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Churches Bless Schools, Families as Fall Semester Dawns

By Carl Stagner



BACK-TO-SCHOOL HAIRCUT AT BEDFORD FIRST CHURCH OF GOD.

Teachers making final preparations for their classes, students dreading the end of summer, parents adjusting to new routines, and school buses on the streets again (drivers, be carefull!)—it can only mean one thing: *it's that time of year again!* School is back in session or will begin again soon across much of the country, signaling a community-wide shift from one season to the next. Sometimes that shift can be anything but smooth for families, just as it can be for teachers, administrators, and staff. We celebrate the Church of God congregations across the country that recognize the need and do what they can to meet the need. School supply drives, special prayer gatherings, and "back-to-school bashes" are just a few of the ways

numerous congregations are coming alongside schools and families as the fall semester dawns.

In Phoenix, Arizona, Mountain Park Church completed a school supply drive for the elementary school located just around the corner. An estimated 600 pounds of paper, glue sticks, backpacks, scissors, pencils, and other staple supplies were donated by the congregation leading up to a late-July deadline. At that point, multiple large bins were delivered to the school. As part of the church's "Radius" ministry, where they do whatever they can to bless their neighbors within a mile radius, the church has found annual blessing in donating school supplies. Greg Battle, outreach pastor, reflects, "It's about being neighborly. We just

Churches Bless Schools...

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want to help out as much as we can, and our congregation always responds well to the challenge. It was a blessing to see the school's gratitude when I made the delivery on behalf of the church."

A popular outreach this time of year is commonly dubbed the back-to-school bash. At Community Church of God in Clio, Michigan, the leadership found a creative way to pull off yet another important community ministry—they delegated responsibility to the younger generation! The youth are hosting the bash this year, which includes a variety of fun games for students in a grand finale event of the summer. As an outreach, admission is free—sort of; a school supply donation grants access and, at the same time, blesses students in need. Similarly, four hundred miles south of Clio, Bedford First Church of God in Bedford is also blessing local students. They just concluded their "Love Week Celebration," which involved school supply donations (410 bags of supplies, 180 backpacks, and lots of new clothing), but also gave away donations of a different kind—haircuts. In total, some 75 haircuts were donated, giving kids a tangible boost of encouragement to grateful recipients as the first day of school loomed close.

In California, the Church of God congregation in Inglewood, known as Center of Hope LA, is really taking the "back-to-school bash" concept to a new level. Encompassing the whole first weekend of August, fun activities are scheduled late into the evening on Friday, all day Saturday, and Sunday, too, including water games, worship, and moments of intentional prayer for local schools. Like an abbreviated summer camp,



FAMILIES LINE UP FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL BLESSINGS AT BEDFORD FIRST CHURCH OF GOD.

their back-to-school bash captures the attention of their community while shining the light of Christ.

Back-to-school events have occurred in various forms at Pendleton Community Church of God in Pendleton, Indiana, over the years. A few years ago, the church decided to try something different. They'd done a needs assessment of the community and discovered that many other churches were already providing school supplies and clothes for students and schools. "Those needs were already being met, and our small congregation recognized a great opportunity," Ryan Kellam, lead pastor, explains. "The teachers, school employees, and adults who work in the schools

are on the front lines of some of the greatest spiritual battles that students and families fight, and they don't need more school supplies. They need prayer! They need the Holy Spirit actively working in their lives."

So, the church has opted to hold a community prayer night instead. "Our prayer night is all about helping our teachers, school employees, and families prepare spiritually for a new school year," Ryan explains.

As highlighted in a recent CHOGnews article, our Dayton area congregations are still loving their communities in the wake of the Memorial Day tornadoes. Salem Church of God canceled their annual VBS to allocate funds instead for two community block parties, at which school supplies will be distributed, especially for families displaced by the tornadoes. Hopeland Church has done a tremendous job collecting brand-new school supplies, backpacks, and shoes. Together, Salem and Hopeland have demonstrated unity and selfless love as the hands and feet of Christ in their community.

How might *your* church come alongside the families and schools in your neighborhood?

Learn more about the Church of God at www.JesusIsTheSubject.org.



NUMEROUS OTHER CONGREGATIONS DO SIMILAR MINISTRY. THIS IS BAYSIDE – SAFETY HARBOR, FL, LAST YEAR.

Louisiana Church Planter: “The Struggle is Real”

By Carl Stagner



STEPHEN NELSON AT AWAKEN'S EASTER EGG DASH AND CUPCAKE GIVEAWAY.

Church planting is not for the faint of heart. Attendance ups and downs are normal. Emotional peaks and valleys come standard. Starts and stops are rocky, and twists and turns are plentiful. It's a roller coaster of an experience and, as Stephen Nelson of Awaken Church, in Natchitoches, Louisiana, explains, “The struggle is real...but God is faithful!” With candor and confidence, Stephen opens up a window to the challenging but life-changing world of church planting as he's experienced it over the past few years.

Eight-and-a-half years as a lead pastor and ten as an associate could not fully prepare him for the role of church planter. Even after reading all the books and articles on the subject he could, as well as engaging in dialogue with church planters and leading church multiplication experts, there were still several things he could only learn by experience. This learning experience,

though challenging, has proved eternally rewarding in a myriad of ways, even as it has stretched him farther than he could have possibly imagined.

“I think I was pretty good as youth pastor,” Stephen recalls. “I was pretty good at preaching and as a senior pastor. I've definitely been a man of prayer, but this has been a wake-up call. I've got to completely depend on God! The more I spend in prayer, the more I realize I need to spend even more time in prayer. I've got to connect with God!”

When the predominantly white and predominantly black state assemblies of the Church of God in Louisiana merged in early 2014, one of the first united actions they took was to get the process going on church planting again after years of starting no new congregations. Stephen greatly admired the unified assembly's new heart for multiplication. He'd had conversations with trusted advisors about the possibility

of church planting, even as he initially wanted to simply be part of a church that supported it, taking an active role in the multiplication process. As it turned out, God had planned for Stephen and his family to “parachute” into Natchitoches, begin building relationships, and launch a church, essentially from scratch.

So, Stephen and his family hit the ground running.

“Wherever I could make connections in the community, I did,” Stephen recounts. “I immediately set up a website and Facebook page. I printed cards that pointed back to our website where visitors could read about our vision. I started connecting with people; one thing about the South, it's easy to strike up a conversation. But one thing about the South, everybody's already got a church.”

Of course, that doesn't mean everybody's walking with the Lord. The culture reinforces the idea that going to church is a good idea (even if it's just Christmas and Easter). “We'd tell them our vision,” Stephen recalls, “and they'd say how great



AWAKEN CHURCH “CRAWFISH BOIL” OUTREACH.

Louisiana Church Planter...

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it was and how their community so desperately needs that. 'But we already have a church,' they'd say."

By the end of August 2016, Stephen and his wife Shelly concluded they'd made a sufficient number of connections to host their first get-together. As the deserts were prepared and the coffee was brewing, anticipation was mounting for a special evening with new friends and new opportunities. Time came for the event, an hour-and-a-half passed, and nobody showed up.

"We were kind of down," Stephen reflects. "But we prayed, 'Okay, God, this is your thing, so what should we do?'"

God answered right away and prompted them to take all the deserts to the local school for the teachers as a gift. They did just that, receiving a warm welcome from the teachers. "So, it turned out to be a great initial way to connect with the school," Stephen explains.

Through a connection with another Church of God in Louisiana, a college student at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches got connected with Stephen and Shelly. The African American female brought friends with her and asked if they could come back weekly for Bible study. Soon the original four morphed into twelve black female students coming every Thursday night to this white pastor's home to dig into God's Word. It wasn't what

Stephen had imagined—it was, in many ways, better! All the while the college ministry continued, the Nelson family continued to reach out into their community.

One man visited from the local United Methodist Church, building a bridge to future gatherings at their coffee shop facility at no cost to Awaken. Some growth took place, but very little. "We found that unchurched people didn't want to go to a church building, and certainly not on a Sunday night," Stephen explains.

While the growth didn't happen like they'd hoped, they continued to build relationships and win the favor of others around them. The Methodist church even told the

promotion of all kinds, but basically all we got to join us were the college students."

But it wasn't all bad. In fact, there was much good that came out of yet another learning experience for these parachute planters. "The preview services didn't draw the crowds, but helped our team learn how to plan and execute worship services together. They turned out to be practice for what would soon become a week-to-week experience."

The church still hasn't grown a lot, but they celebrate what God has done. Five to six families now come on a regular basis since the church started weekly gatherings at the movie theater in October 2017.



AWAKEN CHURCH GAME NIGHT.

They've developed disciples and leaders from within, including their worship leader. The college ministry is flourishing, even as one of the young ladies has launched an officially recognized campus program and calling it the name of the church—Awaken.

So, what have they learned, even as their story continues

Nelsons that if some of their congregants wished to be a part of Awaken's worship gatherings, they would welcome that. They year 2017 came and Awaken held three "pre-launch" services—two at the Methodist church, and the third one at a movie theater. But even these events were a bit disappointing, too.

"The preview services didn't give us the 'bang of the buck' we were looking for. We did the flyers and

to be written—even as the struggle is real, but so is their great God?"

"Door-to-door doesn't really work," Stephen explains. "These days, people just don't want you knocking on their doors. The new 'door-to-door' does work, however, and that's wherever there's WiFi in a public setting—coffee shop, sandwich shops, even the library. I'll wear a T-shirt with the church name on it and have a book like *JesusB*.

Louisiana Church Planter...

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on the table and someone will ask me about either one.”

Stephen continues. “The main thing that hit me pretty quick was that there’s no built-in system for families when you start a church plant. You accept the pastorate at an established church, even a small church, and you probably have at least a nursery facility and, often, at least one other child. You have friends you can make immediately. Even most church plants these days start with seven to ten core families to help. Don’t take this for granted. It took us almost three years to develop these relationships.”

Then there’s that roller coaster experience. “Nothing really prepared me for the ups and downs of church planting,” Stephen explains. “One minute, you get to tell someone about your vision, and you start flying high, and the next thing you know, you never hear from them again. We’re conditioned to focus on numbers and finances, but I’m learning that our church is a healthy little group. God is doing some



MARDI GRAS BEADS GIVEAWAY
(WITH CHURCH INVITATIONS!)

great things in and through us, and that’s healthy, spiritual growth.”

Prayer, wise counsel, and a supportive spouse are also essential, Stephen concludes. Gary Kendall, who founded Indian Creek Community Church, a thriving Church of God congregation in Olathe, Kansas, coaches Stephen. He couldn’t be more pleased with such a valuable partnership. But his wife has been most indispensable to the experience.

“Sometimes it seems I’m just spinning my wheels, and no results,” Stephen reflects. “Others don’t see the wheels spinning; they just see

you’re going nowhere. She sees the time I’m working, regarding me still as a great daddy and husband. I want to keep my family first. If I let it, church planting could consume every moment of the day. Having my office at home requires setting boundaries. From 4:00 in the afternoon, through the evening, there is no conversation about church....”

God’s hand is on Stephen and his family and, even in the struggle, he wouldn’t have it any other way. “This is God’s idea and not mine,” he concludes. “Therefore, I can trust him and his timing and provision. If he’s got me here to disciple a group of twenty people for ten years, great! If he’s got me here to see something become self-sustaining and plant other churches, awesome! We can’t fully plan what it looks like, but when all we see are the curves, he knows the destination.”

In Louisiana, across North America, and around the world, the Church of God is taking back what hell has stolen. Join the movement. Give life. Donate today at give.jesusisthesubject.org.

Native American Ministry Advances Amid Wild Weather in South Dakota

By Carl Stagner

Two tornadoes have touched down within a few miles of Pass Creek Church of God in Allen, South Dakota, this year. One of them struck during Church of God Convention 2019 and General Assembly, while Tim and Kim Wardell, Global Strategy missionaries to Native Americans, watched the news coverage helplessly, more than 1,800 miles away from home. Though everyone was safe

and overall damage was minimal, the tornado left one family in Allen homeless. While South Dakota is often associated with cold and snowy winters, the state does rank fifteenth in the nation for annual tornado activity. In view of this, and the great need to protect the congregation, locals in need, and work camp guests, the Wardells are looking to the Lord and his church to help them turn a vision into reality.



TORNADO THIS YEAR NEAR ALLEN, SOUTH DAKOTA.

Native American Ministry...

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Thank God for his protection of people and property! Tim says there was a tornado that destroyed one of two mobile homes used as VBS shelters on the church property about seven years ago, but this year's tornadoes still hit too close to home for the Wardells. These weren't tiny twisters by any stretch of the imagination, either. Stunning photographs show the severity of these windstorms and just how close they came to civilian areas. Things could have been much worse.

"People tend to think of snow and very cold temperatures when they think of South Dakota," Tim and Kim explain, "but the summers are just as hot. And, should a tornado hit Allen and damage homes, there would be no doubt that it would affect the community economically. Most of the reservation residents live in homes that they rent from tribal housing. The tribe has no funds to repair or maintain the homes they manage, let alone replace one destroyed by a tornado."



WORK TEAM ASSISTING ON THE CHURCH PROPERTY.

Thankfully, the missionaries launched the Pass Creek Facilities Project in January. The Wardells, who live on the church property, are asking for support to construct a parsonage on a full basement. The parsonage would be available for whomever is in ministry leadership at Allen, and the basement would provide a safe haven for anyone in the area in need of shelter during severe weather.

Tim explains, "The current housing where Kim and I reside now is 486 square feet and is desperate need of repairs. Most of the residences in the area are built with a basement shelter, so our parsonage/storm shelter would only be needed by the few people living in mobile homes or who can't make it home in the storm. We would be able to provide shelter for anyone on the property—church service, Bible study, youth night, etc., if a storm comes through. In the event of a tornado while a STEM [short-term engagement missions] team is serving, the basement would serve as a shelter for them, as well."

Recent close-calls with tornadoes only underscore the urgency of this project. The great news, however, is that no severe weather threat could thwart what God is doing in and through the Wardells and Pass Creek Church of God. Consider their summer VBS outreach.

"There is so much to praise the Lord for," Tim and Kim recount. "After three years of service here, the community is beginning to respond to the gospel and the care that has been provided to them. The Lakota do not bond quickly. They need to see that you are genuine and authentic in your life, that you really believe what you preach and teach—that you care. They are seeing that we do love them, through acts of service, and many walls have been broken down as a result



VBS AT PASS CREEK CHURCH OF GOD THIS YEAR.

of this trust. Our VBS season has been amazing. It has consisted of six VBS weeks and four work teams. We have averaged the mid-sixties in attendance of four- to twelve-year-olds each day. It has also been a success for the STEM teams that come together from multiple congregations to serve together. These teams have made an incredible impact on this community."

To learn more about Tim and Kim Wardell, visit www.chogglobal.org/team/tkwardell. To learn more about, and support, the Pass Creek Facilities Project (# 43.44350), visit www.chogglobal.org, click on Connect, then Missions Projects, where you'll see a link for Native American Ministries.

Trafficklight Partner Remerge Celebrates 20 Years of Ministry

By Carl Stagner

Twenty years ago, Church on the Street emerged in Atlanta, Georgia, radically transforming the way we do ministry to those outside the walls. Church on the Street took church to the people living without homes and beckoned traditional churchgoers into proximity with, and investment in, the lives of persons in poverty. Having become a Trafficklight partner since, Church on the Street never sought to engage the fight against trafficking; still, that fight came to them, and they've responded with holy boldness and love. Reemerging in recent years from the starting point of reconciliation—that is, with God and neighbor—Church on the Street became known as Remerge in 2016. With intentionality, flexibility, and fervor, Remerge enters its

twenty-first year, ready to change hearts from the streets to the suburbs, from underpasses to newly upholstered pews.

Andy Odle officially became the executive director of what is now Remerge in July 2008. Before that, he'd been living in Scotland while working on a PhD. But Andy is no stranger to the organization. When it first launched, Andy was on the ground working with Kurt Salierno,

who founded Church on the Street in 1999. For several years, Andy led the educational programming for the ministry. His undergrad and seminary experience with the Church of God, followed by ordination, nurtured Andy, who had also

deepen our separateness and suspicions of God and our neighbors. This unity is not an other-worldly spiritual unity, but rather manifests itself in relationships and, thus, must be lived concretely in the world—that's holiness. We are not only

interested in personal reconciliation with God and neighbors, but with historical divisions that manifest in systems, cultures, practices, and built environments that demand God's reconciliation and justice."

As the ministry needs have grown and expanded, Andy Odle envisioned an even more holistic vision than what had launched Church on the Street. "If God is in the world through Christ, reconciling it to himself, then our work must align with this believe and worldview," Andy explains. "We hold that if we



CREATING ART FOR THE MUSEUM HOUSED ONSITE BY REMERGE. LEARN MORE AT REMERGE.ORG.

accepted Christ in the Church of God. But nothing could fully prepare Andy for the nontraditional setting of ministry on the streets of Atlanta. And there's nothing Andy would rather be doing today.

"The two hallmarks of our movement, unity and holiness, are central to our work," Andy reflects. "We describe ourselves as reconcilers, helping to connect people across boundaries, erected over time, that

commit ourselves to reconciliation, then that work will necessarily result in communities of peace. Since God is the only one who can make reconciliation happen, our task is to make the conditions favorable for God's work (consider John the Baptist)."

The challenge has been navigating the shifts in culture and finding methods that do just that. Few ministries have dared to do things so

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differently, thinking outside the box and challenging the status quo in a similar fashion. As such, Rmerge finds itself taking risks and learning as they go, all the while desiring their kind of ministry be a model for other cities.

“We are attempting to create something that doesn’t exist, which can also be conceptually replicated in different contexts,” Andy explains. “Guided by a single question—‘What does reconciliation look like here?’ we are experimenting with building an organization committed to moving toward an answer.”

In so doing, Rmerge welcomes the participation and contribution of “the most vulnerable” in the process. They’re not simply coming up with a program from their outside perspective and pushing it on their neighbors in need. It’s a “moving target,” as Andy puts it, and the challenge keeps them on their toes.

So, when they discovered the issue of trafficking was a real factor in their ministry, they moved along with the target.

“Our work, either directly or through partners we are in training or consultation with, has coherence in its central attentiveness to the most vulnerable of neighbors,” Andy explains. “In this world—especially in Atlanta, the central hub for human trafficking in the United States—the trafficking of human bodies, either in sex work or physical labor, will



PRAYER TEAM WALKING THE STREETS OF ATLANTA.



THANKSGIVING MEAL AT REMERGE.

be found wherever vulnerable populations can be exploited. We did not set out to address human trafficking; rather, what we found was that our neighbors were being trafficked and we had no choice but to respond to their suffering and the context that created the problem in the first place. This reality led us to learn from and listen to our friends who were suffering and to those who have spent a lot of time working in this arena. In this learning process, it was also important to maintain our commitment to the larger task of reconciliation and not just rescue.”

Rmerge takes several practical steps to curb trafficking in their context. Creating safe spaces for women, disrupting “business as usual” in settings where exploitation takes place, developing healthy

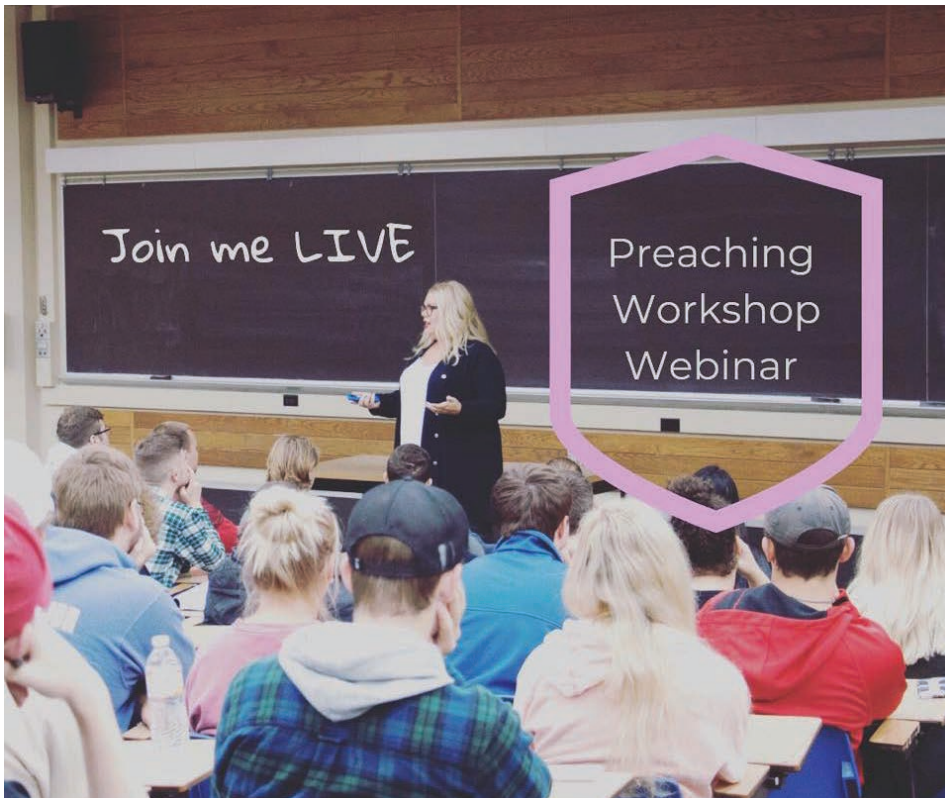
relationships with these women, teaching warning signs, and establishing partnerships with other anti-trafficking organizations, have all helped Rmerge toward this end.

Of course, it’s a process, and there remains much to do. So, for the next twenty years and many more, Rmerge is committed to leading the charge for reconciliation in the Church of God and beyond.

Learn more about Rmerge, and discover opportunities to get involved with their vital work, at www.remerge.org. Learn more about CHOG Trafficklight at www.chogtrafficklight.org.

CBH Cohost/AU Professor Offers “Preacher Girls” New Resource

By Carl Stagner



Women in ministry face different challenges than their male peers. Of course, there's the challenge of equal opportunity in congregations—even in the Church of God. But, another challenge tests the tenacity of women divinely called by God and, at the same time, demonstrates their uniquely gifted abilities to balance multiple assignments. How do these women in ministry, many of whom were called after their college years, find time to hone their craft amid jobs, community involvements, and parenting, for example? Thankfully, a trusted voice in the Church of God now offers a solution: Preacher Girl School. CBH ViewPoint co-host and Anderson University professor Kimberly Majeski convenes the

online experience, led by women in ministry, for women in ministry, all to help take their preaching to the next level.

The six-week course is manageable, affordable, and accessible for any woman called to ministry. Effective sermon preparation and delivery are the goals, and resources include training material, weekly live sessions taught online, one-on-one coaching, sermon review and, as Kimberly puts it, “support of sisters in the trenches with you.”

But what about Anderson University and the School of Theology and Christian Ministry, for which she also teaches? Are they duplicating efforts?

No. “I’m a professor of biblical studies and Christian ministries,” she explains. “I would absolutely

recommend the traditional route of higher education in preparation for ministry. However, many of my friends are in ministry and leadership positions who are also moms, community leaders, PTO presidents, and CFOs, and they are not able to access preparation for ministry through the traditional track. Many of these women have roles where they preach/teach/lead on a regular basis but, for many good reasons, haven’t had the opportunity to learn how to craft a sermon, study Scripture, or connect with a contemporary audience. So, Preacher Girl School is unapologetically for women, by women. It is no secret that the traditional graduate studies have been dominated by men across the generations. Preacher Girl School wants to deliver the same quality opportunity for women in accessible, manageable format, so they are supported, equipped, and encouraged.”

Many of the women who have enrolled at Preacher Girl School already have ministry education and experience. They can still benefit from what Preacher Girl School offers, and already have. “Many of them,” Kimberly explains, “have never had the benefit of a course specifically dedicated to exegesis, sermon craft, and delivery in the female voice.” Even those who have been in ministry for years find the course valuable, if simply to better their preaching or learn other ways to present the Scripture and become familiar with the latest in biblical studies resources.

Sometimes they just need community. This is the most rewarding

“Preacher Girls”...

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part of the experience from Kimberly’s perspective. “The gift of holding space for women who are called is sacred,” she reflects. “The camaraderie of shared experience, common frustrations and barriers, and the blessing of walking through hard things together is extra special for me. I believe our gifts are not just for us, but also for the world. I’m a preacher and I’m a relational

leader. In Preacher Girl School, I get to share these gifts in direct and humbling ways, and that makes it all worth it.”

Preacher Girl School caught the attention of many pastors and laypeople in June, as the new ministry made an already great Convention 2019 experience even better. During the Convention, many were blessed by Preacher Girl School’s Facebook Live video interviews with several women in ministry, two of whom were featured speakers at

the Convention: Lori Salierno-Maldonado and Erin Taylor.

Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) are available through Preacher Girl School.

Learn more about Preacher Girl School on Facebook at www.facebook.com/preachergirlschool (where you can find the Convention 2019 interviews) or at www.kimberlymajeski.com/preacher-girl-school.html.

Dayton Churches Distribute Love in the Wake of Disaster

By Carl Stagner

Memorial Day weekend wasn’t all barbecues and sunshine across the Midwest. Especially from central Indiana to the Dayton, Ohio, area, festivities were cut short on May 27 due to an outbreak of tornadoes, the likes of which most residents had never seen. More than a dozen tornadoes touched down between the state line and the Interstate 75-Interstate 70 interchange, with winds up to 170 miles per hour in the worst twisters, one of which was a half-mile wide. To make matters worse, these storms came after dark and hit many low-income neighborhoods the hardest. Without hesitation, the Church of God sprang into action, offering assistance wherever it was needed. Even since the newness of the tragic events has worn off and the national spotlight on Dayton has dimmed, congregations like Salem and Hopeland continue to distribute helping hands, supplies, and love in the wake of disaster.

Salem Church of God is situated on the west side of Dayton in a



SALEM CHURCH DISASTER RELIEF TEAM REMOVING DEBRIS FROM YARD.

community called Clayton. South of most of the storm damage, the congregation was still affected greatly. Thankfully, only a few homes of families in the congregation sustained major damage. But, on the Sunday immediately following the tornadoes, Kyle Hayes, outreach and missions pastor, posed the following question to the congrega-

tion: “How many of you were impacted directly or know someone close to you who was impacted?” In a signifying response, nearly everyone in the congregation rose to their feet.

Kyle and his wife Jessica, who serves as Salem’s outreach coordinator, weren’t sure what kind of volunteer pool would be available



DESTRUCTION IN DAYTON AREA AFTER THE MAY 27 TORNADOES.

Dayton Churches...

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right away, as widespread power outages persisted. The next day, when the city of Clayton asked Salem Church of God if they would help distribute water through the Red Cross, they were blown away by the response. Jessica explains, “People responded immediately. We had volunteers passing out water from our parking lot for three days straight.”

Of course, water distribution was only one of many aspects involved in disaster relief for Dayton. Debris cleanup was an imminent need, with some homes having been partially or totally destroyed (some parts of homes have never been located). Volunteers came in droves to support their community. One of the church’s biggest “Serve Days” was the one that took place after the tornado disaster. At one point, Jessica explains, “Authorities had to turn people away because there wasn’t enough room for all the volunteers.”

Additionally, the church raised \$20,000 over the weekend follow-

ing the storm, even without much advertising. \$5,000 more has come in since, and Ohio Ministries of the Church of God has collected an additional \$25,000 for relief efforts. Salem has coordinated eleven service projects in the weeks since, tallying up some 1,300 hours of community service.

Few locals had ever experienced a disaster like this one. Kyle had been to Panama City, Florida, on a hurricane relief trip and had witnessed firsthand what weather can do, but neither Kyle nor Jessica had ever seen it happen in their community. Though they wouldn’t have chosen the means, Kyle explains there has been a lot of good coming out of this.

“One of the biggest blessings after the storm has been seeing

Dayton come together,” Kyle says. “We now have outreach partners we didn’t have before the storm. We now continue to work with non-profits we simply didn’t know about, and it’s kind of been a silver lining.”

The other opportunity the church has seized is the chance to get acquainted with more of the neighborhoods. “We were invited into homes and people’s front and



DISASTER RELIEF TEAM PRAYS JUST OUTSIDE SALEM CHURCH OF GOD.

backyards, meeting people we would have never met otherwise, and spanning across racial divides,” Kyle explains. “Because of how the

storm’s path affected everybody, our congregation partnered with a predominantly black church across the street from us and will continue to partner with them.”

Moved by the Spirit, the church allowed the disaster to disrupt their

Dayton Churches...

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normal summer routine. Vacation Bible School, as it would have normally taken place, neither seemed appropriate nor helpful for the community Salem is called to serve. Leadership decided to cancel the usual VBS experience at the church and will instead host two community block parties in August as a part of the church's month of intentional community service projects—"Love Does." One will take place in the heavily damaged and lower-income neighborhoods of Trotwood. The other will take place at Hopeland Church, a sister Church of God congregation on the north side of Dayton. One of the primary thrusts of these block parties will be to

distribute back-to-school supplies, especially for families displaced by the tornados. Because, though the news about the Dayton tornadoes has died down, disaster relief could be ongoing for two or more years. Few understand the importance of this like Hopeland Church.

Through Facebook, Pastor Joel Burton of Hopeland has communicated the urgent and ongoing need of the community. He says volunteerism was strong at the outset, but it has started to wane. The survivors of the storm are displaced, some living in apartments, others in hotels, others out of the area with relatives, and others are choosing to remain in uninhabitable homes damaged by the tornadoes. They're collecting brand new school supplies, bookbags, shoes, and

monetary donations with the goal of distributing love—in the form of 15,000 backpacks and 5,000 new shoes.

They, along with Salem and other local churches, will not forget that this disaster relief effort is a marathon, not a sprint. They will continue to walk alongside local families as they make the transition into permanent, safe housing, all the while distributing the love of Christ by whatever means possible.

Visit www.salem.church/tornado for more information on the disaster relief efforts of Salem Church of God. Visit www.jesusisthesubject.org/disaster-relief for more information about how the Church of God movement responds in the wake of disaster.

Pastors Partner to Plant Urban Church, Reach Diverse Demographic

By Carl Stagner

Two are better than one, especially when it comes to church planting. Perhaps nowhere is this more abundantly clear than at United City Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, where Josh Wagner and Keith Spencer share the pastoral responsibility. Yes, one pastor is white and one is black, and this is intentional—they've set out to be a diverse congregation; leadership must reflect the congregation they want to be. But it's not a forced partnership. A common mission binds the dynamic duo, and they don't just love each other with the love of Christ—they like each other! By learning each other's strengths, passions, and gifts, they've discovered how to maximize their unusual but effective leadership for the glory of God and the betterment of their city.



KEITH AND JOSH LOVE DOING MINISTRY TOGETHER.

Josh and Keith actually knew each other long before United City Church came to be, though not on a very deep level. At about age sixteen, Josh was attending Camp

Warren in Illinois and Keith was a counselor, about four years older. Later, Keith would become acquainted with Nonni (would ultimately marry Josh) when Keith and Nonni

Pastors Partner...

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were in the Chorale together at Anderson University. Friendship—and a kingdom partnership—truly began when Josh sent Keith a message on Facebook, asking if he might be interested helping realize the vision God had given Josh for a new, intentionally multiethnic church in the heart of Indianapolis. This sparked a dialogue, which lasted a year before their church planting partnership was sealed.

Everyone knows most churches have one senior pastor and, depending on size, associate pastoral staff, too. But some Church of God congregations across North America have found a co-pastor model beneficial. A co-church planter model is probably a bit rarer, but Josh and Keith have found ways to work with each other while avoiding stepping on one another's toes. Of course, this doesn't mean they see eye-to-eye every time.

"Speaking of the two-pastor dynamic," Keith reflects, "I think it really works well, though we're complete opposites in many areas, including personality. One of the reasons it works well is I actually like the guy! So, we can have a contentious conversation about an issue but, at the end of the day, we still want to hang out and watch a football game together! Plus,

my areas of weakness tend to be Josh's areas of strength."

Keith's relational strengths make him a perfect fit for city engagement, pastoral care, marketing, and leadership of discipleship and

consultations, community-relationships building, marketing, teach meetings, and "preview" services, which not only provide a feel for community engagement to-date, but also allow the entire launch team the chance to practice conducting worship services. It's grueling and seemingly never-ending, but it's all worth it in the end.

"Really, our heart is for radical hospitality—loving all people as image-bearers of God," Josh explains. "That's why the name, United City. We're creating a John-17 kind of environment united around love in order to worship the Lord. With "city" in the name of the church, we're communicating that we're not just for the city, but we're with the city."

In determining a location for the church plant, the team looked at several factors, including proximity to other Church of God congregations and demographic diversity. Desiring a diverse

congregation, they landed on the very diverse northeast side of the city. Adding to United City Church's unique role in this neighborhood, they're looking especially to reach "unchurched" and "dechurched" people. Whether hurt or disenfranchised by the institutional church, the United City team is dedicated to listening, caring, and showing them the real Jesus.

"We're seeking to restore authentic community," Josh explains. "We want to be about relationships that



NONNI AND JOSH WAGNER WITH KEITH SPENCER AT CONVENTION 2019.

social groups. Josh, who received the vision for the church, continues to cast vision and leads the church forward. Josh also bears the brunt of the preaching, but not all of it.

United City Church officially launched in October 2018. Obviously, the work is very new, but the pieces of the puzzle have taken several years to put together. Besides the cementing of the pastoral relationship, the exhausting task of what is called "pre-launch" involved a number of partners, supporters,



JOSH WAGNER TEACHING AT UNITED CITY CHURCH.

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bring life. Twenty-seven percent of millennials say they deal with loneliness. Twenty-two percent say they don't have a best friend. This is a huge piece for us to address."

Keith adds, "You look at our culture, what's going on—battles racially, battles between different groups...it's easy to live in our own communities with people who live, look, think, and do like us. They're searching today where they can truly connect. You get a glimpse of it happening in bars. People are looking for community, and they were created to be in community. We live in the most connected times ever—think social media—but also the most disconnected. So, in everything we do, we're trying to bring that authentic community."

One of the innovative ways they do this is through their three categories of small groups. Groups focused specifically on discipleship and learning are called soul groups. Groups dedicated to mission are called serve groups. And the most unique one, social groups, have absolutely no agenda other than to hang out. The dechurched population, in particular, is far more likely to connect with a church in these low-pressure social group settings.

Of course, you never know when the Spirit's going to move.

"One dude was having a nightmare every night and shared about it at a social group setting," Josh recounts. "We prayed for him right then and there, and he told us later that he stopped having those dreams."

These are the kinds of experiences that affirm for Josh and Keith that God has them right where he wants them. The same is true for the people who come to Christ and get baptized. One especially meaningful baptism was of a thirty-five-year old man who had strayed from God for seventeen years. His parents had been praying for him desperately to return to faith. These parents were overjoyed to witness their prayers answered at United City Church on Easter Sunday.

If two are better than one, then three—and more—are even better. The United City leadership team has continued to grow, bringing on several key individuals to support their ministries, including Church of God Ministries' own Ann Brandon. Ann, who serves Church of God Ministries as executive director of

operations and innovation, serves weekly on the church's hospitality team, helps set up the rented worship space, prepares the coffee and tea, welcomes guests, and preaches on occasion. As part of the leadership team, she helps Josh and Keith develop strategy for care and outreach, teaching series, and events.

"I learned about United City over a year before I was involved when Josh and Nonni Wagner shared about it at the Indiana Ministries meeting," Ann explains. "I thought then, 'Wow, that sounds great!'...I want to be a part of a community that acknowledges the struggles of our culture, lives out the hope of Christ, and wants to be a voice for the oppressed, marginalized, and excluded."

One conversation led to the next, and Ann was hooked. When asked what has blessed her most about being a part of the church planting experience through United City, she beams: "Seeing the enthusiasm and gratitude of new believers. Watching a diverse team really lean into their gifts and invest day-in and day-out in difficult work...I have found a home with this family and with this faith community!"

Please pray for God's kingdom to advance through United City Church. Pray for even more diversity and unity. Pray for spiritual growth.

Pray that they stay on mission and are blessed financially to continue the work. Thank you!

Learn more about United City Church at www.unitedcity.net. Learn more about Indiana Ministries and their church planting efforts

at www.indianaministries.org. Learn more about the Church of God at www.JesusIsTheSubject.org.



ANN BRANDON

New Jersey Church Faithful in the Face of Adversity

By Carl Stagner



VOLUNTEERS FROM HIGHLAND PARK ASSIST LOCAL COMMUNITY FOR VETERENS.

Sometimes, on the scale of size and influence, smaller churches can feel insignificant. The truth is that the impact of the smaller churches among us cannot be overstated. The Church of God in Gloucester City, New Jersey, for example, has a rich history of impact for the kingdom. Highland Park Church of God also has benefited from pastoral longevity; as senior pastor Bill Dilks prepares for retirement later this year after twenty years, associate pastor Debra Conner surveys the faithfulness of Highland Park, encouraging the congregation to press on in ministry during this time of transition. Through community partnership, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the New Jersey church believes God will do many more amazing things in their midst. But they're not waiting for some elusive big breakthrough to live out their pur-

pose—Highland Park carries on the work of the gospel, even in the face of adversity.

Before Pastor Bill, the church had a couple short-term pastors, but prior to that, a pastor that remained for three decades. These men proved faithful to the call and faithful to the flock God called them to shepherd. Likewise, the congregation has proved faithful to the ministry, even in a difficult ministry setting and a time of transition that has only just begun.

Eighty to one hundred people attend Sunday gatherings on average, and many of the Church of God congregations in the region are relatively small. Even as a smaller church, they rejoice in strong men's and women's ministries, as well as a solid youth program. But Pastor Bill and Pastor Deb have both indicated the tendency to feel isolated from the rest of the Church of

God movement, which is why they were especially blessed when the Regional Convention came to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 2016. But the real challenge for Highland Park isn't the connectedness to other Christians, but effectiveness in meeting the needs of their community.

Situated across the Delaware River from Philadelphia and adjacent to Camden, the struggles that major cities often face are also the struggles of the church's community, Gloucester City. "Drug abuse, crime, a welfare mentality, and other issues are a real concern here," Pastor Debra explains. "There's significant brokenness, and we want to help. They need to know there's hope for them, that there's life for them, that there's a God who knows and loves them. Our church has always been a serving church, but one where people come and we serve them. Now we're finding ways to go to where the people are and serve them, but the challenge, which has also been a blessing, is identifying the needs of the community and determining how to meet those needs."

In the case of identifying needs, they jumped at the chance to do something about the number of young women facing the dilemma of unplanned pregnancy. Ready to make a difference in their community, they instituted a program of national reach. The programming and resources were vast, but the young women did not show up to the church. Recognizing other opportunities, they found the strategic value of partnership as some church members got involved in an established outreach with

New Jersey Church...

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similar goals. Young women (and families) were already coming to this local ministry, especially those who might have otherwise been hesitant to step foot in a church building. Instead of giving up, the church adjusted their strategy and remained faithful to this specific calling. By doing so, they were unexpectedly blessed, themselves.

This local outreach welcomed a gentleman who had recently lost his wife and his home. Through the new connection to Highland Park Church of God, the man brought his four-year-old daughter to vacation Bible school. One thing led to the next, and this man found help and hope through the church's GriefShare ministry—another vital ministry of the church—and the family is now a part of the congregation.

So, instead of reinventing the wheel, Highland Park is looking at other ways to support established ministries. "Right now," Deb explains, "we're looking at ways to support efforts to curb drug abuse. Obviously, that's a nationwide problem, but we're finding so many



MEMORIAL DAY PICNIC AT HIGHLAND PARK CHURCH OF GOD.

young people dying just in our small city. I think the challenge is really assessing the needs, and how we can effectively reach out and touch those lives with the love and provision of Jesus. When we do that, it's the greatest blessing. Seeing people come to us lost and grieving but finding hope and a relationship with Jesus—that's so awesome!"

Since the church has entered a new season of transition—one

they've not experienced often in their history—they request prayer. "I know God is already at work for someone to come and lead this church," Debra explains. "We're praying for the right leadership to take us into the next season as a church. Please pray with us as we continue to find ways to meet the needs of our community in the meantime, getting more young families involved, and pointing everyone to the love of God who can heal the brokenness."

In New Jersey, across North America, and around the world, the Church of God is taking back what hell has stolen. Join the movement. Give life. Donate today at give.jesusthesubject.org.



HIGHLAND PARK'S YOUTH MINISTRY, ANOTHER VITAL PART OF WHAT THEY DO.

Healthy Steps Toward Becoming a Missionary

By Nate Tatman



NATE AND STACY TATMAN

I have worked in the local church for the majority of my adult life. For the last eight to nine years, I have overseen global missions and local outreach. Through my experience as a missions pastor, I can honestly say I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to Christians who feel called into missions.

My experience is not just limited to the church in which I have served for the last twelve years. I have had the privilege of working with pastors from all around the country, from different denominations, movements, and networks. This collective experience and knowledge required Stacy and I to pursue healthy decisions when the time came for us to say yes to missions. What were those decisions and steps? I've compiled a list below that I hope is helpful for other pastors, missionaries, or any-

one who is thinking about or feeling called into missions.

Seek outside counsel.

A calling from God cannot be discerned alone. But, you must seek counsel from those outside your friends and family. Sometimes those closest to us have a difficult time being objective. Mentors, coaches, and other leaders in your life who know you and can speak objective truth are typically best-suited to help navigate the details of what you are sensing in a calling.

Take your time.

It took months to discern whether this was the right move for us. We had multiple conversations with our mentors, peers, family, pastors, children, potential bosses, and others. We prayed, processed, and deliberated, ultimately feeling confident this was a calling and not just a

change for the want of adventure or something new and exciting.

Give up control.

Putting your future in the hands of others is difficult, but necessary. Besides, becoming a missionary is not about you! It's about the people, culture, and ministry that you will be inserted into. It is vital that you work through a sending agency that knows the needs on the ground and whether or not this will be a good fit. We gave ourselves over to the leaders of Three Worlds and our sending agency, Global Strategy, the mission arm of Church of God Ministries.

Take assessments.

Honestly, it will feel like removing duct tape from a flesh wound, however this is one of the healthiest steps you can take. At times, you will feel naked, vulnerable,

Healthy Steps...

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and weak when going through an assessment debrief. However, you will come out of it feeling equipped, empowered, and confident in how God has created you and wired you for the work he has prepared for you. Nevertheless, it will expose some things that you will have to work on in order for him to work through you. Our assessments and debrief were done by Greg Wiens of Healthy Growing Leaders and Truewing.

Get a fundraising coach.

If there is one reason people don't enter the mission field, it is this—fundraising. However, if you get the right coach to walk you through the process, you will not only have the confidence to raise support, but also the proper language and perspective to go through it. We used Tailored Fundraising.

Enjoy the ride.

You will have the tendency to rush through all these steps, wish away the months before your departure, and miss the journey of “leaving well.” Enjoy all the “lasts”

before you leave—house projects, family time, holidays and birthdays, etc. As it is in all of life, it's not about the destination but the journey in getting there.

Become trained for cross-cultural work.

We have not gone through this yet, but we will in June 2020. As a missions pastor, I can say with confidence that this has got to be the most critical step that some missionaries skip. I have seen ministries, families, and marriages destroyed, damaged, or delayed due to the lack of pre-field training. There are many reasons given for not taking this step—it's not necessary, we're eager to get to the field, it costs too much, it takes up time—but this is absolutely essential. We are registered for COMPASS at Missionary Training International next summer.

Trust your agency.

At the end of the day, these are the experts, or at least they are more expert than you. This also assumes you are working with an agency. If you are thinking about not going with an agency—stop it! And no, the local church cannot assume the workload that an agency can provide.

Have a sending church.

Several churches will support and partner with you in ministry, but make sure you have a sending church. This is a church that is full of people who know you, love you, and care for you. That doesn't mean all the work or expectations of missionary care should fall on one church or their church staff, but that personal connection with a sending church body will give you the launch and ongoing connection and encouragement you'll need. Our sending church is County Line Church of God located in Auburn, Indiana.

This isn't an exhaustive list, but if you are considering missionary service or walking alongside someone who is, these are some great things to think through. Blessings on your journey!

Nate and Stacy Tatman were commissioned at Convention 2019 and General Assembly in Orlando, Florida, in June, as associate regional coordinators for Europe and the Middle East through Global Strategy. Learn more, and discover opportunities for support, at www.chogglobal.org/team/nstatman.



GLOBAL STRATEGY

CHURCH OF GOD MINISTRIES

From the Archives: The Covenant of Mission

By Maurice Caldwell



“But to each other and to God eternal trueness vow” is a line from a song which celebrates a covenant. When we sing the songs of our pioneers, we echo the covenant concept which permeated their lifestyle. Their songs and their writings contain the authentic accent of covenantal relationships.

Our ancestors understood, also, the *purpose* of their covenant. They talked about “circling the globe with the truth.” In every generation the church has poured out into the world a multitude of people who have caught the vision and the spirit of God’s mission. Church of God outreach into sixty countries today is based upon the continuing desire to be faithful to clear New Testament guidelines.

On different occasions, Jesus spoke about *a great commandment* and *a great commission*. We are instructed to love our neighbor. And we are told to go make disciples. Is one teaching more important than the other? Are they identical? Or do they belong together?

It was my privilege to participate

in Bible studies led by an English Christian, Dr. John R. W. Stott, at the “Urbana 76” Student Missions Convention. An articulate Bible expositor, he was one of the framers of the Lausanne Covenant (1974). In his conferences and recent books, Dr. Stott is helping this generation to grasp the deeper meanings of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, and their inseparable relationships.

Mission and love

Is it possible that some Christians have given too much attention to the Covenant of Mission, and neglected the Covenant of Love? Certainly we all agree that the *whole church* is under obligation to share the *whole gospel* with the *whole world*. But we should not consider the Great Commission as the only instruction which Jesus left us. He also stressed the obligation to “love your neighbor as yourself,” and called it “the second and great commandment.” It is second in importance only to the supreme

command to love God with all our being, and is more fully treated in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus insisted that in God’s vocabulary, our neighbor includes our enemy, and that to love means to give ourselves actively and constructively in meeting human need.

The Great Commission adds a new and urgent Christian dimension to the requirement of neighbor-love and neighbor-service. If we truly love our neighbor, or course we will share the Good News with that person. We cannot claim to love others if we know the gospel and keep it from them.

An equal demand is that if we truly love our neighbor, we shall not stop with evangelism. It is an incomplete gospel that shows concern for the soul only, or for the body only. It is a handicapped gospel which attempts to consider the body-soul in isolation from society.

As Dr. Stott states, “God created man, who is my neighbor, a body-soul-in-community. Therefore, if we love our neighbor as God made him, we must inevitably

be concerned for his total welfare, the good of his soul, his body, and his community. Moreover, it is this vision of man as a social being... which obliges us to add a *political* dimension to our social concern.

“Humanitarian activity cares for the casualties of a sick society. We should be concerned with preventative medicine or community health, as well, which means the quest for better social structures in which peace, dignity, freedom, and justice are secured for all men. And there is no reason why, in pursuing this quest, we should not join hands with all men of good will, even if they are not Christians.”¹

Jesus spoke frequently about love, and about its expression in self-giving service. The gospel lacks visibility if it is reduced to verbal proclamation only, and it lacks credibility if we fail to apply it to people’s total needs. The basis for our acceptance of the social dimension however, is not to give the gospel visibility or credibility, but simply to express Christlike compassion.

The Great Commission is found in all four Gospels and in Acts. The

cumulative emphasis seems to be placed on preaching, witnessing, and making disciples. But the commission indicates an obligation to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded, including social responsibility.

Called to be servants

Our mission, then, must be one of service. Too often we North Americans tend to be bosses rather than servants. As servant people, we can find the right combination of evangelism and social action. The recovery of the radical biblical tradition will bring about the integration of spiritual and social renewal.

Another aspect of Jesus’ mission which we must parallel in our mission is being sent *into the world*. Dr. Stott observes, “He did not touch down like a visitor from outer space, or arrive like an alien bringing his own alien culture with him. He took to himself our humanity, our flesh and blood, our culture.... And now he sends us ‘into the world,’ to identify with others as he identified with us (though without losing our Christian identity), to become vulnerable as he did.... We seldom seem to take seriously this principle

of Incarnation....”²

The implications of Jesus’ example are inescapable. As the Lausanne Covenant expresses it, “We affirm that Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as the Father sent him, and that this call for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world.”

Maurice and Dondena Caldwell gave their lives to missions in the Church of God, serving in Mexico, Brazil, and Spain. Among other notable pursuits, Maurice also taught Spanish for Anderson University for twelve years.

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¹ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975).

² *Ibid.*

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