

New Beginnings™

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, *an International Association*

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Our Identity...

Claiming the Title “Church of God”

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The next issue of *New Beginnings* is scheduled to be published on Monday, May 11, 1998.

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by Jim Franks

In the summer of 1996, I had the opportunity of traveling to the Seventh Day Adventist World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. They had heard of this “new” group of Sabbath keepers which had formed, and they wanted to know more about us, and what we believed.

The Adventists were quite surprised that we had officially formulated our fundamental beliefs so early in our history. We were told how important it is to hold on to them. Without a strong set of beliefs and standards, you fall prey to a mixture of ideas and beliefs. And if you lose your beliefs, you lose sight of who you are.

During the discussions with some of their leading ministers, we were asked to explain the Holy Days and the plan of salvation. Although the Adventists do not accept the Holy Days as being necessary for Christians today, they were complimentary of the fact that we had held on to them.

They were also quite complimentary of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. One of their elders commented that, in his opinion, “Herbert Armstrong did more for spreading the truth of the Sabbath in the 20th century than any other single person.” It was quite encouraging to hear such positive comments about Mr. Armstrong and his work from those outside our organization.

From this example of how they identified Mr. Armstrong, I was reminded again of how we have always identified

ourselves, and how the world has identified us.

What Identifies Us?

Although the Adventists mentioned Mr. Armstrong only in connection with the weekly Sabbath, we know and continue in the knowledge of the *annual* Sabbaths. As we therefore approach the Feast of Pentecost, which is the anniversary of the founding of the church, we should be absolutely clear on who we are—what identifies us. We claim the greatest title that any group of people can claim—the “church of God.”

This is rather ambitious. The term “church” can be defined as an assembly or group of people. We should all know that the term “church” as used in scripture isn’t referring to a building. Therefore when we claim to be a part of the church of God, we are claiming to be God’s people—to belong to Him.

The Identity Statement which was adopted by the Council of Elders in November of last year addresses this issue. Notice the wording:

The Church of God is a spiritual body of which Jesus Christ is the head. Members are called into the Church, and God is preparing them for the Kingdom of God through the work of the Church. As the head of the Church, Christ has placed some in positions of leadership for the edification and unity of the Church. The United Church

of God, *an International Association*, is a continuation of that body Jesus Christ founded. We, in the United Church of God, *an International Association*, do not claim that all Christians are among our fellowship. However, we have a distinct identity and endeavor to function according to the principles of unity and organization found in the Scriptures.

One of the difficulties we face today is the desire by some to want to define others. How can we do that when Christ warned us about passing judgment (Matthew 7:1)? Instead, we should concentrate on *who we are*. What makes us a part of the body of Christ? The Identity Statement was not intended to define anyone else. We simply wanted it to be clear that we believe we are a part of the body of Christ, the church of God, which has existed since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The issue of identity is one that cannot be ignored. The church was founded on the Day of Pentecost in the year Jesus Christ was crucified. Many groups claim to be the modern-day descendants

of that church, yet their beliefs do not remotely reflect what that church was like. The Bible and history describe a group of people in the 1st century who kept the commandments and the Holy Days while claiming the title "Church of God." Our beliefs must identify us as being a part of that body and our fruit must confirm the truth of such a statement.

The Empty Church

Some time ago, I came across a book titled *The Empty Church, Does Organized Religion Matter Anymore?* The book was written by Thomas C. Reeves in 1996. I found it fascinating reading. The book sets out to answer the question of why attendance in mainline U.S. churches has been on the decline in

recent years. The author's conclusion was quite interesting and revolved around this idea of identity and belief.

Mr. Reeves had many things to say about the churches of this nation and what is happening to them. The book discusses the crisis of declining membership that is occurring in what he calls mainline churches. The primary Protestant churches in America, which he calls the "seven sisters," are: American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

What has caused these organizations to lose membership? Mr. Reeves blames it on a lack of identity—not knowing who they are or what they stand for.

The author makes these statements: "Since the cultural revolutions of the

"We have a distinct identity and endeavor to function according to the principles of unity and organization found in the Scriptures."

1960s and 1970s, the mainline churches have been in a serious and unprecedented numerical decline, losing between a fifth and a third of their membership. In 1993, Methodists, for example, rejoiced that their losses had slowed from 64,344 in 1991 to 58,866 in 1992. In 1995, a researcher observed that the Methodist Church had lost 1,000 members every week for the last 30 years" (*The Empty Church*, pages 10-11).

In a study released in 1993 by sociologists Mark Chaves and Kirk Hadaway and the religion professor Penny Long Maler, it was found that only 19.6 percent of Protestants and 28 percent of Catholics were in church on any given week. "Why are the mainline churches empty?" asks Mr. Reeves. This is the purpose of the book—to address the question of why organized religion seems to have failed in our society.

Mr. Reeves concludes that the churches of our society have failed to provide a standard of conduct and belief. Without strong beliefs the

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The United Church of God, *an International Association*, has a home page on the Internet's World Wide Web. The address <http://www.ucg.org> gives you access to general information and news about the Church, issues of *The Good News* and *New Beginnings*, as well as our booklets. The address <http://www.ucg.ca> accesses the Church's Canadian Web site, <http://www.ucg-aus.org.au> the Church's Australian Web site, <http://www.labuonnotizia.org> the Church's Italian Web site, and <http://www.ucg.org.za> the Church's Southern Africa Web site.

churches have failed to make a meaningful contribution.

Mr. Reeves concludes that in the churches today, "Solid teaching is at a premium, and the basics about sin, repentance, judgment, and hell frequently go unexplored.... What does the Episcopal chaplain at Princeton University tell young people who come to him with questions? The Rev. Frank Strasburger declared in 1994 that he is not in the business of dispensing dogmatic answers about anything" (*The Empty Church*, page 24).

The short answer to the declining church attendance is that religion in general and churches in particular have failed. The primary reason given is the liberal, "we stand for anything" principle. It is a proven fact from 50 years of research that the mainline Protestant churches, advocating an openness that says there are no real standards of belief or conduct, are dying.

There is no level of commitment without a distinction of belief. Mr. Reeves makes this statement about the future of the mainline churches: "The mainline churches, light on questions of

eternal importance, lacking a distinctive identity, and permissive to the bone, seem doomed" (page 31).

"The mainline churches, light on questions of eternal importance, lacking a distinctive identity, and permissive to the bone, seem doomed."

Observing Our Identity

When Christ said He would build His Church in Matthew 16:18, He meant exactly what He said. The church was built upon a sure foundation (Ephesians 2:20). We claim to be a part of that church today. Are we living by those standards as laid out in Scripture? Do we

have a strong conviction of our beliefs? Do we understand our purpose? With Pentecost approaching, I believe these are all important questions for us to consider.

God's calling, and His wonderful truth as revealed in the pages of the Bible, provide us with our identity. We are committed to preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and living our lives following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. We observe the annual festivals as yearly reminders of God's plan of salvation. This is our identity. We must never lose it.

The need to preach the gospel, baptize those being called by God and nurture those who have been added to the body, form the basis of why we exist as a Church (Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:19-20). Christ knew what He was doing when He said: "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

As we celebrate Pentecost this year, let's be thankful that God has given us such a wonderful identity and let's be sure we never lose sight of who we are. *NB*

Home Office Relocation Update

On March 12, following the annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders in Louisville, Kentucky, six members of the Council of Elders and their wives drove from Louisville to Cincinnati, Ohio, to make a first-hand assessment of two possible home-office-location sites.

The first one was on the east side of Cincinnati near the junction of I-275 and highway 50, at an office park called Park 50. The other location was Chester Towers in the northern part of the Cincinnati metropolitan area near the I-275 and I-75. All agreed that Park 50 was the favorite and we have since signed a letter of intent and are negotiating a lease.

The target date to move the office is July 1, 1998.

As more definite information and plans are made we will keep you informed. Your prayers and support for a smooth move of the office and staff are greatly appreciated.

*Victor Kubik
Home Office Location Committee*

Financing the Relocation Effort

Finances available for the move are projected to be as follows: \$50,000 from funds already set apart in the 1997/1998 budget; \$50,000 to be set apart in the 1998/1999 budget; \$138,000 already accumulated in restricted donations from members; and a \$150,000 interest-free loan guaranteed by three church members. This brings the total funds available so far to \$388,000.

Thank You for All the Name-Change Suggestions!

Over 250 different names have been suggested for our Church newsletter. We're taking note of every name received here at the office and preparing a report for review by management.

The most popular names to date have been *New Beginnings*, *Onward*, *The Guardian*, *United News*, and *United Church News*.

Thanks for your involvement on this project! We'll keep you posted on its progress.

*Peter Eddington
Managing editor*

Focused Education Material...

Focused Education

One of the major goals of the United Church of God, an *International Association*, is to provide a comprehensive education program for the entire body. This will be accomplished in four specific categories: Focused Education, General Education, Ministerial Education and Youth Education. Each of these categories represents numerous ideas, as well as a large number of people who are willing to volunteer their time and talents. Presently we have 300 volunteers. Dennis Luker, Arnold Hampton, Dave Evans, Richard Pinelli, and their wives, will be helping to coordinate this program.

Focused Education's goals, which we present here, deal with specific social ills that plague our modern society. Some of those called into the fellowship of the Church have been affected by such problems as substance abuse (alcohol and drugs), sexual abuse, homosexuality, dysfunctional behaviors, and related marriage and family issues.

In tackling these issues, Focused Education's emphasis is on prevention and treatment. We have categorized these issues as:

- 1) Abuse and Addiction (alcohol and drugs)
- 2) Abuse (sexual, emotional, and physical)
- 3) Homosexuality
- 4) Prejudice and Racism

This issue of *New Beginnings* will begin to cover the issues of Prejudice and Racism, and Substance Abuse (in this case a look at alcoholism).

Ministerial Services

Overcoming Prejudice

by Kevin T. Epps

Signs. We have seen many of them in our lives. Some signs attract us, such as Come In, Welcome, or Open, while

others repel us—Do Not Enter, or No Trespassing.

Signs were posted in the first century on the central religious institution of Israel, the temple. The temple was surrounded by a series of courts beginning with the innermost court, the Court of the Priests; then the Court of the Israelites; then the Court of the Women; and finally the outermost court was the Court of the Gentiles.

Signs on the wall surrounding the Court of the Women warned gentiles that if they proceeded any further toward the temple, the penalty would be death. But when Jesus Christ was in the temple, days before His crucifixion, He quoted the prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of

of Judah. There was another road, though less traveled, which also brought one into the Jewish culture. This road was traveled by gentiles who had, to one degree or another, converted to Judaism and became known as "proselytes."

God has always made provisions for His people to receive newcomers. Many important lessons can be gleaned from the proselyte experience in regard to our modern day challenge of overcoming prejudices among the races.

Gentiles living within Israelite territory were required to keep the weekly and annual Sabbaths (Exodus 20:10; 12:19; Leviticus 16:29), refrain from blaspheming God's name (Leviticus 24:16), abstain from sexual immorality and idolatrous worship, among other things (Leviticus 18:26; 20:2). God expected these basic behaviors from the foreigners even if they never adopted all of the tenets of the religion He delivered to Israel.

The Old Testament Hebrew does not use the term "proselyte"; however, the origins of this concept are found in Exodus 12:48-49, "And when a stranger sojourns [dwells] with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be *circumcised*, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be *as a native of the land*. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. *One law* shall be for the *native-born* and for the *stranger* who sojourns [dwells] among you." The New Testament translates "proselyte" from the Greek *proselutos* meaning a newcomer; one who has come over from a gentile religion to Judaism.

Interestingly, the Septuagint, the first Greek translation of the Old Testament, used "proselyte" instead of "stranger" in Exodus 12:48-49 (though Judaism did not emerge until many years after the Exodus). Rabbis had different categories of proselytes according to *how fully* a gentile had come to Judaism. For instance, gentiles who were circumcised and came *completely over* to Judaism while displaying sincere, religious motives were called "proselytes of righteousness" or "proselytes of the covenant."

According to God's scriptural instruction, a gentile could actually become "as a

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prayer for *all* nations" (Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7 emphasis ours throughout).

How could a gentile come to God? How were the Israelites to treat these newcomers? Let's examine the process of becoming a part of the godly community.

"Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with *one accord* in one place.... Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven...*both Jews and proselytes*" (Acts 2:1, 5, 10).

A Jew, in the Bible, commonly denotes a descendant from the tribe



Kevin Epps

native of the land.” Likewise, in the minds of those within Judaism, “proselytes of righteousness” were understood to be full-fledged Israelites rather than circumcised gentiles. In Judaism, the gentile conversion was both religious *and* cultural. In the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David Stern describes the gentile conversion: “[I]f they undergo conversion to Judaism, they obligate themselves to *become Jewish completely*” (page 563). The *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states: “Should he desire to enjoy *the full rights of citizenship* a stranger submitted to *circumcision*, thus binding himself to observe the whole law, in return for which he was permitted to enjoy to the *full the privileges and blessings* of the people of the covenant” (Exodus 12:48–49).

Therefore, within the social milieu of the New Testament, that which God revealed concerning gentiles is religiously *and* culturally explosive “because it removes a major barrier, namely, the requirement, in addition to trusting God and the Good News, *that gentiles should leave one culture and join another*” (Stern, page 526). When Judaism gained a convert it *also* gained another member of the Israelite culture. Stern recounts how he had to destroy a culturally prideful attitude upon accepting Christ as the Messiah: “[W]hat I destroyed was not only a legalistic system but also a form of idolatry, namely *ethnolatry*, in which I took pride in being Jewish and insisted that keeping *Jewish distinctives* is essential to being part of God’s people, even for Gentiles” (ibid., page 541).

The Jews are not the only culture that has to guard against the secret trap of *ethnolatry*. When the lines become blurred between a man’s culture and God’s community, then the process of *ethnolatry* has begun. When one views distinctives within his human culture as being the embodiment of God’s community, then *ethnolatry* thrives. Therefore, both religion and culture were the two-edged sword of resentment toward the apostle Paul for essentially saying, gentiles need only to repent of sin and not be concerned with their cultural distinctives.

With this backdrop let’s return to the book of Acts to ask this question: *Who was the first gentile convert in the New Testament Church?*

According to the biblical definition of “gentile,” the correct answer is Cornelius

(see Acts 10). However, from a modern day perspective one might answer, “Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch” (Acts 6:5). Remember, “proselytes” were gentiles at birth and Nicholas was “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” years before the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 6:3).

There were plenty of gentiles in the Church before Cornelius, according to today’s definition of one’s race by skin color or lineage. Nevertheless, within the biblical society Cornelius was the first. Through circumcision, one’s conversion to Judaism and the Israelite culture was so complete that “Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch” was considered to have already been an Israelite at the time of conversion. An untold number of proselytes received the Holy Spirit among the first 3,000 converts on Pentecost (Acts 2:5, 10). Indeed, Cornelius, an Italian, was the first *uncircumcised* gentile convert (Acts 10:1).

God desires that the way we welcome strangers is through the way of love

Nevertheless, many *circumcised* gentiles (Egyptians, Romans and others) were already in God’s church *before* Cornelius’ conversion.

God commissioned the disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19–20). “Nations” is translated from the Greek *ethnos*, from which the English *ethnic* is derived, and it can denote a *nation (including Israel) or, exclusively, a gentile nation, race or ethnic group*. The gospel was to be preached “to the Jew first” (Romans 1:16; 2:9–10). Therefore, initially, the disciples understood “make disciples of all *ethnos*” to mean that they should visit Israelites only, including proselytes, all over the world. This was the understanding for 10 to 15 years before God expanded the *ethnos* of Matthew 28 to all “ethnic groups” in the world.

Some in the early church may have thought, “We didn’t have racial problems until the apostle Paul and gentiles were in the church. We were one happy church and

culture but now look how divided we are. Why can’t they be like the proselytes before them? Why are they so rebellious?!” As long as the gentiles were expected to suppress their cultural distinctives and adopt Israelite cultural distinctives there was racial harmony in the synagogues or congregations. Gentiles who didn’t happily exchange their culture with Israel’s, may have been viewed as “rebellious” by some. However, in order for the church to mature, God decided to disturb the mental and cultural comfort zone of virtually the entire church. God illuminated a spiritual blind spot that His church had for many years.

One of many ways that this blind spot can be described is an inability to be “all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9:22). God’s church, to one degree or another, struggled with race relations from the top down as was reflected when Peter, Barnabas and “the rest of the Jews” were “carried away with their hypocrisy” while in the company of uncircumcised gentiles (Galatians 2:11–13). They unconsciously gave into the historical tendency to “compel gentiles to live like Jews.”

When Paul said “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28), he was not ignoring these differences between members in God’s church. Rather, Paul was reminding them that the spiritual playing field has been completely leveled in Christ regardless of physical factors.

David Stern recounts the morning prayer given by free Jewish males: “Praise be you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, because you have not made me a *gentile*. Praise be you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, because you have not made me a *woman*. Praise be you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, because you have not made me a *slave*” (page 555). Paul taught that it is useless to thank God for such a thing when he said, “There is neither Jew nor *Greek...slave* nor free...male nor *female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” We are citizens in God’s community, which is on a higher plane than any human culture where “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24).

God desires that we learn the same lesson that ancient Israel and the foreigners among them were to learn—that the way to welcome strangers is through the way of love. Note the following verses:

Leviticus 19:33–34: “And if a *stranger*

sojourns [dwells] with you in your land, *you shall not mistreat him*. But the stranger who dwells among you shall be to you *as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself*; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

Deuteronomy 10:17–19: “The great God, mighty and awesome, who *shows no partiality...and loves the stranger*, giving him food and clothing. *Therefore love the stranger*, for you were strangers in...Egypt.”

Deuteronomy 27:19: “*Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger*, the fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”

Deuteronomy 29:9–11, 14–15: “Therefore *keep the words of this covenant*, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do...all the men of Israel...and your wives—*also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water.... I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but also with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God*, as well as with him who is not here with us today.”

What a challenge it must have been for Israel to love those who were reminders of the abuse they and their ancestors suffered for many years in Egypt. Likewise, the stranger had to learn to love those whom they may have previously looked down their noses at as slaves. This is the paramount lesson of life. “God is love,” therefore “the purpose of the commandment is love” (1 John 4:8, 16; 1 Timothy 1:5). The act of a gentile being physically circumcised was so powerful in the minds of Israelites that they were able to transcend racial differences. How much more transcending power should one have as a result of his inward, spiritual circumcision?

• The Overcoming Prejudices Committee: *Todd Carey, Anne Elliott, Kevin T. Epps, Tom Fitzpatrick, Arnold Hampton (committee head), Don Hornsby, Dave Myers.*

Alcoholism and You

by Larry J. Walker

Beginning with this article, the Focused Education Committee will be sharing helpful information on the critical

and often neglected subject of alcoholism. This article explains the need for alcoholism information in the church.

Is alcoholism a problem in the United Church of God? A survey conducted some twenty years ago in our previous affiliation indicated that alcoholism afflicted the membership of the church in similar proportions to the society in which they lived. We bring our problems into the church, and the society has far greater effect on us than many of us would like to admit (see box at right).

The fundamental reason has already been stated—we have our roots in this present system and are not immune from the effects of this growing problem.

Many of you reading this article are impacted by alcoholism. Others know

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of friends, family members or other brethren who have problems when drinking. And this is only the tip of the iceberg, because denial is one of the primary symptoms of the affliction. In addition, by semi-controlled drinking, many alcoholics evade detection for long periods of time.

The problem of alcoholism thrives in an atmosphere where knowledge and awareness are lacking. Many misconceptions, misunderstandings and prejudices



Larry Walker

about alcohol and alcoholism and how to deal with it perpetuate the problem and prolong the suffering of all concerned. An enlightened membership can be a strong

Alcoholism results in the deaths of over 100,000 people a year in the United States alone. Alcohol is also involved in 30 percent of suicides, 55 percent of auto fatalities, 65 percent of deaths by drowning and a staggering 85 percent of domestic violence. Direct and indirect costs of alcohol abuse is estimated at well over a billion dollars a year. Half of this figure is paid by industry in lost time, health and welfare benefits, property damage, medical expenses, and overhead costs of insurance and lost wages.

Despite these shocking statistics, alcohol consumption has increased nearly 50 percent over the past generation. There are an estimated 18 million alcoholics in the United States (6 percent to 7 percent of the nation's population), each of whom *negatively* affect an average of four to seven other people. There is no way to put a dollar figure on the emotional agony suffered by alcoholics, their families and co-workers.

Although these figures are for the United States, alcoholism is a prevalent problem in other nations as well.

bulwark against the painful experiences of alcoholism.

Here are some specific areas of need.

Prevention

The old adage, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is certainly true with reference to alcoholism. How can we recognize the symptoms and

signs of developing alcoholism? Driving under the influence, public drunkenness or debilitating physical problems are the later stages of this problem, not the onset. How can we help our children understand and prevent this destruction in their lives?

A wealth of material is available on the subject, much of it at no cost.

Recognition

How would you recognize a problem with alcohol? Few of us are experts in this field. Could you evaluate a developing situation in your life or another's? What exactly is alcoholism? Is it a character weakness or an illness? What are the symptoms? Where would you find sound and reliable information?

Referral

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol, what should you do about it? Should you tell the pastor if the person is a member? Should a member seek help outside the Church, or should prayer and ministerial counsel be sufficient?

How much do you know about treatment programs? What happens at AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or Alanon meetings? Should a church member participate in these programs? What about the twelve step AA program? Is it really a spiritual program? If so, would such involvement with

nonmembers be joining another religion?

Understanding and Support

Alcoholics and their families live under a heavy burden of guilt and shame. Even in recovery there can be a great deal of emotional pain and trauma for the entire family. The Church is designed to be a unique spiritual support system for suffering members (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Alcoholics and their families need

The more we understand the dynamics of any problem, the better we can identify with those who struggle with it. Alcoholism is no exception.

love and support of the right kind. Unfortunately, the "way that seems right" is often the opposite of what is really needed. The more we understand the dynamics of any problem, the better we can identify with those who struggle with it. Alcoholism is no exception.

Reaching Out to Others

Jesus came "to heal the brokenhearted, to preach delivery to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" in the context of preaching the gospel (Luke 4:18). He was able to reach out to those suffering people and offer them help and hope.

Alcoholism is a downward progression to the bottom of the barrel—medically, financially, emotionally and spiritually. It is 100 percent fatal if not arrested. Many never pull out of this syndrome. Those who seek help usually do so only after "hitting bottom" in some area of their life, or because of a successful "intervention" by caring, concerned friends or relatives.

With proper understanding, you can be a lifeline to someone and plant a seed of hope that can have positive results for all eternity (Romans 8:18–21).

Please do what you can to help by learning all you can about alcoholism so you can provide informed direction, support and encouragement for those in need as God grants you the opportunity. More information is to follow from the Focused Education Committee on this vital subject.

- The Abuse and Addiction Committee: *Carl Anderson, Dennis Luker (committee head), Richard Pinelli, Larry Walker and Glen White.*

Letters From Our Readers...

Good News appreciated

"The *Good News* magazine is so good. I'm enjoying the archaeological article series on the Bible, as well as other articles warning us our time of status quo is soon to change.

"Thank you for an excellent job on *The Good News!*"

Florida

The unsinkable *Titanic*:

"The March/April issue of *The Good News* is excellent!

"I especially liked your *Lessons from the Titanic* article. The comparisons between our own era and that great ship are too pronounced to miss—but I'll bet most of us have. I sure did. Thanks for pointing out so clearly that no ship is unsinkable, including the ship of state of the U.S.A.

"History has documented pretty well, I think, that no *society* has ever survived the disintegration of its moral code. Now that we've permitted 25 years of killing our own babies, are allowing a

relatively new infanticide called partial birth abortion, and seem to be ready to endorse doing away with the elderly and infirm in the name of more humane medicine, how much further do we have to go before we witness the demise of our own "land of the free and home of the brave?"

"Not much further at all. Many thanks."

Minnesota

Editor's Note: The letters in this section may be edited for length and clarity.

Feast of Tabernacles 1998...

Estonia

Tartu

We are once again planning to hold the Feast of Tabernacles in Tartu, Estonia. Activities will include touring of the historic countryside of the Baltic region. This will be an exciting and unforgettable Feast.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Victor Kubik. You can reach him on e-mail at vic@kubik.org or please call him at (317) 216-0802. We are in the process of working out details.

Services will be in English and Russian with simultaneous translation.

Victor Kubik

Address Correction

Nelson Bay, New South Wales Australia

Visitors wishing to transfer to this site should contact Bruce Dean at this corrected address and phone number: Bruce Dean, P.O. Box 3092, Kirrawee Delivery Centre, NSW 2232, Australia; phone and fax, (02) 9545-5384 (international: +61 2-9545-5384); or write to bdean@ozemail.com.au (e-mail).

Please note that this address replaces an incorrect one in the soon-to-be-mailed Festival Housing Brochure also.

Bruce Dean

France

Port d'Albret

Bonjour! Port d'Albret is on the Atlantic coast of France about 50 miles north of the Spanish border, and 100 miles south of Bordeaux. As last year, this will be an all-inclusive site: Feast attendees will lodge, take their meals, and have services in the same vacation colony called Pinsolle.

Pinsolle offers three heated pools, a sauna and weight room, an archery range, two tennis courts and bicycle rentals. Lodgings are either two- or four-room apartments with telephone and television (French only), and all have kitchenettes. There is also a nine-hole golf course nearby (you may play in French or English!).

This will be a bilingual site: some services will be held in French and some in English, each time with simultaneous translation.

Excursions may be made to nearby sites of interest such as the coastal city of San Sebastien, Spain, and the fashionable turn-of-the-century sea resort of Biarritz. If there is enough interest among visitors, we will arrange bus excursions to these areas. Additionally, if there is sufficient interest, we may organize a tour from Paris down to the Feast site starting after Atonement. This tour would include several of the Loire valley Renaissance chateaux.

Temperatures in southern France are usually pleasant at Feast time, ranging from 50 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit (10 to 24

Celsius), with a slight chance of some rainy weather.

Prices per person for lodging and full board (three meals per day) will be approximately \$475 per adult, lodging and two meals a day (breakfast and lunch or dinner) will run approximately \$375. Wine is served with lunch and dinner at no extra cost. The cost of your stay must be paid in French francs, so the exact amount in dollars will vary. There will be an additional charge for headset rental, if you need translation. We anticipate 100 to 150 people attending.

Additional information and applications can be obtained by calling or writing to: Joel Meeker, 79 Rolling Meadows, O'Fallon MO 63366, USA; phone (314) 561-4026, fax (314) 625-1691; or write to joel_meeker@ucg.org (e-mail).

Key Dates to Remember

April 4, 11 & 18 U.S. and Canadian head-of-household members should clip out their completed *1998 Festival Registration* form and give it to their local Festival advisor at Sabbath services.

Late-April *Festival Housing Brochure* to be mailed to member households.

May 9 Notification at Sabbath services if any sites cannot accept all transfer requests.

May 17 Members attending a U.S. or Canadian Feast site may begin making reservations from the list of accommodations supplied in the *Festival Housing Brochure*.

Senior Citizens Luncheon

For a number of years, many U.S. sites have hosted a senior citizens luncheon for all members and spouses aged 60 years and above.

The tradition will continue, depending on availability of facilities and scheduling requirements of each site. However, because of financial

considerations, adjustments to the funding of the activity are necessary.

In the U.S., the Festival budget for each site has been able to fund this activity (although we have asked ministers and wives who attend to pay for their meals). After hall rental, the senior's luncheon is the largest budget item at most sites and even the most expensive activity at some sites. Therefore, a voluntary donation will be requested this year to help defray the cost.

A catered lunch may cost between \$14–17 per person, after tax and gratuity are added. This may seem to be unusually high, but it is the reality. A \$10 per person donation for this activity in 1998 will be requested. Please be aware that all seniors and their spouses are welcome to attend this activity regardless of whether they can afford the donation or not.

Charles Melear

Around the World...

Santiago Papasquiario, Durango, Mexico

by Larry Roybal

I received an interesting baptism request from the mountain area in the state of Durango, where we have never had anyone interested in the Church before.

We had received several letters from a family asking us to please visit them because four of them wished to be baptized. This was in late November 1997. Adan Langarica, the minister in Tepic Nayarit, and I, decided to travel to Durango and see if we could find these people and speak with them. I traveled from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, to Tepic Nayarit, in order to meet up with Adan and go from there to Durango. It took us two full days of driving through some "off the beaten path" roads but we finally did arrive in Durango late in the evening. The small town where we arrived is called Santiago Papasquiario.

The first thing we did was get in touch with Floripe Lopez, who had sent us a letter requesting a visit. We arranged to meet with her the next morning at her home. We were able to find a small hotel to stay the night. Early the next day, we found Floripe and her younger sister Rosy and talked with them for most of the morning.

What Adan and I discovered was that both of them had received information from their older brother René who lived up higher in the mountains of Durango with their mother Mrs. Modesta Lopez. He had sent them some magazines and articles which he had also received from a sister who had moved to Arizona some years ago. She is now a member of United in one of the congregations that Chuck Zimmerman pastors.

Floripe and Rosy told us that Mrs. Lopez and René (mother and brother) were also very interested in being baptized but that we would have to hire a small aircraft in order to take us up on a special flight, since our vehicle would not make it through the mountains.

After a long talk, both Adan and I baptized one of them, Rosy Lopez, the younger sister. After baptizing Rosy, we decided we should go up into the mountains and pay Mrs. Modesta and René Lopez a visit. However, we were unable to get an aircraft at that time. We told Floripe and Rosy that Adan would have to make another visit specifically for this purpose in December and that if they could, to please let their mother and brother know. They did, and were expecting a visit during the first week in December.

Before we left, I asked Rosy about her family. She explained to me that up in the Durango mountains everybody grew marijuana. Then René discovered that this was something that God did not approve of and had decided on his own to stop growing it and put his trust in God for his needs. He started to grow vegetables for food for themselves and had immediately begun to have some problems from the community. Although we would have liked to have seen him on this trip, we were unable to travel to this far off location and had to wait for Adan to make a visit the next month.

Adan did return in December and was able to meet both Mrs. Lopez and her son René. Adan was able to tell me the whole story of his trip. I thought that it was very interesting and asked him to write it up for others to read so here is the letter he sent to me.

Letter From Adan Langarica

Dear Mr. Roybal:

It was during the second week in December that I was able to make the visit. Fortunately, Alberto Gonzalez, my brother-in-law (a deacon in the Tepic, Nayarit, church), was able to go with me. His company was very helpful.

At about 5 a.m., we drove from Tepic and arrived to Culiacan, Sinaloa, at about 2 p.m. From there we started to

ask about flights to the Durango mountain area, specifically to the Adjunta de Galacita, Durango. We were informed that all flights to the mountains were very early in the morning.

At 5 a.m. the next morning we were ready and willing at the airport strip but there were many people who wanted to fly that day and we had to wait until 9 a.m. About one hour after taking off, we landed on what was I thought a *very* small dirt landing strip in the middle of the mountains. Once there, we were told that we would have to walk one or two hours in order to get to Adjunta de Galacita. This was more or less the time it did take us, carrying our bags and walking in dress shoes through the mountains.

The first thing that seemed strange to us was that everybody there was carrying his own high-powered guns and rifles, even the 13-year-old children. We later found out that there were no authorized law officials and that each man was his own law. We also observed that everyone there lived off the drug marketing business and that this was absolutely normal for that area.

It was very relieving and inspiring for us to meet the Lopez family. The Lopez family consists of Mrs. Modesta, Rosy, Reina and René. It seemed fantastic to us that in such a remote, distant and such difficult place to get to, that we would find people so eager to hear about God's work and His kingdom. But even more incredible than that was to see a shoe box full of different booklets and articles, which they had already studied some time ago. They had firmly decided to obey God. In fact they were already doing this and had been so doing for some time. They

were even ready to pack up and get out of that place and move to a place where they could be closer to a congregation.

Because of all this, we thought they should be baptized and that is what we did during the afternoon on the Sabbath. We walked up the river for about two hours and talked all the way until we found a nice place with much water. We now have four new brethren in Durango!

The first night, Alberto and I slept in a very small room with no doors. During the night we heard that some men had been asking for us and we heard them shooting off their guns and rifles. The bullets were whizzing by over the house. That night we thought that this was a normal thing, but in the morning, someone told Mrs. Lopez that she should put us in a safe place the next night because some of the locals were going to come for us and take us out of the house. What got me worried was that I saw Mrs. Lopez worried. That second night she put us in the inner room, which was more secure. However, it also had no door so all we could do was put some chairs on top of each other to block the entrance to the room.

Mrs. Lopez stayed up all

night, and so did we, because at times we could hear some men looking for us and firing their guns just outside the little house. We later heard that they had been very mad at us because they thought that it was our fault that the Lopez family would be leaving the community because René was having problems now that he was no longer growing drugs for a living.

To make a long story short, we were finally able to get out the next day without any problems. Now, the Lopez family is out of the mountains and safe back in Santiago Papasquiari with Floripe, one of Modesta's older daughters. They have new jobs now and they are renting a small home. We are able to communicate with them at anytime we want by phone. Even now, we are planning a visit before God's exciting feast season, which is soon approaching us.

Adan Langarica

Please pray for the Lopez family and also for God's ministers as they do God's work wherever He may wish to send us to visit His, and our, family. *NB*

- *Larry Roybal pastors the Acapulco, Lappa de Mendez and Monterrey congregations in Mexico.*

Jonesboro Tragedy

On Tuesday, March 24, 1998, two youths (13 and 11 years of age) opened fire with hand guns and semiautomatic rifles on students of Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Four students and one teacher were killed. Several more students and a teacher were wounded. It is suspected that one of the assailants went into the school building to pull a fire alarm at the precise time that one of the intended victims was in a class that would exit from the door at which the assailants were waiting.

The Westside complex consists of an elementary, middle, and high school. Three children of members of United

attend in this complex. One in the middle school involved in the attack, one in the nearby elementary school, and one in the nearby high school. The elementary and middle school students (Caleb and Eric Cornwell) heard the shots but were not in the vicinity of the shooting. The other student (Laura Harrell) attends high school and was also not in the vicinity.

This tragic incident stunned the citizens of Jonesboro in this quiet rural area of Arkansas. Senseless violence on the innocent leaves the mind bewildered. The only solution for this growing plague is the return of Christ to set up His kingdom.

*Steven D. Moody
pastor, Jonesboro, Arkansas*

What's New on the Web?

- April 2 member letter from the Council of Elders:

<http://www.ucg.org/articles/ce/ce980402.html>

- March 27 and 30, 1998, Council of Elders teleconference reports:

<http://www.ucg.org/html/literat.shtml>

- March 1998 *Nuevos Comienzos*:

http://www.ucg.org/html/espa_ol.shtml

If you have any questions or comments, please contact:

webmaster@ucg.org

United's Fax Information Service

The Fax Information Service was one of the first mediums of communication up-and-running at the inception of the United Church of God. It continues to be an excellent tool for the timely posting of Church information.

Anyone can call from a fax machine, or a computer installed with fax software, and receive many documents. *New Beginnings* is posted within hours of its publication, Council reports are posted as soon as possible, as well as other pertinent and timely information.

A list of congregations around the world, with telephone numbers to call for time and location of services, is a big help to members traveling out of town.

The number to call is **(626) 294-0818**. A menu guides you through the list of choices. For a list of all documents available, please request document number 101.

Announcements...

Births

Michael and Edith Abugoh of Lagos, Nigeria, are delighted to announce the birth of their second daughter, Phyllis Efe Uche Reynolds Abugoh. She was born on December 28, 1997, at 6:55 a.m. and weighed 7½ pounds.

Scott and Sarah (Parman) Gjesvold of Osseo, Minnesota, are excited to announce the birth of their first child, Kaitlyn Jeanine. She was born August 21, 1997, (seven weeks early) weighing 5 pounds 6 ounces and measuring 17¼ inches long.

Proud grandparents are Lonnie and Jeanine Gjesvold of Ramsey, Minnesota, and Starlit and Ralph Winder of Lacey, Washington.



Kaitlyn Jeanine Gjesvold

Chris and Heather (Crosson) Howard of Exeter, Devon, England, are delighted to announce the birth of their much awaited first child, Victoria Sarah, on March 30, 1998.

Victoria is a welcome addition to the Bickleigh, Devon, congregation.

William and Jacqueline (Pachinger) Stetter of Cleveland, Ohio, are delighted to announce the birth of their first child, Jordanne Ariel, born at 4:26 p.m. on January 6, 1998. Jordanne weighed 7



Jordanne Ariel Stetter

pounds 14 ounces and was 19¾ inches long.

Proud grandparents are Alan and Pauline Pachinger of Cleveland and Ray and Shelby Stetter of Pleasant Grove, Utah.

60th Anniversary

Cecil and Mary Drayer celebrated their 60th anniversary on March 19 of this year. Their home church area, Canton, Ohio, honored them after services on the Sabbath of March 21 with a special luncheon.

Mr. & Mrs. Drayer were married March 19, 1938, in St. Joseph, Ohio. For the last 50 years, they have lived in the cozy home Mr. Drayer built in 1948. Their two living children, Noel Drayer and Marlene Ware, along with Marlene's son Michael, attend in Canton.



Cecil and Mary Drayer

They have eight grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren, with the "latest arrival" having made his appearance on Sunday, March 22, three days after their anniversary. It seems the "multiplying" continues. Congratulations to the Drayers!

50th Anniversary

Ken and June Berry of Beloit, Wisconsin, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on March 27, 1998, with a Caribbean cruise. They were married at St. Ambrose Church, Westbourne, Dorset, England.



June and Ken Berry

They entered God's church through C.G.I., Milwaukee, in July, 1988. Ken was baptized on October 22, 1988, and June in September, 1993, at the Feast of Tabernacles in England. They transferred to the United Church of God in Beloit, in 1996.

They have one son, John (wife, Gabrielle) with three sons; and two daughters, Karen Fleming, of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Alison and her husband Mark, who have one son and one daughter. The family plan a reunion in Beloit in July.

Wedding

Berkeley Weis and Carmella Cafourek were united in marriage February 2, 1997, at the Academy Chapel in Vancouver,

New Beginnings

Periodicals Postage
paid at Arcadia, California,
and at additional mailing offices

Washington. The matron of honor was Carmella's sister, Roxanne Sears. The bride's other attendants were Ladell Fuquay, Kathy Korakas and Leslie Mackie. The best man was J.B. Myers, and the groom's other attendants were Roger Barta, Casey Jones and Dusty Weis.

The bride's father, John Cafourek, of Olympia, Washington, performed the ceremony.



Carmella and Berkeley Weis

Member Honored



Merle Cunningham

Merle Cunningham, an elder in the Dallas North, Texas, congregation, received a "Rising Star" Steuben crystal piece for 44 years of outstanding service in visual merchandising at the Neiman-Marcus flagship store in Dallas, Texas. The award was presented February 25, 1998, at a large gathering of Neiman-Marcus executives from all their stores.

Obituaries

Bill O. Beam, 71, of Golden, Mississippi, died December 5, 1997, at

home sitting in his recliner. He was preceded in death, May 26, 1997, by his wife of 48 years, Doris. Bill was a member in Tupelo, Mississippi. He is survived by four sons, Rick, Terry, Gary and Rudy, and seven grandchildren.

Bill first learned about the Church through his wife-to-be in the late 1940s. Her father had become a co-worker in the early 1940s. Bill and Doris were pioneer members of the Memphis, Tennessee, congregation, attending its inaugural service in the summer of 1961. Later they were pioneer members of the Tupelo congregation where they served many years as a deacon-deaconess team. Bill had been a baptized member since August, 1966. He had served as a deacon since April, 1968.

Funeral services were conducted by Ed Mitchell, pastor of the Tupelo congregation.



Bill Beam

Christopher Timmothy Goodrich, 10½ months, died on Monday, January 26, 1998. In the March issue of *New*

Beginnings we accidentally omitted his photograph. We'd like to print it for you in this issue.



Christopher Timmothy
Goodrich

Flornia Perri, 68, died Friday, March 6, 1998, at the Laurels Nursing Home in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. She had been in declining health for some time.

Mrs. Perri had been a member of the church in Mansfield, Ohio, for over ten years; she will be greatly missed. She was present at the first service of the United Church of God there in June, 1995.

Mrs. Perri is survived by one son, four daughters, 13 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, two brothers and three sisters.

Gemuetlichkeit 1997

Correction: The e-mail address for Cathy Folker, contact person for the Gemuetlichkeit singles weekend, was incorrectly printed in the March issue of *New Beginnings*. The correct address is cfolker@globaldialog.com