

NOV. 2019 • IN THIS ISSUE

Unconditional Love Defines,
Directs Regional 2020
Host Church 1

Growing Spokane Church on Front
Lines of Freedom Fight 3

Art Exhibit Enhances Church's
Day of Prayer for Persecuted
Church 5

Canadian Church Invests in Kids,
Seeks Community's Welfare 7

"Progressive" Revival Strengthens
Unity Among Central Ohio
Churches 9

English + Spanish + Arabic =
3 Congregations Under 1 Roof 10

CHOG in Northern Brazil Grows
at "Incredible" Pace, More Pastors
Needed 12

Haiti Hospital Stays Course
Amid Civil Unrest 14

Callen Compiles General Assembly
Comprehensive History, Reference
Guide 15

Church of God Raises \$25,000
for Dorian Disaster Relief 16

From the Archives:
Remembering to "Say It!"
(by Robert H. Reardon) 17

**Christ's Birthday
Observance 2019 is
Almost Here!**

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Unconditional Love Defines, Directs Regional 2020 Host Church

By Carl Stagner

What drives the arms of the heavenly Father to welcome back the prodigal son? What brings the wanderer out of long-term drug rehab and back into fold? What then transforms him and ultimately calls him to pastor one of the most influential Church of God congregations in the country? What motivates those under his leadership to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and care for the orphans and widows in their community? What causes them to add tremendous hospitality, for the Church of God movement next June, to their already full ministry plates? At Madison Park Church of God in Anderson, Indiana, the answer is no secret. It's *unconditional love*.

Visit Madison Park online or in person and you'll be confronted with this statement, written, spoken, and lived out: "You are loved—no matter what." It's only natural, of course, for one who has received such love to pass it along to others. And that's what happened to Paul Strozier, senior pastor for the past four years, when he was in his mid-twenties. "I was raised in a Christian home and accepted Christ and his call as a child," Paul recalls. "However, I ran from him in my teen and early adult years before coming back, following a stint in long-term rehab from drug addiction."

How wide, long, high, and deep is the love of Jesus! It was this uncondi-



MADISON PARK LIVES OUT THE LOVE OF CHRIST LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY.

tional love shown at First Church of God in Vero Beach, Florida, that re-opened Paul Strozier's eyes to the love of his Father in heaven, teaching him more fully the way of Christ and giving him opportunity to serve and grow. After several years of experience in worship leadership and associate ministry in Birmingham, Alabama; Dayton, Ohio; and a senior pastorate at Meadow Park Church of God in Columbus, Ohio, Paul Strozier and his wife Mariann followed the Lord's leading to Madison Park, succeeding now general director of Church of God Ministries, Jim Lyon.

Unconditional Love...

continued from page 1

“The phrase, ‘You are loved—no matter what,’ has become the heart of our mission in Madison County and beyond,” Paul explains. “People need to know about the absolute and unconditional love of God through Jesus Christ. When we can dare to believe that God loves us, we can accept by faith that he has saved us, and we can trust him to transform us. God’s love changes lives!”

Paul should know; it changed his. And through the wide variety of ministries of the church he leads today, God’s love continues to change lives.

“We’re seeing God at work not only at Madison Park, but at wonderful Jesus-centered churches throughout our community,” Paul reflects. “Madison County has had some challenges, but God is reclaiming this community as his own—taking back what hell has stolen. The addiction recovery community is stronger than it has ever been. People are working together to address poverty and homelessness. Madison Park Church has recently adopted a hunger initiative to work together with other congregations and agencies throughout our community to address food insecurity in

over 25 percent of our population. We’re also transitioning our adoption agency to a broader ministry of orphan care, supporting foster and adoptive families. Plus, we have a ‘Next Gen’ team making an enor-



MADISON PARK CHURCH OF GOD CAMPUS EXTERIOR.

mous difference in the lives of our children and students. People of all ages are accepting God’s love and committing their lives to Jesus. We believe this is a wonderful time to live, serve, and love Jesus here!”

Madison Park Church of God is no stranger to the broader Church

of God movement. For many in the movement, coming back to Anderson for the Regional Convention next year will be more like a homecoming. Still, there are sure to be others who are new.

Pastor Paul Strozier

and the Madison Park family look forward to welcoming everyone, and doing so with unconditional love.

“We are grateful to be part of the Church of God, and consider

it an extraordinary gift to host our brothers and sisters from across the movement,” Paul concludes. “Our prayer is that we may, in some small way, provide a refreshing respite for everyone who gathers at the Regional Convention next summer. We want every person to sense God’s Spirit as we gather and to be reminded of God’s love. As a pastor who serves on the front lines every day, I know what a smile, a hug, or a warm welcome can do to encourage your soul and refresh you for the wonderful work God has called us to do. Our staff and congregation love the fact that we get to provide the setting in which God’s Spirit can move among God’s people!”

The Regional Convention in Anderson, Indiana, is scheduled for June 24–26, at Madison Park Church of God. For details all three Regionals and to register, visit www.chogconvention.org, where more event details will continue to be posted as they emerge.



PAUL STROZIER

Growing Spokane Church on Front Lines of Freedom Fight

By Carl Stagner



PASTOR RANDY HOOD PREACHES AT NEW HORIZONS COMMUNITY CHURCH.

The status quo isn't good enough for New Horizons Community Church. Whether you're talking about the congregation itself, the progress in the fight against human trafficking, or the condition of their surrounding community, the Church of God congregation on the northwest side of Spokane, Washington, believes God has more in store. So, as they finalize preparations to enhance their fifteen-acre property, they've determined not to pull back forces from the front lines of the fight for freedom. Instead, they're all the more resolved to support anti-trafficking efforts to the point of putting other pursuits on the back burner.

"We first began hearing about sex trafficking in the United States about eight years ago from a documentary," Pastor Randy Hood explains. "I remember, as I watched,

feeling emotionally crushed that this could be happening in the states, including Washington State."

A few years later, Randy connected with a young pastor from another part of the state, who informed him that his ministry had met with a youth who was, tragically, being trafficked by her own family. "He began to see the problem was much bigger than the one student," Randy explains, "and tried to approach the town leadership." Sadly, the town leadership was reluctant to act, wanting instead to protect the town's image. That town's motivation is all too common.

God kept stirring in the hearts of

Pastor Randy and the congregation on the issue of modern-day slavery. Only about four years ago, the church learned from within that sex trafficking is a painful reality in Spokane itself. They also learned then about a "grassroots" ministry, based in Spokane, trying to do something about it. The Jonah Project, as it's called, actively seeks, rescues, and restores victims of human trafficking, while spreading awareness of the prevalence and severity of the problem. The parachurch organization has exploded in impact, with the number rescued from trafficking now approaching three hundred.

"We at NHCC have been convicted that there are a lot of important and powerful ministries in Spokane and around the nation and world," Randy explains. "One very positive thing is that sex slavery is not a political hot potato. It seems to be a concern of everyone. I was excited when I first heard of the Church of God movement's involvement a few years ago. So, after time spent in prayer, this underfunded ministry in

Spokane became a high priority for us. We have even decreased our funding of other missions for the sake of this need."

New Horizons Community church not only provides financial support for the Jonah Proj-

ect, but also offers volunteers for a few of the services the ministry provides. Knowing the cost of what the ministry does, and the limited funding available, some church



Growing Spokane Church...

continued from page 3

volunteers help raise funds. Others help by providing meals for the safe houses. Another volunteer, who got involved with the Jonah Project because of New Horizons, serves as an advocate of a trafficked youth at a local safe house. Some in the church have considered participating on “extraction teams” to physically rescue victims—for safety concerns, little information is available beyond this fact. Indeed, the front lines of the freedom fight is not for the faint of heart.

“We are realizing that this kind of ministry can quickly burn people out,” Randy reflects. “They are putting their lives on the line. We feel that supporting them spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and sometimes financially is the least we can do.”

Randy and his wife have felt a personal calling to “come alongside” the Jonah Project’s founder Aaron Tilbury, and his wife Bindi. Aaron, Bindi, and the Jonah Project are overwhelmed by the support.

“The way Randy and New Horizons responded,” Aaron explains, “is even more powerful than [financial support] because they really engaged the issue. They learned about it. They let it impact their hearts...which means they can pray for a group of people their hearts truly ache for, and not just pray against the statistics. This makes them more able to empathize with others and be better at loving...and more equipped to share the gospel with people who need to know Jesus.”

Aaron’s call to courageous Christianity hearkens back to church history. He’s reminded of historical accounts of the growth of the church as believers physically rescued children, especially those with disabilities, from being thrown out and burned with the trash. “We got dirty,” Aaron explains. “And then we’d take the children into our homes. These children, that nobody else wanted, have always been at the core of who we are, and to Jesus they are beautiful. God’s heart hasn’t changed. The question is whether or not ours have.”

Jesus has rescued us. Will the



NEW HORIZONS IS ALL ABOUT THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF JESUS.

church be his hands and feet to rescue others? “The opportunity to be Jesus to the world is no more open than in the issue of modern slavery. At every time in this nation’s history, the pursuit of freedom has been led by the gospel. Right now there are no social programs solving this. There aren’t organized and efficient government programs or resources. And the trauma we’re talking about is heavy. That’s exactly why the church has a role to play. This darkness can be conquered by love!”

As New Horizons Community Church and the Jonah Project advance spiritually farther into the enemy’s territory, they’ve got their eyes fixed on a bold and innovative new project. In a similar fashion to the Underground Railroad of the mid-19th century, the “Freedom Railroad” would connect churches across the country—known as “HUBS”—to rescue, safely relocate, and restore victims of trafficking.

*Learn more about the Jonah Project at www.jonahproject.org.
Learn more about Trafficklight at www.chogtrafficklight.org.*



AARON TILBURY TEACHING AT NEW HORIZONS.

Art Exhibit Enhances Church's Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

By Carl Stagner

Before this year's General Assembly resolution about prayer for the persecuted church ever passed, the next International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church was already on Pastor Mark Martin's radar. Maiden Lane Church of God in Springfield, Ohio, had already made the November observance an annual occurrence, but this year's event took on a life of its own, raising the bar for years to come. Leading up to the first weekend in November, Maiden Lane Church of God transformed their activities center into a prayerfully interactive art exhibit, wholly dedicated to the persecuted church across the globe.

"When we first began observing the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church," Pastor Mark explains, "we would simply acknowledge it and have a time of prayer. But each year it has grown in emphasis and we've moved it to the point that it's the focus of our entire Sunday. This year, it just so happened to take on a grand scale!"

That grand scale came in the form of an art exhibit, portraying images and brief biographies of fourteen martyrs of the faith. "Faces of the Martyrs: An Interactive Art Experience" is the personal collection of Christian artist Julia Armstrong, whose masterpieces hadn't



PARTICIPANTS OF THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE WALK THROUGH THE EXHIBIT.

ever "gone mobile" until this point.

"One of Julia's family members attends our church," Mark explains. "I'd never heard of her or her work, but was told about her collection of art depicting Christian martyrdom. I thought it sounded interesting and reached out to her. In our conversation, the

moment I realized the significance of what she had done, I instantly asked her if there was any way she could come and bring her exhibit to Maiden Lane on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. She'd never done this kind of thing before, and previously only had the collection on

display back in college when she'd completed the work for her education. At the time, I had no idea how we were going to pull this off, but I knew we had to try!"

At Maiden Lane Church of God, each portrait was suspended from the ceiling of the gym, rather than on easels. Spotlights were hung from the ceiling to illuminate only the art, while the rest of the room remained dark. As a result, the faces appeared, quite appropriately, as lights in the darkness. Pastor Mark Martin credits members of the congregation who have an artistic gift for determining how to so effectively display Julia's work.

From 9:00 until the 10:30 Sunday morning worship service, and following the service until 1:00 in the afternoon, the art exhibit was open to the public. But it was more than an art exhibit; it was an interactive



PORTRAIT OF A MARTYR AT MAIDEN LANE CHURCH OF GOD. CREDIT: JULIA ARMSTRONG.



PASTOR MARK MARTIN INTERVIEWS ARTIST JULIA ARMSTRONG.

Art Exhibit...

continued from page 5

prayer experience unlike the church had ever experienced. From portrait to portrait, visitors walked through the space, reading about each martyr, following a printed prayer guide, reflecting on the experience through journaling, and praying for the persecuted church around the world. A table was set up for guests to learn about the ministry of Voice of the Martyrs. Prayer bracelets and prayer commitment cards were available to inspire and challenge visitors to keep praying for the persecuted church beyond this special day. The opportunity to make a donation was also given, and the funds collected will provide Christmas care packages for children in the persecuted church. Pastor Mark can't describe adequately how excited he is that an estimated 90 percent of those in worship on November 3 also participated in this prayer experience. The Spirit moved, tears flowed, and feedback indicates that lives were forever changed.

During the worship service, in addition to prayer for the persecuted church, Pastor Mark interviewed Julia about her art and her heart. He delivered a message called "The Sin We Must Not Commit," based on 1 Samuel 12:23, "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you" (NIV). Songs also supported the theme and mood of the meaningful morning.

"Prayer is the pulse of the church," Mark concludes. "If our prayer life is missing, we don't have a pulse. If you don't have a pulse, you're in danger of dying. When it comes to praying for the persecuted church, I'm reminded how, in some ways, the American church has tended to live in a bubble. It's like we're not as aware as we should be with what's happening in the broader body of Christ around the world. They don't need to hear from us as much as I think we need to hear from them. I think they have something we need to know about what it means to follow Jesus. Being more aware that we're part of a global family is important, even as our global family

is suffering. When one part suffers, the rest suffers, too. This year's observance of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church turned out ten times better than we could have imagined. From a discipleship standpoint, it has been one of the most impactful things we've ever done."

Pastor Mark Martin and Maiden Lane church posted images and corresponding bio of the martyrs depicted by Julia Armstrong on Facebook each day for the fourteen days. Follow along at www.facebook.com/MaidenLaneCOG.

Missed the opportunity on November 3 to pray, as a congregation, for the persecuted church? It's not too late. Observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church any Sunday in November! Learn more here about the 2019 Church of God General Assembly resolution on prayer for the persecuted church at <https://chognews.org/2019/10/03/movement-to-pray-for-the-persecuted-church-this-november/>.



Canadian Church Invests in Kids, Seeks Community's Welfare

By Carl Stagner



PASTOR KEVIN (FAR RIGHT) HOSTS THE DEDICATION OF THE CHILDREN/YOUTH AREA.

Compared to some of the major metropolitan destinations across Canada, the isolated city of Swift Current, Saskatchewan—population 18,000—may seem insignificant. But there's really nothing insignificant about the community, home to Eastside Church of God, a thriving congregation actively making Swift Current a better place to live, work, and raise a family. Under the visionary leadership of Pastor Kevin Snyder, and without compromising their Jesus-centered message, the church has dealt a serious blow to the forces of darkness as they've reclaimed territory—including actual property—from the clutches of hell.

Though a relatively small city, Swift Current isn't immune to drug addiction. Big cities tend to offer more things to do, which, when utilized, can keep kids off the street. Swift Current has fewer options, so Eastside Church of God took bold

steps to fill the void by reclaiming for Christ a 9,000-square-foot bar and pool hall. Today their youth center, now its own fully functioning entity, employs a staff of five and serves the needs of more than three hundred students per week. The youth center's full-time counselor provides tutoring and connects youth with mentors and social services, as needed. The impact of the youth center has been remarkable, but so

have the variety of other ministries Eastside carries on a regular basis as salt and light in Swift Current.

From GriefShare to DivorceCare, Eastside Church of God's got it. But the ministry that Pastor Kevin is especially pleased that the church has launched is called Fresh Hope. Fresh Hope is a ministry specifically designed to address the needs of persons dealing with mental illness, an issue churches often choose to ignore or simply aren't equipped to handle. "The Fresh Hope ministry isn't big," Kevin explains, "but it's exciting because of its impact on our community. When you realize that 20 percent of our society across the board is facing a mental illness of some kind, or has faced mental illness at some point, we wanted to be able to do something about it. But, until recently, we weren't able to adequately support that. Fresh Hope is Christ-centered, but the message is, 'We get it, and we want to support you.'"

By offering a variety of programs that meet real needs of their city, Eastside has become more than a fixture in the community; they've become a widely recognized



PACKED AUDITORIUM FOR WORSHIP AT EASTSIDE – SWIFT CURRENT.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE EASTSIDE CHURCH OF GOD CAMPUS.

Canadian Church...

continued from page 7

resource. Families trust Eastside, too, and this fact continues to have a positive effect on the community's health. Such a pleasant reality didn't happen overnight or by accident, though. Their emphasis on children and youth was, and continues to be, intentional, even as the church's efforts to meet the needs of local young people continue. "We put a lot of financial and people resources into our children's ministry," Kevin explains. "It was a bit risky, but God honored our investment and the ministry started to bear fruit. So, when we came to a position to actually add on to our building, we decided to add 10,000 square feet exclusively for children and youth. This was a strong statement to everyone about our commitment."

It should come as no surprise, then, that their vision includes yet

another exciting addition. "We have long winters up here," Kevin explains. "When it's so cold, there's very little in the community for young families to do during the week, except perhaps spend time at the playground at McDonalds. Our hope is to install our own indoor playground for the community and let families come in and enjoy a safe, warm, and fun environment."

Eastside's shift to an intentional focus on the next generation began several years ago when they began to consider the all-too-common phenomenon known as the "greying of the church." Similar to Barna studies in the United States, a study in Canada called "Hemorrhaging Faith" revealed the



PASTOR KEVIN SNYDER PREACHING AT EASTSIDE.

disturbing statistics of only one in three children remaining in church upon entry into adulthood. "We felt God had positioned us to target younger families," Kevin recounts. "It influenced our programming, our time, and our spending."

Even as Eastside celebrates what God has accomplished in their midst, the congregation is not without its challenges. The isolation of the church and community means some commute an hour to get to worship services. It's hard to connect those who live so far away. Pastor Kevin also prays for a more diverse demographic within the congregation, including a greater acceptance and love for people of every ethnic and cultural background. Eastside has been involved in sponsoring three to four Syrian refugee families, and not everyone has been comfortable about it. But amid the stretching and growing, Pastor Kevin Snyder is praising God for ongoing transformation as they continue to proclaim the message of Jesus and model his ways.

Perhaps this is why Eastside Church of God is making such a difference, locally and globally. In the midst of ethnic, cultural, and political division, Eastside Church of God is a trusted place for grace, and a home for all.

Learn more about the Church of God in the United States and Canada at www.JesusIsTheSubject.org.

“Progressive” Revival Strengthens Unity Among Central Ohio Churches

By Adrian D. Powell



THE COLUMBUS-AREA REVIVAL PASTORS AT KIMBERLY PARKWAY CHOG.

Five Church of God congregations organized and participated in revival meetings at five different locations around the Columbus, Ohio, metro area, in early October. The pastors met for over a year together and had planned to do revival differently than the traditional way, and bring hope to the greater Columbus area, which is home to 2.4 million people. Not unlike a progressive dinner, where you might begin at one location and go to a different house for each course of the meal, the pastors agreed to this kind of unique approach.

They agreed that no pastor would preach or chair the service at their own church. Instead, they would plan to have the opportunity for the different churches to hear and see different preaching and

worship styles. The involved pastors and churches were Rob Watts of Columbus West Church of God; Steve Anthony of Columbus Hilltop Church of God; Iran Watson of Columbus Kimberly Parkway Church of God; Dave Lewis of New Horizons Community Church of God, Blacklick; and Adrian Powell of Faith Community Church of God, Grove City. These congregations span the width of the area from the southwestern side of the city (Faith Community Church of God) to the Northeast (New Horizons Community Church of God).

The first night's service at Faith Community had a great message from Pastor Watts of Columbus West Church of God on the tabernacle of God. He taught how the tabernacle prefigured our relationship to God during the church age. It was a fascinating exposition of the imagery of the glory of God.

During prayer time, a young man about age six asked for prayer for a baby in the congregation named Joel, who was hospitalized with breathing problems, fever, and congestion. Pastor Watson called the young man forward, and the pastors anointed Ryder in proxy for the baby. The congregations knew the Spirit was moving that night.

The following night at Columbus West Church, Pastor Steve Anthony, of Hilltop Church of God, took the fifth point of Pastor Watts's sermon and spoke on sanctification.

Wednesday night saw Pastor Adrian Powell preach an expository

message at Hilltop Church on Isaiah 57:14–21, with the text emphasis on removing the stumbling blocks in the way of reaching friends, relatives, and strangers while, at the same time, understanding the doctrine of the sufficiency of God



HONORING THE PASTORS EMERITI AT KIMBERLY PARKWAY CHOG.

in our motivation for evangelism.

Pastor Iran Watson from Kimberly Parkway Church of God preached Thursday's message at New Hori-

continued from page 9

zons and brought both humor and intensity to the preaching of the Word with a passage from James 1:1–15, titled “A Certain Promise in Uncertain Times.”

Pastor Dave Lewis from New Horizons Community Church closed out the revival at Kimberly Parkway Church of God with a message from John 15:1–8, “Re-Centering Your Life.” The famous passage deals

with the vine and the vinedresser, and the fruitfulness of the vine.

At the end of the service, Pastor Watson honored the retired pastors emeriti from Columbus West and Columbus Hilltop, Rev. Ralph Watts and Rev. George Jordan, respectively, for their years of service to the Church of God in Ohio and the way they helped the ministers develop locally, and as mentors in ministry.

The pastor’s wives also presented them with gifts of cross pens

and leather-bound journals to keep notes for next year’s revival and their ongoing work in ministry.

Adrian Powell is pastor of Faith Community Church of God in Grove City, Ohio. He has been published in the Columbus Dispatch, Columbus Call and Post, Columbus Post, and Vital Christianity. He has authored two books, The Jubilee Harvest and Resident Aliens: A Living Faith in a Hostile World, available at Amazon.com.

English + Spanish + Arabic = 3 Congregations Under 1 Roof

By Carl Stagner

While race, language, culture, and politics are just a few of the things that often keep people apart, at 14400 Northwest Freeway just off US Highway 290 in Houston, Texas, Jesus Christ brings people together under one roof. Houston First Church of God, Houston Primera Iglesia de Dios, and Arabic Christian Church offer weekly ministries separately in English, Spanish, and Arabic, but each of these Church of God congregations come together for different purposes throughout the year. One recent example of such unity took place in early October when the three churches gathered at the table for their annual “International Feast.”

Tim Gould, who’s served on the Ministries Council for the past two years, has also served as lead pastor of Houston First Church of God since 2015. Warning: his description of this grand occasion could lead to severe cravings: “The International Feast is the most amazing church potluck that has ever happened.”

There you have it. But even while the tantalizing spread reflects the delicious diversity among the three groups, it’s not the food that captures



PASTORS TIM GOULD, HUBER MAXWELL, MOUNUIR SOLIMAN LEADING PRAYER.

Pastor Tim’s focus. The special day in October, which generally begins with a joint worship service in three languages, also includes fervent prayer and enriching cross-cultural fellowship. Huber Maxwell, pastor of the Spanish-speaking congregation, echoes Tim’s sentiment.

“The International Feast is a great opportunity,” Pastor Huber Maxwell

explains, “for everyone to realize that there are others who enjoy praising God as much as we do, with the only difference being that they do it in a different language.”

Tim Gould’s predecessor, Don Bergstrom, who now serves as regional pastor in Wyoming, remembers fondly when the Holy Spirit orchestrated the beginnings of the triad of



THE INTERNATIONAL FEAST!

3 Congregations...

continued from page 10

congregations about twelve years ago. Reviewing the results of a community survey, Houston First Church realized the primary language of a high percentage of their neighbors is Spanish. It was clear that a Spanish work was needed, and the church welcomed Pastor Huber Maxwell from El Salvador to their campus. A master calendar was created to help prevent confusion and to keep the two congregations' calendars straight. "Though there were probably a few misunderstandings in the beginning," Don recalls, "we all believed this was God's idea. So, we prayerfully and honestly worked through those minor issues and a wonderful partnership was born."

Following complications from a hurricane that led to the closure of one of the church's ministries, the door of

opportunity opened to another. "Pastor Soliman had come to the United States from Egypt, seeking treatment for his wife's cancer," Don explains. "But the Holy Spirit had also put it on his heart to stay and plant an Arabic-speaking church in Houston...thus, three Church of God congregations worshipping under one roof. Hallelujah!" The pastor of Arabic Christian Church also rejoices.

Since 1967, Mounuir Soliman had served as a pastor in the Church of God. For twenty-five years, he presided as president of the Egyptian General Assembly of the Church of God. "I would like to thank Houston First Church of God for their love and cooperation," he reflects. "They opened not only their building, but also their hearts, to our congregation."

Only a couple years ago, in a move that reflected both cooperation and stewardship, Houston First Church and

Arabic Christian Church merged their children's ministries. Sarah Mathewes, Houston First Church children's pastor, reflects, "We have enjoyed having our children's ministries combined," Sarah explains. "The children benefit from learning about one another's cultures, and the teachers benefit from having a week off every other week, allowing them to participate in the worship service."

Scheduling works well for the unique combination, as Houston First Church worship services begin at 10:45 and last until noon, while Arabic Christian Church's services take place in the east wing of the building from 11:00 until about 12:30. Primera Iglesia de Dios gathers for worship at 4:00 in the afternoon, and various ministries take place at different times during the week, all run with intentional strides toward clear communication.

God opened the doors for yet



PASTOR HUBER MAXWELL



PASTOR MOUNUIR SOLIMAN



PASTOR TIM GOULD

3 Congregations...

continued from page 11

another partnership when Houston First Church faced vacancies last year for worship pastor and youth pastor. David Rivera, who leads worship and youth for the Spanish-speaking church, was recruited to help Houston First Church find the right replacements. In the search process, it quickly became apparent to Pastor Tim that David was the one for both jobs. "This gave him the opportunity to step away from the forty-hour work week outside the church and instead work full-time for Houston First Church," Tim explains. "Not only does he still hold leadership with Iglesia, but also his role was formalized by the Spanish-speaking church as they recognized him as an associate pastor alongside his father as the lead pastor."

The three congregations get together for various activities throughout the year. Youth activities and game nights attract attendance from all three congregations. Two of the congregations have partnered to host a combined VBS. Bilingual worshipers regularly attend more than one service. The children of Primera Iglesia de Dios and Arabic Christian Church, who usually speak English, are frequently involved in the Houston First Church worship service. In everything, Pastor Tim is most encouraged by the opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus together in their community. What a powerful witness that Jesus is the subject! Tim cites the circumstances that unfolded post-Hurricane Harvey a couple years ago.

"All three congregations came together for a supply drive, for which we were able to use all three languages to our advantage," he explains. "We

were able to go out into the neighborhoods to deliver supplies and literally knock on doors to ask them if there was anything they needed. When we came to a Spanish-speaking home, for example, we spoke the language! And, we were able to quickly refer them to each other's churches, knowing we could trust each other and that each one would minister wonderfully to these individuals. As we're ministering to people, they may not end up being a part of Houston First Church due to the language they speak, but our goal is to see them be a part of the kingdom. Three congregations under one roof really help make this possible!"

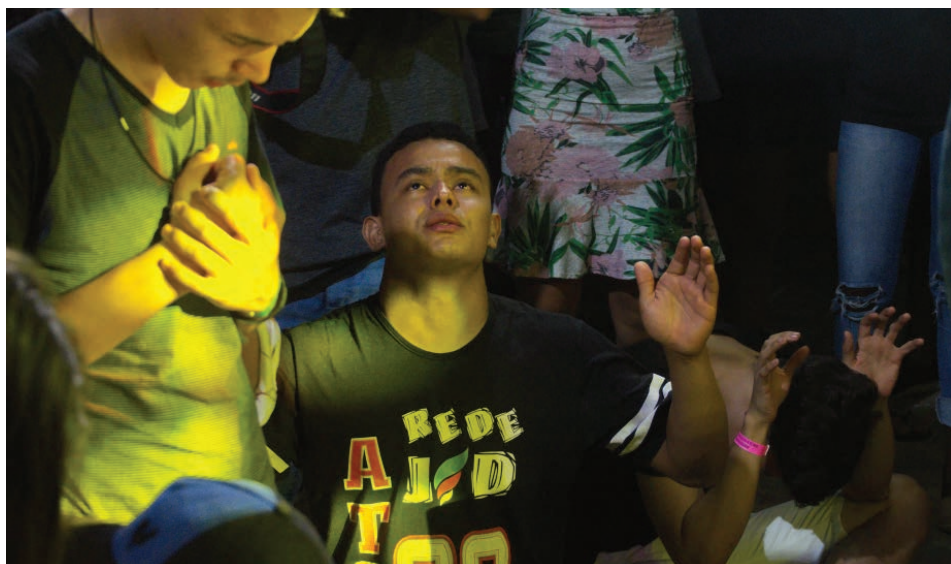
In Texas, across North America, and around the world, the Church of God is taking back what hell has stolen. Join the movement. Give life. Donate today at www.jesusisthesubject.org/give.

CHOG in Northern Brazil Grows at "Incredible" Pace, More Pastors Needed

By Carl Stagner

Though its roots are in church tradition, today's festivities of Mardi Gras tend to reflect the worst of culture more than the person of Christ. In Brazil, the celebration of Carnival has similar Christian roots but, like Mardi Gras, hardly resembles its origins. Thankfully, as the Church of God in northern Brazil continues to grow, so does its influence on the culture, especially in the city of Itaituba. Missionaries Jonathan and Beth Todd have been blessed to witness firsthand the mighty move of God in recent years, which has resulted in a good problem to have—they need more pastors.

"Virtually every community in Brazil has a Carnival celebration,"



SEMINARY STUDENT WORSHIPS AT REGIONAL YOUTH CONVENTION.

Jonathan Todd explains. "Five years ago in Itaituba, the Church of God pastors decided to offer an alterna-

tive to Carnival for the community. Through the efforts of several congregations working together with

CHOG in Northern Brazil...

continued from page 12

a unified vision and focus, they started an event called *Desperta*. During the five days of Carnival, the churches, through the effort of *Desperta*, focus on evangelism and outreach with each evening focusing on music and preaching. Some of the biggest names in Brazilian Christian music have come to *Desperta*. Thousands attend every night, many are saved, and other churches have started bringing their youth groups.”

This regional revival experience has touched every level of society. Even the government and the media in Itaituba have been affected. The days of a big Carnival event in town have passed, and now the community cultural calendar highlights *Desperta* instead. Local government encourages people to attend the Christian gathering, and the media is by no means absent. “The director of their largest TV station is a member of the church, as are a couple of reporters,” Jonathan notes. “So, *Desperta* gets a lot of air time.”

While *Desperta* is certainly one of the most exciting and influential events of the Church of God in Brazil, it’s really only a manifestation of what God has been doing in the hearts and lives of the believers for many years. Itaituba, surrounded by rainforest, is home to several Church of God congregations, each committed to Christ and community transformation. Among such ministries are after-school programs, a medical clinic, and a



DESPERTA 2018

popular farm and retreat center. The Church of God congregation in Boa Vista, near the border with Venezuela, is actively helping refugees acquire visas, find housing, and obtain food. And, due to the growth of these congregations, the need for pastors is also growing. Thankfully, God is calling more young men and women into ministry, which also

resulted in the expansion of the seminary.

“The Church of God in Amazonia is focused not only on meeting the spiritual needs of the communities, but also the physical needs,” Jonathan explains. “Our

churches are growing at a rate that is about 30 percent per year. We have more church planting opportunities than we have pastors. The Church of God in Amazonia feels called to planting at least one church per year, with a focus of having at least one congregation in each of the seven northern states of Brazil by 2023. Additionally, we have so many young men and

women being called into ministry who need access to formal theological and biblical training. Beth and I are part of that through the seminary. To this point, the focus on pastoral training has been teaching courses at the seminary. They run for eight weeks at a time. However, this is changing because the seminary, too, is growing.”

Please pray for the Church of God in Brazil as they continue to grow and seek new leaders. The Todds anticipate the completion of their home assignment so they can return to the task to which God has called them in Brazil—teaching, training, and equipping these ministers to lead a growing church. Learn more about Jonathan and Beth Todd, and discover opportunities for support, at <https://www.chogglobal.org/team/jetodd/>. Learn more about the ongoing church planting project and how you can be a part of it at www.chogglobal.org/churchplantinginamazonia.



JONATHAN TODD WITH
NEW SEMINARY GRAD.

Haiti Hospital Stays Course Amid Civil Unrest

By Carl Stagner



CHURCH OF GOD HOSPITAL IN HAITI.

As political tensions increase and vital resources become scarce, Haiti's social conditions continue to decline. With an end to the volatile situation nowhere in sight, the safety and health of the country's citizens is a chief concern of the church and broader community. In the midst of chaos, the hospital of the Church of God in Saintard (St. Ard) is staying the course, even while limited in staff and function. Global Strategy missionaries Mark and Kathy Fulton, who also work at the hospital, remain stateside, unable to return to their beloved brothers and sisters via routes now considered impassable. They provide the latest information with insight on how the Church of God outside Haiti can best support the Church of God within.

"The civil unrest in the country has negatively affected the ability of the hospital to function," Mark explains. "Our staff cannot traverse the roads. The patients are fearful and often unable to travel to the facility."

To keep the emergency room operating, the hospital had to reduce staff. Supplies are hard to find, limiting the hospital's capabilities. Operation of the outpatient clinic was suspended, and daily patient visits have decreased from more than a hundred to fewer than ten. The strain is also financial, with 40 percent of monthly operating

funds normally coming from the hospital's low patient fees. Mark and Kathy have been in daily contact with hospital administration, staying in-the-know and offering encouragement. They couldn't be more impressed with the local staff who run the hospital. Their tenacity and perseverance are being tested now like it hasn't in years.

"The missional model that we follow for the hospital is that it is entirely indigenously staffed," Mark explains. "The management and staffing of the hospital by our sixty-four-member Haitian staff allows it to function in our absence. Our job is to empower, providing continuing education and supplies for the very capable Haitian staff."

Of course, this doesn't make it much easier on Mark and Kathy, whose hearts break for the Haitian people. These missionaries long to be "at home" in Haiti, where God has called them, especially when circumstances are difficult. In fact, their bags are packed and ready to go as soon as they get the green light.

The last time Mark and Kathy left Haiti for the United States, they had to leave early in the morning, navigating around roadblocks and signs of civil unrest. Sadly, the situation in Haiti con-

tinued to devolve while stateside, and the missionaries have not yet been able to return. "The decline of social conditions in Haiti," Mark explains, "have been evident rumored and noticed over the last year or so, as inflation ramped up, governmental corruption was revealed, and shortages of necessary items became evident... During these trying times, we communicate pretty much daily with someone from the hospital staff to assess and to determine how to sustain daily operations."

Global Strategy will continue to monitor crisis in Haiti and updates will be made available. In the meantime, the prayers of the Movement are invaluable. Mark offers some suggestions to guide our prayers.

"We pray that we can continue to function during these very difficult times, and the financial support now is even more crucial," Mark explains. "When this crisis passes, and eventually it will, the general populous will probably need to be supported in a relief mode for a time, until we can return to development mode, growing a sustainable business and ministry in the Church of God hospital. We pray for a quick resolution to the unrest so lives can be saved and the life of the average Haitian can return to normal."

Mark and Kathy Fulton have served as Global

Strategy missionaries to Haiti since July 2014, but their dedication to the Haitians have taken them there several times a year since 1993.

Thank you for your prayers for Haiti, the Church of God there, the hospital, and missionaries Mark and Kathy Fulton. Learn more about the Haiti hospital at www.chogglobal.org/haitihospital/.



MARK AND KATHY FULTON

Callen Compiles General Assembly Comprehensive History, Reference Guide

By Carl Stagner

Anyone who has done even the most rudimentary research into the early days of the Church of God movement knows we have a fascinating history. We love to laud the honorable aspects of our past, but we acknowledge our missteps and failures, as well. Learning from yesterday—the good and the bad—helps us lean forward into the future God has planned for us together. In Barry Callen’s new book, *Leaning Forward!*, God’s unchanging involvement in the lives of his people is the thread that connects our heritage to who we are today. As a comprehensive history and reference guide to every resolution since the General Assembly’s humble beginnings in 1917, *Leaning Forward!* provides a panorama of the Church of God unlike we’ve ever seen.

Callen’s new book is more than a list of all the resolutions of the General Assembly. That’s been done before, though an updated list was certainly needed. *Leaning Forward!* is a reflective journey into the origins and growth of the General Assembly, offering not only facts, but perspective on the particular structures and functions of the whole. “Christians are wiser together than they are as separated, isolated individuals or congregations,” Barry reflects about the book. “The General Assembly is the most representative voice of the movement. Its speaking deserves

to be heard by everyone in the movement. Several of its pivotal resolutions speak pointedly to vital issues now. This book becomes a resource of contemporary wisdom for all of us.”

When asked why he decided to publish the book at this particular time in the life of the Church of God, Barry says, “The General Assembly had just reached its centennial, having been established formally in 1917. So much of its collected wisdom over the generations was virtually unknown by most people in the church, and even sometimes forgotten by assembly members who participated in key resolu-

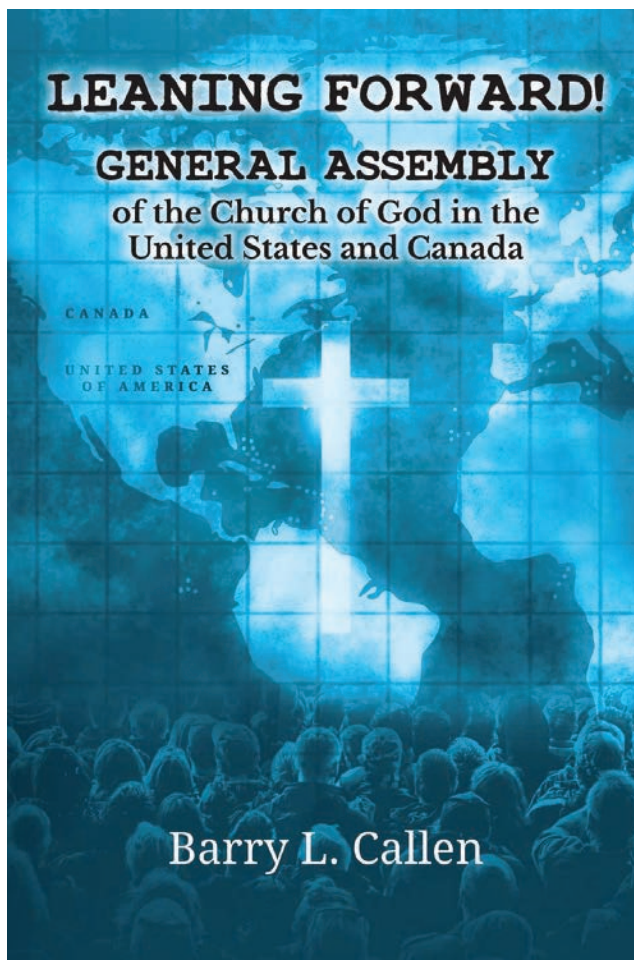
tions. We must not forget our accumulated wisdom as we proceed into the future!”

The book is organized by topic and includes an index designed for any pastor, board member, or lay person to quickly find any resolution passed by the General Assembly on any subject in any year. Having been released after this year’s General Assembly in Orlando, Florida, the book is the most up-to-date resource available, and include names and pictures of General Assembly and Church of God Ministries leadership over the past few decades.

As Barry Callen was researching, compiling, and preparing to write *Leaning Forward!*, he was reminded of some especially unique but compelling characteristics of the Church of God we

so dearly cherish. “Church of God people are very reluctant to accept centralized authority in church life,” he notes. “The General Assembly is not authoritative, in the sense that it can control the lives and beliefs of individual congregations. Even so, we are stronger together, and our wisdom is enriched by the Spirit’s giving of gifts to a wide range of believers who have guided the life and thinking as the General Assembly.”

Purchase a copy of Leaning Forward! General Assembly of the Church of God in the United States and Canada at Amazon.com.



Church of God Raises \$25,000 for Dorian Disaster Relief

By Carl Stagner



OUR PARTNERS ON THE GROUND IN THE BAHAMAS!

While Labor Day weekend may have been a picnic for many in the United States, it was nothing short of disaster for those distressed and displaced due to Hurricane Dorian. The 185-mile-per-hour winds struck the Bahamas with torrential rainfall and left widespread destruction in its wake. The Church of God would not stand idly by, however, as the days and weeks that followed were marked by an outpouring of generosity. In total, more than \$25,000 have come in since the hurricane, and news of such an impact is only beginning to come to light.

Bishop Tejado Hanchell, of Mt. Calvary Holy Church in Winston-Salem, has served as a liaison between Church of God Ministries and the relief workers in the Bahamas. In a conversation with John Johnson, disaster relief coordinator for Church of God Ministries, Hanchell offered a report on the tremendous need and

how that need is being met with the dollars donated.

“At present, we have provided over four hundred families with groceries, hot meals, and clothing,” he explains. “Additionally, our ministry has helped to arrange shelter for dozens of families who were left homeless from the storm. On my recent trip to the Bahamas, I personally sat with several families who shared the horrors of their ordeals. I was struck by one woman who stopped by our ministry and received food and clothing for her family of nine. She broke down in tears and told our office manager that she had not cried since the storm. She was so busy being strong for her children that she had not allowed herself to cry. Our ministry gave her the gift of tears. She was able to release several weeks’ worth of pent-up frustration, pain, and fear.”

Hanchell continues: “Your donations will help us continue to

positively impact lives and families like hers. I was overjoyed to hear that Church of God Ministries has raised over \$25,000 for the Bahamas hurricane relief efforts! To God be the glory! We look forward to using those funds to help those who are hurting and to share the light of Christ in their time of darkness.”

Shortly after Hurricane Dorian struck the Bahamas, Tim Clarke, chair of the General Assembly of the Church of God urged congregations to set aside the fourth Sunday of September to collect love offerings for Dorian disaster relief. Jim Lyon, general director of Church of God Ministries, echoed this refrain online during his September Facebook Live event. The challenge was issued, and the Church of God responded.

To the Church of God, Bishop Hanchell exclaims, “Thank you, again, for your amazing generosity. May God continue to bless the work of your hands!”

Thank you, Church of God!

In crises where an immediate response is critical for relief, Church of God Ministries advances funds in anticipation of a gracious outpouring of donations from churches and individuals. Such advances are made from a limited Disaster Relief Fund maintained by Church of God Ministries. Give now at <https://faithlife.com/coggm-c/give?funds=4743>. Donations can also be mailed to Church of God Ministries, PO Box 2420, Anderson, IN 46018; please note that your gift is for Disaster Relief, Project #45.04502. Learn more about Church of God Disaster Relief at www.jesusisthesubject.org/disaster-relief/.

From the Archives: Remembering to “Say It!”

By Robert H. Reardon



A few days ago, without any notice in the media, the autumnal equinox silently came and went. Now the days are shorter and the nights longer. Soon the wonderful holidays will be upon us with all the homecoming, joy, laughter, and the deeper sense of gratitude for God’s unspeakable gifts.

I thought about this as I drove along last Sunday toward the Church of God in Eaton, Indiana, where I was scheduled to preach. When I arrived, matters were in a general state of confusion. The night before, an Indiana thunderstorm had taken out a transformer and the church was completely devoid of power. What? No light or air-conditioning? No red and green lights flashing in the PA control booth? No sound from the

organ, guitars, or electric piano? Would anyone be able to hear the solo or the preacher? Well, miracle of miracles, God turned on some heavenly power from above and his energy blessed the service.

After the benediction, Dewayne Roberts, chair of the board of trustees, walked me to my car. Dewayne is a highly respected businessman in the area, with deep roots in this local church and a passion to help carry out its mission. “How is your cousin, Lois Harris?” he asked.

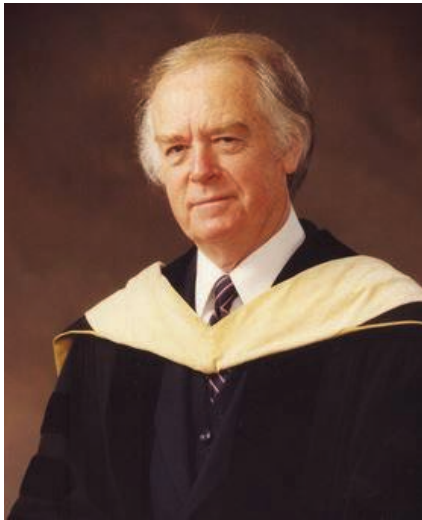
Now I was surprised, since Lois lives in Tulsa and has little to do with Eaton, Indiana. “How do you know Lois?” I asked.

He said that back during the Great Depression he and his mother were living alone in Bloomington, Illinois, struggling to survive. When

he was eight years old, Lois Harris knocked on the door and invited him to come with her and her husband Jim to the Church of God Sunday school. It was her loving persistence that finally persuaded him. Soon he and his mother were regularly picked up on Sundays in the Harris car, since they had no car of their own.

The love of the Bloomington congregation and the nurturing in faith of Lois as a youth leader soon led Dewayne to surrender his life to Jesus Christ. Now this good man stood outside the church he loves and serves with tears of gratitude in his eyes for that special person down in Tulsa whose godly influence and example helped change his life.

I relate this story to remind us all that this is the way it happens. I am sure that current marketing strategies, church growth concepts, and the application of various methodologies are helpful. But it all began when someone had a burden for an eight-year-old boy, prayed for him, and brought him to a Sunday school



ROBERT H. REARDON

From the Archives...

continued from page 17

and into the arms of a loving, nurturing community of faith. God bless all the Lois Harrises of the church.

As I drove home, I thought of Thanksgiving and those special people we all have who, at a critical juncture in our pilgrimage, have been there to touch our lives with love and encouragement and to help us find our way. Find that person before it is too late. Write a

letter of thanks. For heaven's sake, "Say it!"

A few years ago, I urged Anderson College students in chapel to do this. I know one who did, and her letter meant so much to the retired high school teacher that he carried it in his billfold until he died. I know that to many Thanksgiving means Turkey Day and football. To the TV Simpsons, Thanksgiving dinner began with the prayer, "God, we've paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing." But "Hol-

low Days" can be redeemed and become "Holy Days" again with a grateful heart.

Robert H. Reardon served as president of Anderson University from 1958 until 1983. Article originally published in the November 1994 issue of Vital Christianity. Republished by permission. Across the United States and around the world, God is on the move in the Church of God. Join the movement. Give life! Donate today at www.jesusisthesubject.org/give.

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