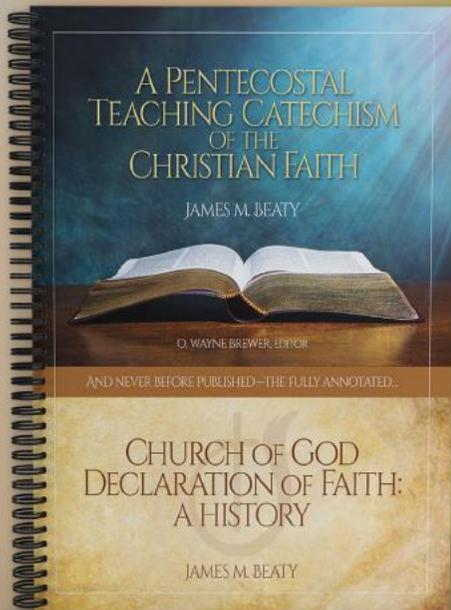
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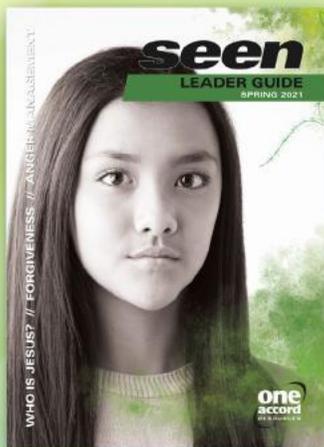
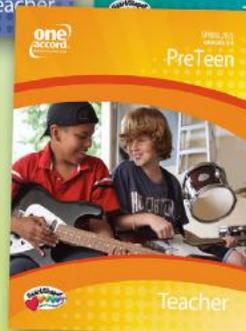
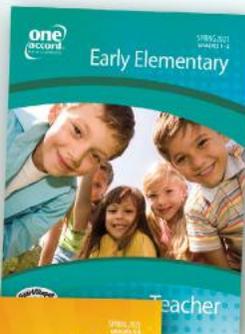
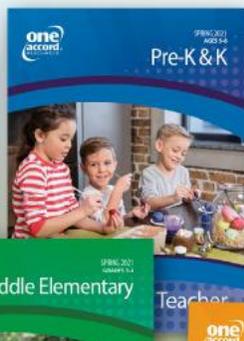
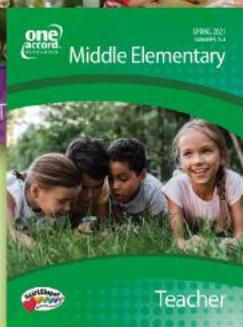
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A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a blue checkered button-down shirt, is sitting at a laptop. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light grey color.

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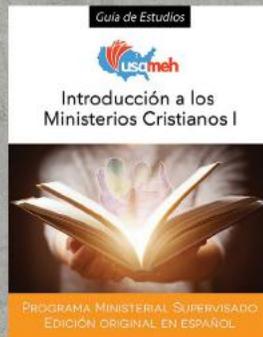


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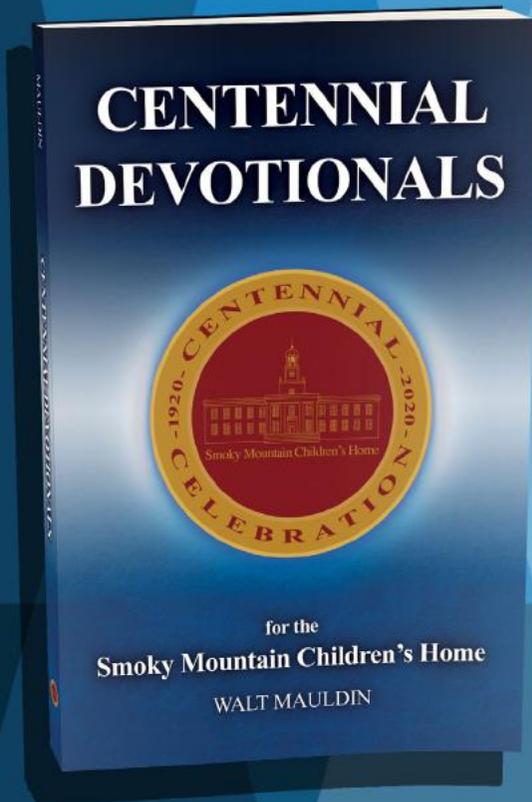
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An Interesting Conversation About the COVID-19 Vaccine

RECENTLY RECEIVED a call from a Church of God constituent whom I will refer to as “Jane Doe” in order to protect the privacy of this individual. Jane and I had an interesting conversation about the COVID-19 vaccine, and she asked me two questions: “If I take the COVID-19 vaccine, have I taken the “mark of the beast” referred to in the Bible?” and “What is the Church of God’s official position regarding whether or not its members should take the COVID-19 vaccine?”

IS TAKING THE COVID-19 VACCINE ACCEPTING THE “MARK OF THE BEAST”?

Let me point out that I do not think this question is a crazy question. In fact, I have heard it raised elsewhere. I am aware that there could be instances where proof of the COVID-19 vaccination might determine whether a person can fly on airplanes or do other things, but I have not yet

been able Biblically to place receipt of the COVID-19 vaccination in that category, so it does not seem to me that this would be accepting the mark of the beast. But I will make this foray into the theological world very brief.

DOES CHURCH OF GOD HAVE AN OFFICIAL POSITION REGARDING THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Jane’s other question is in fact a question which I have been asked. I want to point out that I am not assuming the authority of stating the Church’s official position on this question, but only giving my personal opinion.

I pointed out to Jane that in the Church of God we have many constituents and numerous points of view regarding any question, this question included. I know persons within the Church of God who tell me that they absolutely will not take the COVID-19 vaccination and that they

The decision of whether or not to take the COVID-19 vaccine should be an individual healthcare decision that a person should make, in consultation with his or her doctor or medical provider.

do not trust the effectiveness of any vaccine, whether Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, or AstraZeneca. In fact, I have friends in the Church of God who are very skeptical about vaccines in general.

On the other hand, I have friends in the Church of God who strongly believe that everyone should get the vaccine shots. There is an outstanding minister in the Church of God in New Jersey named Dr. Philip Bonaparte, who is a medical doctor and a pastor. Dr. Bonaparte has released some videos regarding the COVID-19 vaccines and in these videos, he details the making of the vaccines and the efficiency of them, from a medical and scientific standpoint. In Dr. Bonaparte's locale many people have died from Coronavirus, and he believes that vaccines are greatly needed. He also points out that no one in his locale has died from taking the vaccines.

It is my personal opinion that the decision of whether or not to take the COVID-19 vaccine should be an individual healthcare decision that a person should make, in consultation with his or her doctor or medical provider.

SHOULD YOU REQUIRE STAFF MEMBERS TO TAKE THE VACCINE?

Some have wondered whether or not church staff members should be required to take the vaccination. The laws on this question might vary from state to state, and you should consult legal counsel before taking such action. Some employers have offered incentives for taking the vaccine, such as bonus pay or time off. But keep in mind that some employees might have religious objections to taking the vaccine.

CONCLUSION

As in any other decision, I think whether or not to take the COVID-19 vaccine should be made after prayer, but with firm confidence that our ultimate healer is the Lord and that it is in Him that we place all of our trust! ■

Dennis Watkins is legal counsel for the Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



MONEY MATTERS
Art Rhodes

Get Your Tax Status Right

AS WE COMPLETE another tax season, it is a reminder that ministers many times are not being treated properly from a tax standpoint by their local church. The issue often arises out of a lack of understanding of the tax code, and regretably, in a few cases, it arises because of an outright disregard of the tax laws by ministers and churches. So, how should ministers be treated for tax purposes?

W-2 EMPLOYEE

If you are a “minister of the gospel” and serving as a lead pastor or on the staff of a local church, the church should be providing you with a W-2 annually. Not a Form 1099. Regardless of the position of a minister on the staff of a local church, he or she should be receiving a W-2.

Churches and ministers often get confused on this issue because ministers are considered self-employed for Social Security and Medicare purposes. Since that is the

case, the argument is that the minister should receive a Form 1099, rather than a W-2.

However, ministers have a “dual tax status.” For Social Security and Medicare purposes, the tax laws treat ministers of the gospel as self-employed. On the other hand, ministers are treated as employees of the local church for federal and state income tax purposes. This dual status is probably the most confusing and difficult provision in the Internal Revenue Code.

Ministers often argue that they should receive a Form 1099 because the church cannot withhold FICA taxes on the minister. While it is correct that the church cannot withhold FICA taxes on ministers, the minister can still get a W-2 without the church doing any withholding.

FRINGE BENEFITS

A person who receives a 1099 is considered to be an independent contractor under

the tax laws. The new form 1099-NEC actually stands for “non-employee compensation.” But consider this: Would you provide a parsonage or a housing allowance to a non-employee? Would you provide health benefits to a non-employee? Would you contribute to the retirement plan of a non-employee?

All these benefits are employee benefits and are not eligible to be made available to non-employees. Therefore, if a minister is receiving a housing allowance, for example, the minister should receive a W-2, rather than a Form 1099-NEC.

TAX ENFORCEMENT

Recently, among Church of God ministers, as well as ministers in other denominations, the Internal Revenue Service has taken the position that such employee benefits (ministerial housing, healthcare, retirement, etc.) provided to a non-employee, regardless of their ministerial status, is taxable income. Such has not only created additional tax liability for the minister but has also put the church in the position of having to defend the tax treatment of members of the church’s staff. Severe penalties can be levied by the IRS if an employee is inadvertently treated as a 1099

independent contractor when in reality, they should be considered a W-2 employee.

BOTTOM LINE

A minister of the gospel who is on staff of a church, regardless of their position, should receive a W-2 from the local church annually. For that minister to receive ministerial benefits, such as housing allowance, retirement contributions, and healthcare benefits, just to name a few, he or she must be treated as a W-2 employee. Those benefits are not available to 1099 independent contractors.

Finally, evangelists or visiting ministers, who receive more than \$600 cumulatively in a year from a church, must be provided a Form 1099-NEC. These “visiting ministers” are the only ministers who should receive a 1099 from a church.

To learn more about these tax issues, review the Minister’s Compensation Manual and our other free resources at <https://www.benefitsboard.com/manuals>. ■

Art Rhodes is president and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the Benefits Board are not engaged in rendering financial advice, legal advice, or other financial planning services.



CREMATION: The Believer's Option?

THE INTERNATIONAL Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, neither suggests nor mandates any certain procedure for body interment. Burial practices are left to the discretion of the believer and their cultural pattern. The intention of this article is to provide information to assist individuals prior to and during the difficult event of death.

Does the believer have options for interment of the body other than earth burial or placing in a mausoleum? The question appears to be asked on a more frequent basis as the percentage of cremations to burials has increased significantly in many countries. In the United States, the National Funeral Directors Association's "2016 NFDA Cremation and Burial Report" recorded a 32.3% of cremations in 2005 with a projected 51.6% in 2017. This is much lower than the 68.4% of cremations in Canada in 2009. However, in the previously mentioned report, the NFDA has projected the United States percentage to be 71.1% by 2030.

"International Cremation Statistics 2014" reveals even higher rates of cremation. Consider this random sampling: Japan (99.9%), Nepal (95%), Taiwan (92.5%), South Korea (81.6%), Denmark (76%), Sweden (70%). Reason for this will be addressed later in the article.

Any consideration of the believer's option must begin with asking, "What does the Bible teach?" There is no defined statement on the means to be followed. We understand that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. They house the soul and spirit during life. There is dignity in human flesh in spite of its not being immortal. It provides the means for us to accomplish the will of God here on earth and worship our heavenly Father. God made human bodies from earth (Genesis 2:7) and upon death they return to the earth. In the future, believers expect a bodily resurrection. We will be then clothed in a glorified physical body without all the limitations of being human. In 1 Corinthians 15:15-49, we are provided with the most detailed

statement of the bodily resurrection. Yet, “the exact process by which God will physically resurrect the decomposed and scattered bodies of the faithful is not fully explained” (David Jones, “To Bury or Burn? Toward An Ethic of Cremation” *JETS* 53/2 (June 2010) 335-47). Occasionally, individuals express concerns as to how there can be a bodily resurrection for those who have been consumed by animals, burned by fire, or disintegrated by explosions. Athenagoras, a second century apologist in Athens, offers a perspective on this in his *On the Resurrection of the Dead*. Having indicated it is the divine power which initially gave shape to our bodies he then responds to the ability of the same power to bring together the unrecognized and give life to what had no life.

That same power can reunite what is dissolved, and raise up what is prostrate, and restore the dead to life again, and put the corruptible into a state of incorruption. And to the same being it will belong, and to the same power and skill, to separate that which has been broken up and distributed among a multitude of animals of all kinds which are want to have recourse to such bodies, and glut their appetites upon them.

The bottom line continues to be that there is no limitation of God’s ability to fulfill His word regardless of the setting which brings death to a believer.

In Scripture there are numerous references to earth burial and caves being used

for tombs. Abraham’s family members are buried in the cave (tomb) he purchased upon Sarah’s death (Genesis 23:3-18; 25:9; 35:29; 49:31; 50:13). The burials of Joshua (Joshua 24:30), John the Baptist (Matthew 14:12), Lazarus (John 11:17, 18), and Jesus (John 19:38-42) provide further examples. These examples are not to be seen as biblical mandates for burial practice, but rather reflect the cultural patterns of that time.

Not to be overlooked are the references to cremation or at least partial cremation. None of them are part of a positive environment (1Samuel 34:11; Amos 2:1-3; 6:8-11). There is also the punishment of Achan which included bodies and possessions being burned (Joshua 7:15, 25). Once again, these examples are not to establish funeral practices. They simply record events which occurred in an environment of desecration and judgment.

A brief historical review indicates a contrast between the Judeo-Christian view which places value on the body due to an emphasis on the resurrection and the pagan religion’s concept of annihilation, no life after death. In modern times various atheists have chosen cremation in their ill-fated attempt to prove there is no God.

The Christian commitment to earth burial is especially emphasized during the reign of King Charlemagne, ruler over the Franks (768-814), when cremation was declared to be a capital offense punishable by death for those who cremated a body. In the latter 19th century (1886), the

Roman Catholic Church officially banned cremation in canon law. Seventy-seven years later (1963), this ban was lifted by the Second Vatican Council. Then in 1997, U.S. bishops were given permission for cremains to be part of a funeral mass. Protestant churches have tended to be rather silent concerning burial practices as their members and adherents regularly have chosen earth burial. At the time of committing the body to the ground, the familiar phrases, “dust to dust, ashes to ashes” or some close variant were spoken and then followed with an emphasis on the resurrection.

When viewing the various world religions, it is quite obvious that their theological positions determine the burial practices. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism all practice cremation. Islam strictly forbids it. Judaism vehemently opposes cremation and will not allow cremated remains to be placed in a Jewish cemetery. The Jewish *Mishnah* states that cremation is an unacceptable heathen practice.

Further consideration must be given to an understanding (definition) of cremation and the reasons for its growing popularity. We begin with a short explanation of the process. The body is taken to a crematorium where it is placed in a furnace and incinerated at temperatures which vary between 1400 to 2100 degrees. This vaporizes the skin, flesh, and muscles leaving only the skeletal remains which are then

pulverized. This fine dust (cremains) is then disposed according to the deceased or family members wishes. They may be placed in an urn within a columbarium, scattered at a special place, even placed in several smaller urns or types of jewelry so every member of the family can have their sense of memory and closeness.

Special note needs to be included here. Cremation does not mean there can be no funeral or memorial service. Rental caskets are available so the deceased’s body can be viewed to further emphasize the reality of the death and a regular funeral observed. Or, a memorial service can be held with the urn of cremains or a picture of the deceased in the location where a coffin would normally be located.

Reasons for the growing popularity of cremation are multiple. A major one is the lesser cost of cremation in comparison to a regular funeral. If direct cremation is chosen (no services), the cost is greatly reduced. In both settings there is a cost reduction of thousands of dollars.

Another reason for cremation stems from there being limited cemetery plots. In some countries with limited land areas, it is impossible to have earth burial for all of its citizens. Even when coffins are stacked in burial plots the problem persists. Some countries stack coffins in a burial setting and after a set period of time cremate them. Cremation becomes preferable in highly populated areas in which burial plots are extremely expensive or many miles out into

the country. It also relates to family plots which want to be used for generations but are restricted by limited space.

A third reason which some present is that burial pollutes the earth. Decomposing bodies leak into the water system. This problem is easily handled by the use of sealer coffins and burial vaults. However, not all areas in the United States and other countries have this requirement.

The fourth reason for consideration relates closely to the first one. Cremation simplifies the funeral process. No need to select a coffin or burial plot (which is traumatic for some families). There is no need for a processional to the interment location which is becoming more difficult in heavy traffic areas. All this in turn results in reduced costs to the family.

Not to be overlooked is the perspective of the deceased's family. Some have great difficulty in accepting the vaporization and pulverizing which is part of the cremation process. Because of this it seems vital for the choice to be discussed with family members and all coming to an agreed conclusion. Decomposition over a period of time appears to be the desired, normal process for them. (Even though cremation can be viewed as simply speeding up the process.) It is also important to be aware of the laws concerning cremation in your area. Does the deceased's will stating cremation supersede the family's wishes? In the case of the death of a parent, do all the siblings have to agree to the cremation? These

questions are easily answered by one's chosen funeral director.

So we return to the initial question. Is cremation an option for the believer? From a biblical perspective the answer is "yes." As believers, we know that after living a Christ-exalting life and finishing our earthly existence, we have the assurance of a bodily resurrection regardless of how our earthly body has been put to rest. When it comes to the final interment of one's body, that decision rests with the individual and one's family. ■



Written and submitted to the Doctrine and Polity Committee of the Church of God by Dr. Jerald Daffe, Lee University professor and member of the D&P Committee.

The Church of God Doctrine and Polity Committee is a group appointed by the International Executive Committee consisting of ministers, university and seminary professors, and theologians. The group is engaged in continual examination and dialogue of cultural issues as it relates to Church of God beliefs, core values, and Practical Commitments. The D&P Committee has undertaken the task of addressing some of the most pertinent and frequently asked questions of today and are continually releasing their research. Each issue has been scripturally vetted and presented for clarification of the current Church of God polity stance.

The D&P Committee has presented nearly 20 papers, which may be read and/or downloaded at churchofgod.org/doctrine-and-polity-papers/



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Tim Hill, General Overseer

The Day the Lord Said: “Shut It Down; I Want You Back!”

(Editor's Note: The following is an article from the “Let's Talk About It” series by General Overseer Tim Hill. To read more of his thoughts in this series, please visit www.letstalkaboutitbytimmhill.com.)

I WILL NEVER FORGET a particular morning when I arrived at my office at the church I once pastored. The word busy does not come close to describing my life at the time. I preached at three services on Sunday, hosted media ministries, traveled to various speaking engagements, and as Paul alluded to it in 2 Corinthians 11:28, had the daily care of the churches.

I had a lineup of staff meetings and other “urgent” appointments that day before a major board meeting that night to discuss construction changes to a new multipurpose facility we were building. Honestly, when I walked into the office

door, prayer and quiet time with God had not even crossed my mind. I am sure I had no clue how spiritually distant I had become. I was still preaching well, or so I thought. People were being saved, and the church seemed to be experiencing a good rate of growth. Yet, I would soon be reminded that “good” is not the same as “God.”

My head was buried in my work, when seemingly out of nowhere I heard some words strongly spoken in my spirit: *“Shut it down; I want you back.”*

I was stunned and could not shake off what I was hearing. I mostly walked around in silence the rest of the day and the better part of the week. It was so obvious, my wife, Paula, noticed and inquired about my demeanor and mood. After some time of trying to work through it in my mind, I decided to seriously search my life. I went back and listened to recent sermons I had preached at our church. The

structure was there along with the jokes, anecdotes, and songs. The applause was loud, and the organ was always on time to emphasize the particular point I was trying to stress. But I knew—I knew—it was performance, not power.

RESPONDING TO THE CALL

I became overwhelmingly thankful that God had mercy on me and the people during that time of blunt and lost edges. With the words “I want you back” branded on my heart, I decided to spend a night in the church to seek the Lord. This would be the beginning of a series of repentant actions I would take to regain the edge. Other intentional actions would follow “I remembered that the Holy Spirit had said, “Shut it down.” I began trimming down my “good things” list, and then I began dedicating myself to finding and doing the “God things.” I shut down radio programs, TV programs, and speaking engagements. I learned that I could delegate counseling to someone much more qualified than I was. I also learned that I was not called to be a frustrated building contractor; I was called first to be a disciple of Jesus. Next I was called to be a devoted husband and father, and then a pastor whose chief responsibility was to be spiritually alive so that I could better equip the church I served.

Like the young student prophet of 2 Kings 6, who lost his ax blade, sometimes you just have to stop everything and recover your effectiveness again. That experience taught me that the time taken to sharpen the edge is made up later in greater productivity for God’s purposes. If one never stops to invite godly intervention, things will only get worse.

TAKING A SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

At some point, one has to take a spiritual inventory.

- What were you doing when you noticed something was missing in your life?
- Were your habits hindering your productivity?
- Was the company you were keeping or possibly the entertainment to which you were giving yourself displeasing the Lord?
- Have you learned how to ignore the Holy Spirit’s conviction and turn a deaf ear to the spiritual alarms going off in your heart?

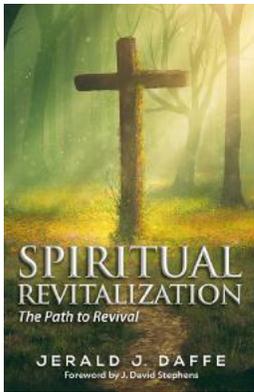
The joy of serving the Lord is lost when we incessantly attempt to experience success by swinging at our problems with the blunt end of a static relationship with God. ■

Book Review:

Spiritual Revitalization: The Path to Revival

PATHWAY PRESS recently published Dr. Jerald Daffe's newest book—*Spiritual Revitalization: The Path to Revival*. Dr. Daffe is currently a professor of pastoral studies at Lee University.

This book offers a unique look at today's Church and its need for spiritual



revitalization, along with historical glimpses of past revivals and revitalists. Chapters also include the means, evidences, and hindrances to revitalization. A distinctive of the book is the inclusion of perspectives on

revival presented by ten different ministers and their experiences of renewal.

Spiritual Revitalization: The Path to Revival is a culmination of Daffe's own experiences in two "genuine" revivals and research spanning a 30-year period.

According to Daffe, Pathway Press General Director David Ray suggested he revisit the topic several years ago. "My

decades of research, the other articles I had published, as well as my work with a spiritual revitalization task force, all came together with this new book," said Daffe.

Daffe's previous works include his book *Revival: God's Plan for His People* and a 36-lesson study titled, "Learning From the Great Revivals" for the Church of God Ministerial Development office. During his time at Lee, he has had 10 books and 70 articles, booklets, and independent fully-manuscripted studies published.

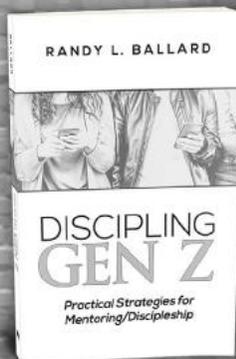
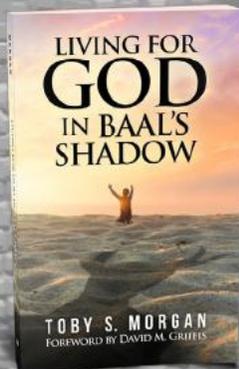
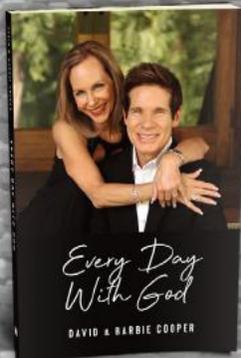
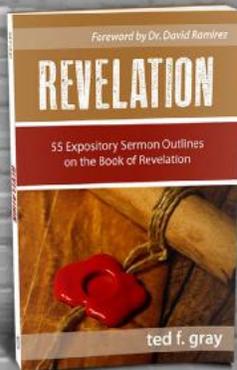
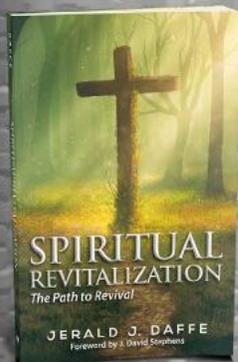
Daffe has been teaching at Lee since 1987. He teaches classes such as Message of the Old Testament, Introduction to Preaching, Ministry of Preaching, and Pastoral Ministry I and II. His areas of specialty are revivalism, worship, Church of God history, and the Emerging Church. He was a recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award at Lee in 1990 and the Excellence in Advising in 1999. Daffe has also been published extensively by Pathway Press, and he is a member of the International Church of God Doctrine and Polity Committee.

Daffe said, "My hope and prayer is that after reading this book, the reader will be encouraged to lead believers into a spirit of revitalization which renews entire congregations and results in bringing unbelievers into the kingdom of God."

Daffe's book is available at Pathway and on their website at pathwaybookstore.com/item/spiritual-revitalization/.

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CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

*Abbreviated news from faithnews.cc between January 10, 2021 and May 10, 2021.
To link to the entire article, click on its title.*

Thousands Participate in Global Ministers Meeting

February 19, 2021, Cleveland, Tenn.—

General Overseer Tim Hill led an online event designed to appeal to Church of God ministers around the world with an update on events, ministries, and resources available during this unprecedented period.

Following Scripture reading and prayer, Hill opened the two-hour session with a ten-minute address that highlighted the following five points: (1) Reflecting on Our Path, (2) Reporting Our Progress, (3) Resourcing Our Pastors, (4) Reiterating Our Priorities, and (5) Reinforcing Our Partnership. Hill took the occasion to encourage and uplift the more than 4,000 pastors, ministers, church leaders, and laypersons who joined the livestream, which took place on Wednesday, February 17 at 2:00 p.m.

Two, five-minute updates were given on the state of the economy and potential legal issues associated with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Secretary General John Childers gave a brief report on the state of church finances, while each member of the International Executive Committee gave announcements and updates from their divisional portfolios.

Also making presentations were David Blair, director of Youth and Discipleship, and a Special Order of the Day from Director of World Missions David Griffis, who briefed the

online audience with ministry highlights from around the globe.

Former General Overseer Paul L. Walker Passes Away

February 24, 2021—Dr. Paul L. Walker, one of the Church of God's most influential leaders,



passed away on February 23, 2021 at the age of 89.

Walker, perhaps best-known for his nearly 40-year leadership as pastor of the Mt. Paran Church of God in Atlanta, was

elected to the highest office of general overseer for the Church of God in 1996. In a nontraditional move, Walker's ministerial colleagues elevated the popular leader to the post straight from the pastorate at the General Assembly of 1996. Walker served the full term of four years, from 1996–2000, being reelected general overseer in 1998.

Following Walker's tenure as general overseer, he became chancellor of Education for the Church of God, serving four years in the role until being reelected to the International Executive Committee of the Church of God as third assistant general overseer in 2004. He

served two years in that role and was elected secretary general in 2006 where he served for two additional years.

General Overseer Timothy M. Hill stated, "I learned much from Dr. Walker through his books and sermons originating from his pastorate at Mt. Paran. To be able to sit with him for four years on the International Executive Committee is a cherished experience that I shall always remember. His work and ministry as General Overseer of the Church of God was anointed by the Holy Spirit and brought strategic direction to our movement. My thoughts and prayers are with the Walker family as we honor the memory and ministry of this wonderful Champion of the Faith."

[Church of God Releases Statement Regarding Equality Act](#)

March 1, 2021, Cleveland, Tenn.—The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed H.R. 5— the "Equality Act." This action was anticipated and expected. Under the Act, sexual orientation/gender identity will be recognized as a civil right, as are race, national origin, and other factors.

Last year, in the 116th Congress, a version of the Equality Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives but was not considered by the U.S. Senate. This current version of the Equality Act will now be advanced to the U.S. Senate, where it will be taken up for consideration.

Numerous factors of the Act as passed are cause for concern. The Act is very broad and sweeping in its coverage and will affect many areas of life in the United States, such as schools, businesses, healthcare organizations,

and also churches. The very definition of how we view sexual orientation and gender identity will be challenged. In particular, there will be a definition of "equality" which is not consistent with our sincerely held religious and Biblical beliefs. Our beliefs in this area are not based on our personal or societal beliefs, but upon our interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and how we should live. Our concern with the Act is not personal, but Biblical.

We believe that we are living in the last days, and we desire to walk according to the dictates of God's Word and His manner of living. Our prayer is that God will intervene and direct our nation in these crucial and trying times.

[David C. Blair Memorialized](#)

March 29, 2021, Cleveland, Tenn.—The funeral for Dr. David C. Blair, international direc-



tor of Youth and Discipleship for the Church of God, was a fitting tribute to a life and ministry dedicated to serving youth.

Hundreds gathered on Thursday, March 25, to remember

the life of Blair who passed away on March 21, 2021, following a brief bout with Covid-19. The unexpected passing of the 56-year-old leader prompted a massive outpouring of remembrances and tributes on social media, as well as during the celebration of life, conducted at the North Cleveland Church of God, a place where

Blair spent nine years of his early ministry as youth leader.

Opening the ceremony was Rev. Eddie Jones, who reflected on years in the early 1990s as a member of Blair's original youth group at North Cleveland. Secretary General of the Church of God, John D. Childers, who had a close working relationship with Blair, shared a lifetime of "Blairisms," quips and quotes attributed to the late leader.

David Blair's brother-in-law, Rev. Brett Jarriel, represented the Blair family. He was followed with a tribute by Church of God General Overseer Timothy M. Hill, who, like Childers, spoke of the loss of not only a powerful and effective working relationship and contributions by Blair to the Church of God, but also of a personal friendship.

The celebration of the life of Dr. David Blair concluded with a keynote message from Rev. Kevin McGlamery, a member of the International Executive Council for the Church of God.

David Blair was preceded in death by his mother, Jo-Ann Carlton Blair, who passed away last year. He is survived by his wife, Janet, and their two children, Brittani and Bruce, daughter-in-law, KaLea Blair, and grandson, Charlie Blair.

Robert L. Bailey Commissioned Director of Youth and Discipleship

April 14, 2021, Cleveland, Tenn.—Rev. Robert "Rob" Bailey, elected as the assistant director of International Youth and Discipleship for the Church of God in 2016, was officially installed in the director's role during a com-



Rob and Christal Bailey are commissioned by the Executive Committee and others.

missioning ceremony on Wednesday, April 14, 2021. The brief ceremony took place as a Special Order of the Day during the regular monthly meeting of the International Executive Committee.

Bailey assumes the role following the unexpected death of Director David C. Blair, who passed away following a brief illness on March 21, 2021. The commissioning prayer was led by General Overseer Tim Hill who was joined by members of the International Executive Committee, coordinators in the Department of Youth and Discipleship, Randall Parris and Mark Swank, as well as Mark Leonhardt, chairman of the Board of Youth and Discipleship. Other members of the Board joined the ceremony electronically via Zoom.

“Rob Bailey’s commitment to the youth of the Church of God has been exemplified through his years of proven leadership and dedication to the Jeremiah Generation,” stated General Overseer Timothy M. Hill. “I have full confidence in his ability to lead Youth and Discipleship through this very trying period as we continue to mourn the passing of David Blair. Greater days are yet in store for this ministry!”

[Lee Celebrates Walker’s Presidential Inauguration](#)

April 26, 2021, Cleveland, Tenn.—Lee University formally inaugurated Dr. Mark L. Walker as its 17th president on Friday, April 23.

During his inaugural address, Walker expressed his hopes for the future of Lee. He also addressed five commitments on which the university will focus: (1) Mission



Mark Walker at his inauguration on April 23, 2021.

Excellence, (2) Academic Expansion, (3) Student and Community Engagement, (4) Program Innovation, and (5) Ministerial Development.

“Lee University’s mission of preparing students for responsible Christian living in a complex world is vital to our society today,” said Walker. “We are sending forth light-bearers into all fields of endeavor to lead and serve like Christ for the betterment of all humanity. The world is a better place with Lee students in it.”

Walker succeeds Lee Chancellor Dr. Paul Conn, who served as the university’s president for 34 years, making this the school’s first inauguration ceremony since 1986, the fifth formal in the school’s history. Walker began his presidency in August, but because of the pandemic, official celebrations were postponed.

Prior to his presidential appointment, Walker served as vice president for ministerial development and chair of the Department of Christian Ministries at the university for three years. Before that, he served as pastor at Mount Paran North Church of God for 25 years. He also served on Lee’s Board of Directors for seven years.



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"We will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord. We will tell of his power and the mighty miracles he did." Psalm 78:4 (NLT)

Dixon Pentecostal Research Center

Celebrating 50 Years of Ministry

"On behalf of the Church of God Executive Committee, I want to congratulate and commend you on this wonderful fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center. What a wonderful flow of ministry you have been to so many people that have been helped by the resources you have made available."

—General Overseer Tim Hill



The purpose of the Pentecostal Research Center is to preserve for future generations those things of the past that have made us what we are.

*—Charles W. Conn, Litt.D.
Founder and first Church Historian*

As the official Church of God archives, we preserve the story of what God has done through Church of God fathers and mothers, we continue to add historical treasures and faithful voices to our collections, and we welcome ministry partners who enable us to preserve and pass on the Pentecostal heritage to our children and grandchildren until He comes.

*—David G. Roebuck, Ph.D.
Director and Church Historian*



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