Virtual Christian Magazine
hope and encouragement for the real world

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We are pleased to announce the November/December 2000, ***Good News*** magazine...

AIDS: How a Killer Plague Can Be Stopped



The AIDS plague will soon become the most deadly killer epidemic of all time, taking more victims than the dreaded black death of the 1300s. The saddest fact, however, is that neither plague had to happen. The measures that would have prevented so much suffering and saved so many lives have been readily available for thousands of years--in the pages of the Bible.

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Virtual Christian Magazine

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Virtual Christian MAGAZINE Editorial

Technical Support for Your Mind and Soul

By Mike Bennett

Ever had one of those frustrating computer glitches? The last few times I've tried to copy files to a peripheral drive, it keeps crashing my whole system! Even when I restart the computer, the external drive kept whirring and there was no way to stop it or eject the disk!

After reading the little bit of printed documentation and exploring the on-line manual and frequently asked questions (FAQs), I still haven't figured out the problem. I'm about ready to call in the big guns by calling the technical support number.

Sometimes you just need the help of technical support-a real person (OK, a real *knowledgeable* and *helpful* person!) to assist with your specific questions.

More important questions

What if you could get personal support for even more important questions? Questions about life and its meaning. Questions about why there is so much evil and suffering in this world. Questions about how to have better relationships with family, neighbors, enemies and with our Creator God.

There is a source for this information. Our Maker has provided an instruction book--a manual for mankind--the Holy Bible. Since the equipment it covers (you and me) is quite complex, this manual can be complex in places as well. But it's easier when you discover documentation that shows you where to find the answers to the frequently asked questions in that manual (for example, see the Literature Library of the United Church of God Web site at www.ucg.org/articles/booklets/index.html).

Still sometimes you need personal help and answers to specific questions. Like when you come across scriptures that seem to contradict each other, or that contradict well-worn traditions you've been taught. Or when you are trying to figure out how to apply the principles of the Bible to your specific circumstances.

There is a place you can turn to get answers from trained and caring ministers. You can send a message to info@ucg.org, and gain the benefit of decades of biblical study and years of counseling experience. This month Tom Clark, a United Church of God pastor in Kansas, is fielding the questions.

Of course, e-mail isn't the only way to get an answer. You can send a letter to Personal Correspondence, United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. Or if you want to talk to a minister in your area by phone or in person, that can be arranged as well.

"Ask Youth"

Teens, there is a special resource just for you. "Ask Youth" is part of the brand-new *Youth United* e-zine at www.youthmagazine.org. Check it out, and send a question or comment while you're at it.

Enthusiastic and talented veteran ministers who serve at teen summer camps "are anxious to also serve you. Give us a try about your worries, concerns, questions, hopes and desires, and we'll do our best to help you discover sound biblical advice," said the first issue.

The magazine even provides an on-line form to fill out to instantaneously submit a question.

Now if it were only that easy to get answers about why my computer keeps crashing!



Christmas Before Christ?
The Surprising Story

Most people know the Bible doesn't mention--much less sanctify--Christmas. Does it make any difference as long as it's intended to honor God and bring families together?

By Jerold Aust



SEVERAL MONTHS AGO the popular American comedic actor Drew Carey was interviewed on an equally popular television talk show, *The View*. Mr. Carey surprised the audience when he addressed the value of telling children the truth about Santa Claus.

"I don't think you should tell kids that there is a Santa Claus," he said. "That's the first lie you tell your children." Otherwise "when kids get to be 5 ... they realize their parents have been lying to them their whole life."

Earlier in the year the Arts & Entertainment cable television channel aired a program titled "Christmas Unwrapped: The History of Christmas." The promo for this program read:

"People all over the world celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. But why is the Savior's nativity marked by gift-giving, and was He really born on that day? And just where did the Christmas tree come from?

"Take an enchanting journey through the history of the world's favorite holiday to learn the origins of some of the Western world's most enduring traditions. Trace the emergence of Christmas from pagan festivals like the Roman Saturnalia, which celebrated the winter solstice."

These two programs addressed the fact that Santa Claus is fictitious and that Christmas and its trappings emanate from pagan Roman festivals. By no means are these the only sources of information about the background of Santa Claus and Christmas.

Is there more to these ancient traditions and practices than meets the eye? And, more important, does it make any difference whether we continue them?

Celebration of the sun god

It may sound odd that any religious celebration with Christ's name attached to it could predate Christianity. Yet the holiday we know as Christmas long predates Jesus Christ. Elements of the celebration can be traced to ancient Egypt, Babylon and Rome. This fact doesn't cast aspersions on Jesus; it does, however, call into question the understanding and wisdom of those who, over the millennia, have insisted on perpetuating an ancient pagan festival that is now celebrated through much of the world as Christmas.



Members of the early Church would have been astonished to think that the customs and practices we associate with Christmas would be incorporated into a celebration of Christ's birth. Not until several centuries had passed would Christ's name be attached to this popular Roman holiday.

As Alexander Hislop explains in his book *The Two Babylons:* "It is admitted by the most learned and candid writers of all parties that the day of our Lord's birth cannot be determined, and that within the Christian Church no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and that not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance" (1959, pp. 92-93).

As for how December 25 became the date for Christmas day, virtually any book on the history of Christmas will explain that this day was celebrated in the Roman Empire as the birthday of the sun god. Explaining how December 25 came to be selected as the supposed birthday of Jesus, the book *4,000 Years of Christmas* says: "For that day was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans but to a religion from Persia which, in those days, was one of Christianity's strongest rivals. This Persian religion was Mithraism, whose followers worshiped the sun, and celebrated its return to strength on that day" (Earl and Alice Count, 1997, p. 37).

Not only was December 25 honored as the birthday of the sun, but a festival had long been observed among the heathen to celebrate the growing amount of daylight after the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. The precursor of Christmas was in fact an idolatrous midwinter festival characterized by excess and debauchery that predated Christianity by many centuries.

Pre-Christian practices incorporated

This ancient festival went by different names in various cultures. In Rome it was called the Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. The observance was adopted by early Roman church leaders and given the name of Christ ("Christ mass," or Christmas) to

conciliate the heathen and swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity.

The tendency on the part of third-century Catholic leadership was to meet paganism halfway--a practice made clear in a bitter lament by the Carthaginian philosopher Tertullian.

In 230 he wrote of the inconsistency of professing Christians. He contrasted their lax and political practices with the strict fidelity of the pagans to their own beliefs: "By us who are strangers to and new moons, and festivals [the biblical festivals spelled out in Leviticus 23], once acceptable to God, the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians" (Hislop, p. 93).

It took 300 years for the new name and symbols of Christmas to replace the old names and meaning of the midwinter festival...

Failing to make much headway in converting the pagans, the religious leaders of the Roman church began compromising by dressing the heathen customs in Christian-looking garb. But, rather than converting them to the church's beliefs, the church became largely converted to non-Christian customs in its own religious practices.

Although at first the early Catholic Church censured this celebration, "the festival was far too strongly entrenched in popular favor to be abolished, and the Church finally granted the necessary recognition, believing that if Christmas could not be suppressed, it should be preserved in honor of the Christian God. Once given a Christian basis the festival became fully established in Europe with many of its pagan elements undisturbed" (*Man, Myth & Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown,* Richard Cavendish, editor, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 480, "Christmas").

Celebration wins out over Scripture

Some resisted such spiritually poisonous compromises. "Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under Pagan superstition. That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin" (Hislop, p. 93).

The aforementioned Tertullian, for one, disassociated himself from the Roman church in an attempt to draw closer to the teachings of the Bible.

He wasn't alone in his disagreement with such trends. "As late as 245 Origen, in his eighth homily on Leviticus, repudiates as sinful the very idea of keeping the birthday of Christ as if he were a king Pharaoh" (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 11th edition, Vol. 6, p. 293, "Christmas").

Christmas was not made a Roman holiday until 534 (ibid.). It took 300 years for the new name and symbols of Christmas to replace the old names and meaning of the midwinter festival, a pagan celebration that reaches back so many centuries.

No biblical support for Santa Claus

How did Santa Claus enter the picture? Why is this mythical figure so closely aligned with the Christmas holiday? Here, too, many books are available to shed light on the origins of this popular character.



"Santa Claus" is an American corruption of the Dutch form "San Nicolaas," a figure brought to America by the early Dutch colonists (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 11th edition, Vol. 19, p. 649, "Nicholas, St."). This name, in turn, stems from St. Nicholas, bishop of the city of Myra in southern Asia Minor, a Catholic saint honored by the Greeks and the Latins on December 6.

He was bishop of Myra in the time of the Roman emperor Diocletian, was persecuted, tortured for the Catholic faith and kept in prison until the more tolerant reign of Constantine (ibid.). Various stories claim a link from Christmas to St. Nicholas, all of them having to do with gift-giving on the eve of St. Nicholas, subsequently transferred to Christmas Day (ibid.).

How, we might ask, did a bishop from the sunny Mediterranean coast of Turkey come to be associated with a red-suited man who lives at the north pole and rides in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer?

Knowing what we have already learned about the ancient pre-Christian origins of Christmas, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that Santa Claus, too, is nothing but a figure recycled from ancient pagan beliefs.

The trappings associated with Santa Claus--his fur-trimmed wardrobe, sleigh and reindeer--reveal his origin from the cold climates of the far North. Some sources trace him to the ancient Northern European gods Woden and Thor, from which the days of the week Wednesday (Woden's day) and Thursday (Thor's day) get their designations (Earl and Alice Count, pp. 56-64). Others trace him even farther back in time to the Roman god Saturn and the Greek god Silenus (William Walsh, *The Story of Santa Klaus,* pp. 70-71).

Was Jesus born in December?

Most Bible scholars who have written on the subject of Jesus' birth conclude that, based on evidence in the Bible itself, there is no possible way Christ could have been born anywhere near December 25.



Again we turn to Alexander Hislop: "There is not a word in the Scriptures about the precise day of [Jesus'] birth, or the time of the year when He was born. What is recorded there, implies that at what time soever His birth took place, it could not have been on the 25th of December. At the time that the angel announced His birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem, they were feeding their flocks by night in the open fields ... The climate of Palestine ... from December to February, is

very piercing, and it was not the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October" (Hislop, p. 91).

He goes on to explain that the autumn rains beginning in September or October in Judea would mean that the events surrounding Christ's birth recorded in the Scriptures could not have taken place later than mid-October, so Jesus' birth likely took place earlier in the fall (Hislop, p. 92).

Further evidence supporting Jesus' birth in the autumn is that the Romans were intelligent enough not to set the time for taxation and travel in the dead of winter, but during more-favorable conditions. Since Joseph's lineage was from Bethlehem, and since he had to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, and since his expectant wife, Mary, traveled with him, it would have been nearly impossible for Joseph and Mary to make the trip in the winter. As recorded by Luke, Mary delivered Jesus in Bethlehem during the time of census and taxation--which no rational official would have scheduled for December.

What difference does it make?

The Bible gives us no reason--and certainly no instruction--to support the myths and fables of Christmas and Santa Claus. They are tied to the ways of this world and contrary to the ways of Christ and His holy truth. "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles," God tells us (Jeremiah 10:2).

Professing Christians should examine the background of the Christmas holiday symbols and stop telling their children that Santa Claus and his elves, reindeer and Christmas gift-giving are connected with Jesus Christ. Emphatically they are not! God hates lying. "These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Christ reveals that Satan the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). Parents should tell their children the truth about God and this world's contrary and confusing ways. If we don't, we only perpetuate the notion that it is acceptable for parents to lie to their children.

Can a professing Christian promote a pagan holiday and its symbols as something that God or Christ has approved? Let's see what God thinks about people using customs and practices rooted in false religion to worship Him and His Son. We find His views clearly expressed in both the Old and New Testaments.

God specifically commands His people not to do what early church leaders did when they incorporated idolatrous practices and relabeled them Christian. Before they entered the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites a stern warning: "Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them [the inhabitants of the land],... and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'

"You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods ... Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).



Paul traveled to and raised up churches in many gentile cities. To the members of the Church of God in Corinth, a city steeped in idolatry, Paul wrote: "What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God ... Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' ... Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 7:1).

Instead of allowing members to rename and celebrate customs associated with false gods, Paul's instructions were clear: They were to have nothing to do with them. He similarly told Athenians who were steeped in idolatry, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

God alone has the right to decide the special days on which we should worship Him. Jesus Christ plainly tells us that "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). We cannot honor God in truth with false practices adopted from the worship of nonexistent gods.

Jesus said: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:6-7). With God no substitutes are acceptable. It makes no difference that Christians mean well when they observe Christmas. God is not amused or pleased.

The knowledge of how to honor Almighty God, who made us, preserves us and gives us eternal life, has been made available to you. Will you honor God or follow the traditions of mankind?

To learn more about what God says about which days and customs we use to honor Him, request a free copy of the booklet, *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*

Too Many Treasures?

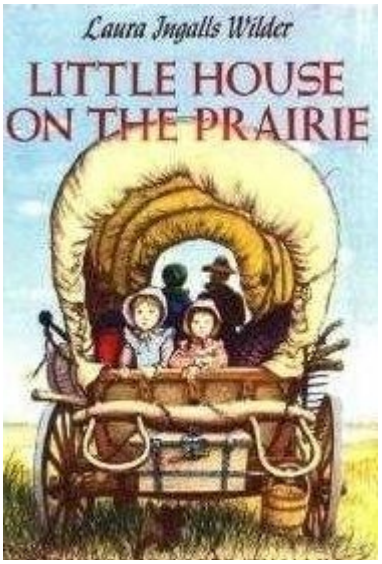
Why do I sometimes find myself envying Ma and Laura of the Little House books?

By Becky Bennett



I'M A DEVOTED "YARD SALER" and enjoy going to look through other people's cast-offs. I'm often amazed at the items that people no longer want or have room for. I'm especially tempted by the books. Often it doesn't matter that my children already have the same book, or that our own bookcases are bulging and in need of sorting.

Recently I couldn't pass up a book of poetry by Robert Louis Stevenson. As I flipped through it, I remembered memorizing "My Shadow" when I was young. This beautifully illustrated book is a treasure for children! How could I pass it up for just 10 cents!



As I recounted my find to my family later, I couldn't help but think what a real treasure the book would have been for the average family 100 years ago. I thought of the Little House series of books Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about her family. Perhaps you remember reading those books or seeing the television show many years ago. I remembered that the Ingalls family had only one book, other than the Bible. That book about the wonders of the animal world was treasured by the Ingalls.

Also treasured was Ma's porcelain shepherdess figurine. Ma carefully carried it in their pioneering journeys. The family knew they were home when Ma would place the shepherdess on the mantle. Then there was Charlotte, Laura's beloved rag doll with black yarn hair and shoe button eyes. Charlotte replaced Laura's old "doll," a dried corn cob wrapped in a rag.

The Ingalls family, like so many other families of past times, had few possessions. But they treasured the things that they had.

Sometimes, I must confess, I feel somewhat envious of Ma and Laura. No, I guess I don't really want to live in a log cabin, with my bedroom also my dining room, living room and kitchen. And I don't want to have so few dishes that if we have company my children would need to share a cup.

And yet, I still envy that love that Ma had for her porcelain shepherdess. I have many decorative items in my home, but not a one that I treasure so much that I hand-carried it to our new home when we moved last year.

Could having too many things actually contribute to a lack of satisfaction?

Today we can have so many things that they sometimes just get in the way! (Hence the yard sales to try to clear out the clutter.) We have so many things, and yet we have a hard time not acquiring more. It's a unique time in history! While we may not have the jewels and lands owned by royalty of previous centuries, we have possessions that only royalty or the very wealthy could have had in the past. We have so much that it becomes like trash to us! And even while we have so much, there's always a "need" to do more shopping, a need to have more or better.

Sometimes the possessions themselves can become a problem. I'm reminded of a movie from the early '80s called *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. The story took place in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa where few people lived except the diminutive Bushmen. They lived happily together getting all their needs from the land and animals around them.

Could having too many things actually contribute to a lack of satisfaction?

And then one day someone in a plane overhead threw out a Coke bottle. The bush people had never had such a hard thing before and considered it a gift from the gods. Virtually everyone found it useful and fun. The children enjoyed making sounds by blowing over top of it. An elderly lady found it useful in smoothing leather. A mother found it could be used to roll out dough. The only problem--the reason the gods must have been crazy--was that there was just one bottle. Soon fights broke out and arguments developed. When at last there was an injury, the people agreed that the bottle had to go! They decided they would rather be without this wonderful possession than have it cause unhappiness and discord.

What a wonderful example of contentment!

I sit here trying to think of what items around me I value the most. Years ago we lived in California and had friends who lost their home to a brush-fire. They had no opportunity to save anything. When it was safe to return, they sorted through the ash and debris hoping there might be something left. The most precious thing they hoped to find? A photograph of their sons, then already grown. That year, even though I knew our home was not in danger of a wild fire, I kept a close eye on my own photo albums, making plans to grab them if an emergency arose.

Perhaps that's what I value most. Family photos certainly are irreplaceable, since I can't have my daughters go back to being babies, small toddlers, etc. And yet it's not really the photographs that

I treasure as much as the memories each one brings back. And the memories are not nearly as precious as my daughters are themselves, in real life (wind-blown hair, smudged faces, sticky hands and all). They are far more precious than any possession, and yet they are something that I don't possess! They'll grow up, leave home, experience life apart from me and have their own families!

I was discussing my thoughts about things and the human tendency to always want more with my daughter, Heather. We reminisced about the Little House books, and then talked about Solomon's observation that the person who loves abundance will not be satisfied no matter how much increase he gets. And, of course, Christ warned us, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

I asked Heather what she thought was the solution to the more-things-less-satisfaction tendency. Her response was wise beyond her 10 years: "People need to have God be their most precious possession." Later, she decided to join me in putting her thoughts into writing. Let me share one paragraph:

"We were all created by God, and are more special than Laura or Ma could ever imagine. But He expects Himself and His love to be present in the hearts of people everywhere, as our most treasured and prized possession. No fancy bedspread or new stove could ever make us happier."

Out of the mouths of babes...



Peace on Earth?

A World War II vet considers how the days of infamy and victory remind us of this world's crying need for peace.

By Dean Rammelsberg



A few years back I called several newspapers on December 7, and asked if they knew what day it was. The reporters didn't know it was Pearl Harbor Day. Of course, even fewer remember Victory in Europe (VE) Day or VJ Day or other days of remembrance.

How contradictory that the world seeks peace by waging war. The horrors of war were made painfully clear with World War I and World War II. But the world continues to seek peace through conflicts and armed battles. Aren't we all looking for the day when the whole world will have a truly peaceful environment in which to live a happy, enjoyable life?

Rather than relying on peace treaties, what if all the world followed the Golden Rule? It certainly appears there would be a much, much more peaceful world if all the "war lords" would use the Golden Rule as a daily guide and settle their differences in more peaceful ways.

General Douglas MacArthur understood the answers to these questions at the end of World War II when he spoke aboard the USS *Missouri* September 2, 1945: "Let us pray that peace be now restored to the world and that God will preserve it always."

"We have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, our Armageddon will be at our door."

He declared: "We have had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, our Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence, an improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh."

In all, we need to honor God on these days of remembrance--Pearl Harbor Day, VE Day, VJ Day, Memorial Day, Veteran's Day and Armistice Day--because of His

giving us victory. We also honor the tremendous sacrifices Americans have made to try to bring about peace and keep America and the rest of the world free. Each time we remember these days of war and victory, we can remember the words of General MacArthur and the fact that war doesn't really make a peaceful world. More than that, we can look to the Book that teaches the Golden Rule and the true way to peace.

Dean Rammelsberg served aboard the USS Goshen *in the Pacific from December 13, 1944, until the end of the war.*



But You Look So Healthy!

It's not easy to help someone whose problem you don't understand. Here's some information that can help you help people who suffer with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

By Joe Bellefeville



A WHILE BACK I was having a bad day. Although not feeling well, I dragged myself to church services. The details are a bit fuzzy now, but I believe before services I met a nice, quiet, older gentleman. We exchanged pleasantries and our names. Services were about to begin, so I got seated. Afterwards, I met a nice, quiet, older gentleman. I introduced myself. He looked puzzled and explained we had met before services. I apologized.

We had a potluck meal that day. After going through the line and selecting my food, I sat down across from a nice, quiet, older gentleman. Of course, I introduced myself. Once again, he stated we had met earlier. Of course, I was embarrassed, but I had no memory of his face or his name. Was this an example of Alzheimer's? In my case, no. I have chronic fatigue syndrome, and sometimes my short-term memory is very poor. Although I look perfectly well, my general health is poor. I can be up about three continuous hours, but then I need to rest. Some days--unexpectedly--I need to rest most of the day.

So, what exactly is CFS? According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the 1994 case definition for CFS is:

1. Clinically evaluated, unexplained, persistent or relapsing chronic fatigue that is of new or

definite onset (i.e. not lifelong), is not the result of ongoing exertion, is not substantially alleviated by rest, and results in substantial reduction in previous level of occupational, educational, social or personal activities.

2. The concurrent occurrence of four or more of the following symptoms:
    - substantial impairment in short-term memory or concentration
    - sore throat
    - tender lymph nodes
    - muscle pain
    - multi-joint pain without joint swelling or redness
    - headaches of a new type, pattern or severity
    - unrefreshing sleep
    - post-exertional malaise lasting more than 24 hours

These symptoms must have persisted or recurred during six or more consecutive months of illness and must not have pre-dated the fatigue.

The *CFIDS Chronicle,* a magazine for people with CFS, estimated (based on a number of prevalence studies including the 1999 DePaul University study in Chicago) that there are 200,000 to 500,000 adults in the United States that have CFS. It seems that many congregations have at least one person with CFS (or a similar disease, fibromyalgia). In my small congregation I know of three or us who have been diagnosed with CFS.

How can you help people with CFS?

1. Be patient with us. Some days our memory or concentration or energy level may be very poor. Help us. We may need you to repeat things a few times or remind us to write things down. Some of us think very slowly. Please talk about a subject first and gradually ease into questions or decisions that have to be made. When people spring unexpected questions on me--especially on bad memory days--my mind tends to go blank or I may give a knee-jerk response that may need to be changed later. We appreciate invitations to go out or to fellowship. Regretfully, we may have to decline because of fatigue or because our energy is about gone. But don't stop inviting us--we need the fellowship with brethren. All too often brethren with CFS only see other brethren at services when health allows us to attend church.

Be patient with us. Some days our memory or concentration or energy level may be very poor. Help us.

2. Be flexible. When planning an activity that includes people with CFS, please be flexible. Because our health is so unpredictable, we cannot guarantee our attendance at future events. Please do not schedule activities that require or rely on us to be there. A few years back I was accompanying a vocal group for special music. However, when the day came to perform, I was sick. Thankfully, the group was able to sweet-talk another pianist into playing at the last minute. It is always a good idea to have a Plan B--just in case.

3. Be encouraging. Many of us with CFS have to battle major health problems along with a myriad of other challenges. Because of our health, we may not be able to attend church every week. When we are able to attend, please be supportive. Take the time to listen to

how we are doing. Add us to your prayer list and pray about our health and other needs. Since there is no known cure for CFS (as there is no cure for many other diseases), please remember it can be very discouraging living with CFS. Please bear in mind that it is not encouraging to be lectured on the "cure" for CFS which you are selling to brethren at a special price. By the same token, it is also not encouraging to be "exhorted" to do what is physically impossible.

4. Telephone people with CFS. Walk with us through our triumphs and our trials. Please check with the person to find out what is the best time for them. Please do not assume that 6:30 a.m. (your best time) is also the best time for others. Along the same lines, please do not "pop" over unexpectedly for five-hour visits. Although people with CFS appreciate your good intentions, some days we may be in relapse (resting most of the day) and simply cannot entertain people then.



5. If you are ill with a contagious disease, please avoid contact with people who have CFS. Our immune system may be extremely weak and we may have the tendency to catch every "bug" that is going around. By the same token, please do not expect us to visit people in hospitals or in places that have contagious diseases.

CFS is an overwhelming chronic disease. In order to help people with CFS: be patient, be flexible, be supportive and, when contagious, avoid contact with us.

If you want more information about CFS, you can contact:

- The CFIDS Association (a national CFS group) at 704-365-2343 or toll-free at 1-800-442-3437 or on the Web at www.cfids.org.
- The National Institutes of Health (NIH) at 301-496-5717 or on the Web at www.nih.gov.
- Those who will try these suggestions will be greatly appreciated by those of us with CFS!