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Coming in the June BA: on dating, marriage, and attitudes toward homosexuality

In the April and May issues of *Now What?*: a husband receives healing beyond this world, and a Mormon priest finds Christ (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)



When you see this symbol, visit www.cog7.org/BA for additional material.



In Other Words

If the Bible could be compacted to one word, what word would it be for you? My choice would be *love*. If you chose *God*, no problem: The One is the other.

If the gospel were written in only two words, what two would you write? One songwriter chose “Jesus Saves.” For Matthew, Mark, and Luke, being saved by Christ meant entering *God’s kingdom* (two words); for John, it meant *eternal life* (two words). No difference.

If ultimate truth could be boiled down to three words, which three are the best? Paul once used *faith*, *hope*, and *charity* (1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV). Ever wonder why? Maybe it’s their link to past, present, and future: What God said and did in the past, we accept by faith; what He promises in the future, we hope for; what He commands in the present is charity — to love. Still the greatest.

If our Christian creed were reduced to four words, could you write it? E-mail your choice for the best four-word summary to the editor (bibleadvocate@cog7.org), and we’ll print the better entries.

The gospel is condensed to five words in 1 Corinthians 15:3: “Christ died for our sins.” This covers the who, what, and why of salvation and states the theme of our annual Lord’s Supper, at sunset on April 7 this year. Jesus suffered in our behalf; the bread and cup of communion are the most appropriate symbols by which we remember His sacrifice on the cross.

The Sabbath after is prime time to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. Shortened to six words, the gospel becomes “He rose again the third day” (v. 4). “It is finished” with “He is risen” also make six. In them we hear the clear echo of another six: “No condemnation to those in Christ” (Romans 8:1).

Six more words, “Fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13), sum up man’s whole duty, as do these nine from Micah 6:8: “Do justly . . . love mercy . . . walk humbly with your God.”

The Bible in seven words boils down to “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). Be reminded of that each time your digital clock reads “6:33.”

The gospel in twenty-five words of King James English is John 3:16. Count ‘em!

With that, my four hundred words for this page are nearly gone, so I’ll close with five more: God bless you and yours.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



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Plan for Pleasing God

On what basis can we stand before a just God? by Bob Fogarty

Jesus is baptized. As He comes up from the water, the Spirit descends on Him like a dove, and a voice proclaims loudly and proudly, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Time passes. With Peter, James, and John on a mountain hike, Jesus is surrounded by God’s sudden, brilliant glory. Again the voice: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (17:5).

Enter you and me. No doves, no voice, no brilliance — just doubts. Painfully aware of the distance from where we live to the “well pleasing” we seek, how can we possibly stand before a holy and justice-driven God?

With so many potential ways to displease Him, is there a way to know, with the same assurance that Christ received, that our Father in heaven is well pleased with us?

Yes! We can know that God will use the same words to describe us that He used to describe Jesus.

Failure to please God

First, note what is not and will never be pleasing to God: “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure” (Hebrews 10:6).

Nothing we offer God for our faults and failures can be acceptable or pleasing to Him. Only *one* thing prompts God’s forgiveness for sins: the offering of His Son’s body “once for all” (v. 10).

In God’s sight, we are sanctified — declared and made holy — only by Jesus’ death on the cross.

How many things have we done, and continue doing, to make up for our moral mistakes,

subconsciously thinking they make a difference? Going to church, behaving better, trying to do enough to tip the scales in our favor, starting this good habit, stopping that bad one, tithing, apologizing. Each of these may be good and admirable, but none of them will ever please God enough to pay the sin debt we owe. The absence of peace and assurance in our hearts is part of the proof that good things didn’t work. Doing right things for the wrong reasons leaves us dried and unsatisfied inside.

“So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). If we are not born again, blood-bought children of God, *nothing* we do will ever please God. The “flesh” is the old, fallen part in each of us; it is self-seeking, not God-seeking. Galatians 5:19-21 lists what this old nature can do without God — things that are never pleasing to Him:

Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (NIV).

No matter what our hearts or anyone else says, God says these

things are never pleasing to Him. Being honest, we admit that they don’t bring us lasting satisfaction either. In the end we feel dirty, unhappy, and discontent — just the opposite of the pure, joyful, and peaceful experience God desires for us (Romans 14:17).

Most believers don’t want to do what displeases God and do want to do what He approves. Because of this desire, many of us get caught on the spiritual treadmill: No matter how fast, how long, or how hard we run, we sense that we are never much closer to pleasing Him. We’re just wearing ourselves out. We try to stop doing sin and are painfully aware when we fall short of the ideal. We strive to live holy lives, but our heart of hearts is never quite sure if we are pleasing to Him — even at our best. When we realize we have fallen, we need to *quickly* follow the instruction of 1 John 1:9: admit our sin to God. This gives Him the spiritual license to cleanse us from it — and move on!

Five actions

The New Testament points out five specific human actions that God will see and respond to with a great, well-pleasing “Yeah!” as He did at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration.

The absence of peace and assurance in our hearts is part of the proof that good things didn’t work.

1 Believing to receive salvation: “God was pleased . . . to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

The first scriptural statement we find for what truly pleases God is trusting in Christ *alone* for salvation. We should no longer think that our God is selective in whom He saves when He’s pleased to save all those who believe.

2 Allowing Him to reveal Jesus in and to us: “When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me . . .” (Galatians 1:15, 16).

When God gave Paul understanding into who Jesus was and what He had done, that leading theologian of his time disappeared into the desert for three years of contemplation. So big was the Christ concept being revealed to him that he hid to get fuller disclosure from heaven before even trying to teach it to others.

Many of us were raised as Scripture searchers in churches that stressed truth. The truth that 100 percent pleases God is not uncovering and stringing together miscellaneous doctrines; it is allowing Him to reveal Jesus to us and through us.

3 Accepting His kingdom: “Do not fear, little flock, for

it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Jesus tells us that God is not trying to keep us out of His kingdom, so no fear: It thrills Him whenever He gives or helps us experience His kingdom. Accepting God’s gifts pleases Him.

4 Saying “thanks” for the salvation of Christ, and doing good to others: “By Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:15, 16).

Saying “thank You” to God is not only an act of respect but also one of the highest gift-forms we can offer. The Old Testament thank or peace offering was not a sin sacrifice, but the opposite: an offering to celebrate the acceptance and atonement of the previously offered sin sacrifice. It was something extra and beautiful to be offered in recognition of what God had already done.

Jesus’ earlier sacrifice of Himself for the sin of the world was fully accepted by God. The thanks offering of Hebrews 13 is our saying “thanks” in return. These thanks are a sweet aroma to our Father, another way we can gladden His heart.

Our Hebrews text also con-

veys that simply doing good to and for others pleases God as much as Jesus did in His earthly ministry. Anything and everything good we do, great or small, He sees and appreciates. He is well pleased with all acts of love.

5 Getting over ourselves: “To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

The word *communicate* in the King James rendering of Hebrews 13:16 means opening and sharing life with others. The Jews of Jesus’ day were always holding back, thinking themselves higher and better than others – even better than other Jewish believers. The writer of Hebrews was telling believers to get over themselves. Joining hands and hearts with others tells God that we recognize that we are all His creation and the same in His eyes. Something as simple as shaking hands, smiling, and hugging those we normally wouldn’t speaks volumes more to them and to God than our deepest theology.

Child’s play

These five things please God, and they are so simple that children can do them. These five have done and will do far more to spread the gospel and advance His kingdom than anything else.

I dare you to try them! Imagine God looking at you and saying “Yeah! *That’s My kid!*” **BA**

Ananything and everything good we do, great or small, He sees and appreciates. He is well pleased with all acts of love.

Bob and Kim Fogarty and their two teenagers attend and serve the church in Kansas City, MO.

by Sherri Langton

Electronic/Online Bibles

Johannes Gutenberg wouldn't believe his eyes. Six centuries after his printing press began mass producing the Bible, the Word of God is gaining entrance into even more lives through electronic and online mediums.

Electronic/digital Bibles have been available for a number of years, of course. But with new technologies popping up, publishers have their hands full adapting the Bible for the tech-savvy. Here are two versions that hit the market in recent months.

Franklin Electronic Bible

Since 1986, Franklin Electronics has been producing handheld devices, such as dictionaries, spell-checkers, and translators. They also sell handheld Bibles (NIV and KJV) and the *Holman Bible Dictionary*. One of Franklin's newest releases combines both NIV and KJV with the Holman Dictionary. If you like your Bible small with quick, interactive features, you'll be in handheld heaven with this one.



I "test drove" last year's electronic edition with combined NIV/KJV text. I could find a verse by reference or by scrolling through the books of the Old and New Testaments. There's also an advanced key word search, daily devotional readings, and an organizer. Once you've found your favorite passages, you can bookmark them for future reference.

Franklin offers the *Santa Biblia Reina-Valera Version 1960* for Spanish readers as well. It has all the NIV/KJV in English features, plus allows users to take notes and learn verses from a new passage each time they turn it on. Visit www.franklin.com or call 1-800-266-5626, option 1.

English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible



When Crossway Books and Bibles released its *ESV Study Bible* last October, it quickly climbed to the top three spots on Parable.com's national Bible sales list. This study Bible is packed with maps, illustrations, and other graphics, plus articles and notes.

The Bible's real strength, however, is its interactive online companion that provides much more than the print version: maps and images from NASA's Shuttle Radar Topography Mission, depicting the latest archaeological findings; hyperlinked cross references; search by verse, topic, or key word; a color palette to digitally highlight passages; a note-taking column where users can add their own reflections and links.

If you purchase the print ESV, access to the online companion is free. From what I've seen of the online demo, the cost of the print is well worth it. Read more about this Bible at ESVStudyBible.com. View a user-created tour at <http://vimeo.com/3073981>.

Bible footnotes

- Olive Tree Bible Software now offers the NIV for iPhone, BlackBerry, smartphone, and more. Visit www.olivetree.com.
- Christianity.com has an outstanding free Bible Tools section.



Religion vs. Salvation

Hear ye: an apostolic sermon, the audience divided.
You pick your crowd. **by Dr. Guillermo Contreras Morales**

There are moments we think we know enough about God. Presented before the church as infants, we went on to acquire the truth each Sabbath and were baptized pursuant to the true doctrine. Our forebears bequeathed “the chosen church” to us. Standing before a mirror, we could be proud.

Now imagine a congregation, with Apostle Paul expounding on Romans 2. On one side are the Jews – honest, fulfilling the law, unchanging. On the other side are Gentiles learning of Christ – remorseful, but without a fully informed faith. Where in this crowd do you sit?

If you choose the Gentiles, you won’t enjoy this sermon’s first half (vv. 1-16). Paul speaks

against the ungodly perverts, warning that wrath is directed against those living in sinful delights. As he scolds the evil uncircumcised, a chorus can be heard across the aisle: “Amen! The Lord our God will judge!”

Just as the Jews celebrate their righteousness, the apostle points his finger at their inflated chests. To end all boasting of those who think they deserve salvation, he hurls his verbal bombs against legalism:

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God . . . You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? . . . do you steal? . . . do you commit adultery? . . . do you rob temples? . . . You who make your boast in the law,

do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you . . .” (vv. 17, 21-24).

Just when the brethren think they should be praised, they are rebuked.

Scarf of genealogy

The idea of depending on a myth reminds me of the story of a woodcutter’s son who was convinced there were ghosts in the forest. This annoyed the father, who earned a living among the trees and wanted his son to do the same. To console him, the father gave him a scarf and said, “Ghosts fear me, my son. Wear my scarf, and the ghosts will fear you too. This scarf will make you a woodcutter.”

So the son wore the scarf with pride, telling everyone that he was a woodcutter. However, he never wandered deep into the forest and never cut down a tree.

This story depicts the Jews’ attitude toward grace. In the latter half of his Romans 2 sermon, Paul assaults the Jews who relied on their parents’ scarf. As a “chosen lineage,” they felt secure in their inheritance. It didn’t matter if they were thieves, adulterers, or extortionists (vv. 22, 23); they had their parents’ scarf!

Do you carry such a scarf? If the branches of your genealogical tree are loaded with leaders or active members and you cut your teeth on a church pew, remember that a family tree can neither save nor condemn you; that choice is yours!

Ring of circumcision

The scarf story reminds me of the symbolism of a wedding ring.

The ring represents love, but cannot replace it.

Imagine that a husband is an unfaithful wife beater and drunkard, but he always wears his ring on the proper finger. One day the wife confronts him about his bad behavior, and he responds, "But darling, I always wear my ring. Can't you see how much I love you? Don't you know how difficult it is to put up with what others say about that ring?"

The saddened wife responds, "It's true. Forgive me. Go on with your life as usual. As long as you wear the ring, I know that you love me."

When Paul accuses the Jews of relying on circumcision while neglecting their souls (v. 25), he echoes the wife's complaint.

What contemporary symbols of Christian faith could be considered substitutes for circumcision? Could it be baptism, the annual Lord's Supper, head covering, ostentatious garb, or church membership?

"Lord, many times I forget You. I don't get along with others, and my friends never hear the gospel from me. I damage my body and stretch the truth for my own benefit. But I was baptized as a youth, and I attend the right church with its camps and conferences."

Do you think God will say, "Yes, My child; I do look the other way on your perverse ways and rebellion. Don't worry; because of your loyalty to the symbols, I forgive you completely"?

Symbols or Savior?

Symbols may be important. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for example, illustrate the cross of Christ and may even articulate

the truth of salvation in dramatic form. But they don't have power to impart salvation. Does God save His children based on a symbol? Would He look upon a religious hypocrite and say, "Because your name appears in the records of the right denomination, I will save you"?

On the other hand, would God say to a sincere seeker, "You devoted your life to love Me and love My children. You gave Me your heart and confessed your sins. I long to save you. I regret that your church celebrated the Lord's Supper too many times and didn't keep the right day. Therefore I cannot grant you salvation"?

Our God abounds in love and mercy. He saves us, not because we rely on a symbol but because we rely on a Savior.

From heaven's perspective (as seen in the Bible), little difference exists between the partygoer and the ungodly churchman who points a self-righteous finger at the partygoer. Gang members, good people, accusers, and members of the praise team need the same message: All are lost without God!

Or as Paul summarizes:

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin As it is written: "There

is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Roman 3:9-11, NIV).

The inheritance, the rites, and the ceremonies do not make us real Christians: "It is God who justifies" (8:33, NIV). Salvation is God's business. There is only one name under heaven that has power to save, and that name is not yours.

Warning against pride

The root of our religion comes down to rejoicing in the Savior and Lord, believing and serving Him humbly and with gratitude. Spiritual pride is most harmful, so let us take care to avoid it. Regeneration and renovation of the Holy Spirit create a spiritual framework to the mind and a will to follow the truth in its holy ways.

As members of the one body of Christ, let us pray that we may be true Christians, not just on the outside but within; not in the letter but in heart; baptized not only with water but with the Holy Spirit; caring little for the praise of men but for that of God. **BA**

Dr. Guillermo Contreras Morales is a member at Independencia, one of about forty CoG7 congregations in Monterrey, N. L., Mexico.

There is only one name under heaven
that has power to save, and that name
is not yours.

Reflection on Repentance

by Barb Eldred

Approaching the communion table, my mind turns to self-examination.

Some of us still call this annual event the Christian Passover. My Jewish friends tell me that the adjoining Hebrew feast, Unleavened Bread, was to picture and stimulate repentance. Putting all the leaven, the sin, out of the house pictures repentance.

My self-examination this season raises several personal points, deeper than the desire to get rid of extra pounds and gray hairs. I could say, "I'm a good friend. I help people. I give to charities. I have never hurt anyone." Then on second thought: *Oh, them! They deserved everything they got.*

This is about spiritual things, our relationship with God, whether we live as He asks. This is much more than keeping Sabbath, the supper, and not killing anyone. Jesus said if we've been angry with a brother, that's as wrong as murder. Been angry lately? When your husband put the diamond saw through the phone line? You try living without broadband! Does that count?

True self-examination leads us right to old-fashioned repentance. As we remember that Jesus died for our sins, let's admit

that we have some of those to be washed away, too.

Look at poor old Job, a righteous man. God links him with Daniel and Noah as the only three people righteous enough to save their own lives in the destruction of Jerusalem, had they been there (Ezekiel 14:14-20). He did his best to be a no-sin bloke.

Under Satan's attack, Job lost everything. He whined to God and asked God to show him where he went wrong. He thought he was right (Job 1:22; 2:10b). He challenged God to show him where he had sinned (31:35).

In the end, God settled the argument (ch. 38). He lovingly put Job in his place, but He didn't mince words till we come to the point of the whole exercise: that Job would see God with his own eyes (42:5). And this led to repentance (v. 6).

If Job, why not me?

We teach kids to say, "Sorry" rather glibly today. A bit like the term "Love you." Repentance is about saying sorry and meaning it. But on what level? And how does the person to whom it is being said see it?

Being sorry you were caught, sorry you are getting an ear-

ful, sorry you were fined, is just regret. Regret is being sorry for how the action affected you (Exodus 10:16, 17).

Remorse is being sorry for how your action affected someone else. The outcome has had a negative effect on someone else, and you realize you are responsible, or partly responsible. Judas showed remorse (Matthew 27:3). The Greek word here for *remorse* means "a care to one afterwards."

Repentance is being sorry for how your action affected God. In other words, the deed was fundamentally wrong. Repentance means to re-think, to change the way we look at ourselves and at Him. It is not part of our human nature to admit that we might be wrong. Repentance is never pleasant; the Hebrew word comes from a root meaning "to sigh or breathe heavily."

But repentance is such an important process because without it, there cannot be change. The object of this life is to grow as we become more like Christ. Growth must involve change; lack of growth is unhealthy.

Repentance is about acknowledging our basic inability to live up to the standard Christ set, no matter how hard we try, and acknowledging our need for a Savior to save us. That's the thought we should fix in our minds as we participate in the Lord's Supper.

BA

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Unity in Community

by Israel Steinmetz
Kansas City, Missouri

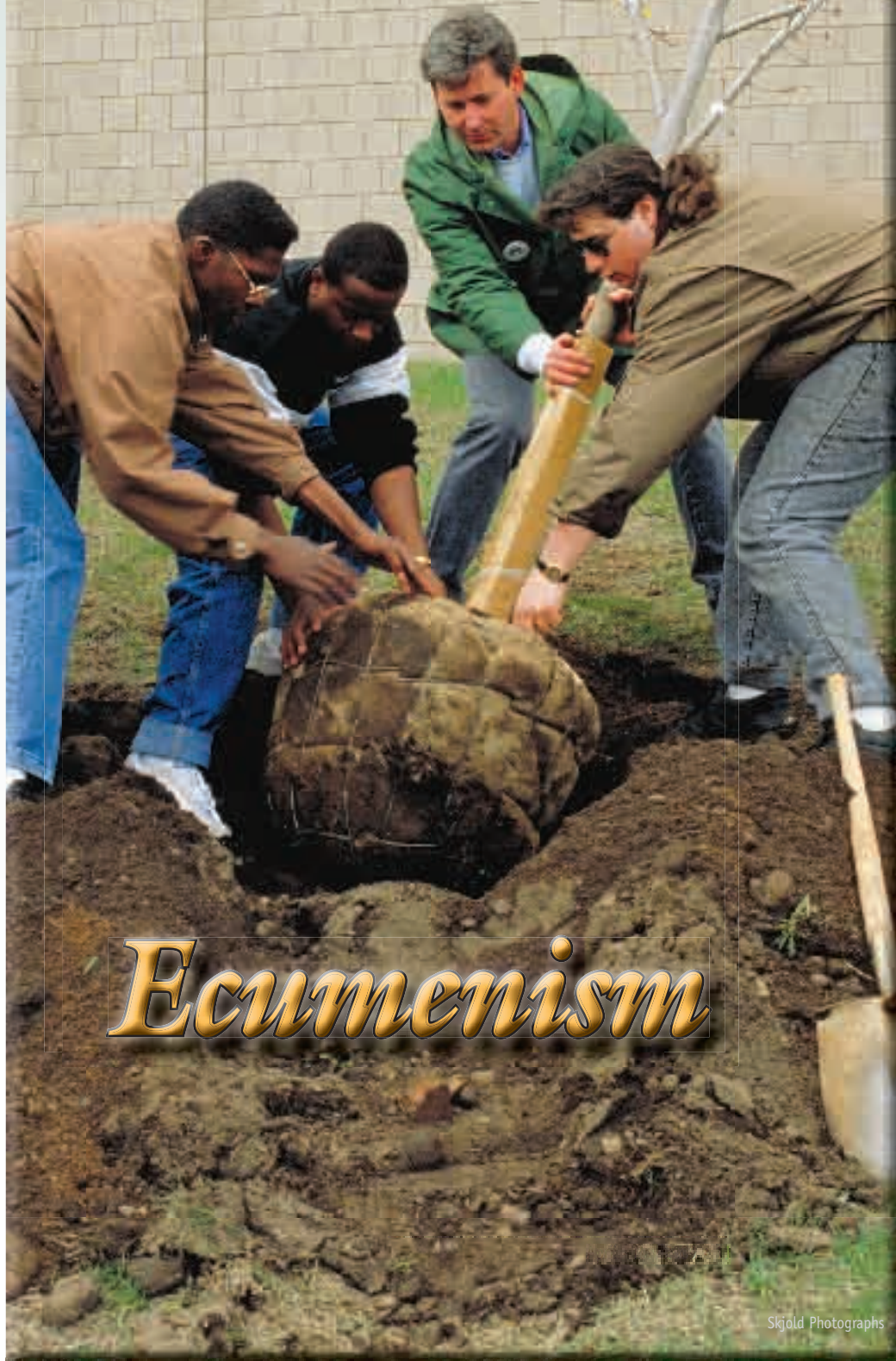
In its Christian form, the ecumenical spirit seeks to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” because “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:3-6, NASB). It seeks to actively fulfill Christ’s prayer that His followers would all be one, just as He and the Father are one (John 17:21).

The ecumenical spirit does so, not only with those who attend our congregation or share our denominational brand but also with all those who place their faith in Jesus and are thus fellow members in Christ’s body. And it does so only through a spirit of heavenly wisdom that is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy” (James 3:17, NASB).

How might this noble pursuit be practiced in a Christianity fractured by nearly two millennia of infighting and division? Every day we encounter others who share our faith and serve our Lord. I’ll cite a few personal examples that may prove useful.

As a student at an interdenominational Bible college and seminary, I found growth and fellowship across a wide spectrum of believers. Attending institutions of higher learning, you too can seek out believing classmates

Faith-Plus Forum



Ecumenism

and Christian groups on campus.

Serving a church that hosts a food and clothing giveaway, I've seen many Christians join us in ministering to the poor in our area. One of our members has a friend in a Disciples of Christ church. This friend was so excited about our ministry that he asked if their church could partner with us. Now we've received as many donations for our giveaway from that church as from our own. In the same way, our church could help others do the work we're all called to.

On Sundays we rent the building to a Church of God in Christ group, and several of our members enjoy friendships with theirs. Their pastor and I eat, talk, and pray together about the work that God is doing in our congregations. I also enjoy fellowship with area pastors in a Ministerial Alliance group. Twice a year we hold community services to support a food bank and build relations among our churches. Together, we work to advance the kingdom of God.

At Elder Melvin Sweet's home-

going service, a member of the Stanberry Ministerial Alliance testified that Pastor Sweet was an example to the pastors in his city of what it meant to love and serve Jesus in Christian unity. May they have the same testimony to share about us.

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Unity? Among Christians?

by Bob Fogarty
Lee's Summit, Missouri

An amazing 1.5 billion humans call themselves Christians. These divide, then sub-divide into thousands of denominations, with many saying they are "denominationally free." And Jesus has the audacity to pray for unity among them all (John 17) — unity like He shares with the Father. The result of this bond, He said, would be that the world would come to see, know, and believe in Him.

How is Christian unity possible when it is so rare to find even two of us with very similar beliefs?

An example of Jesus' prayer fulfilled is in Acts 11:26-30. In this text, God spoke to and through the prophet Agabus, declaring that a famine was coming. *Together* the Antioch church accepted God's warning. *Together* each of them set aside what they individually could. And they pooled their resources *together* to provide relief for those who would be affected by the coming disaster.

This passage holds a key to how unity happens and why the disciples were first called Christians. They didn't separate themselves from all who believed differently; those were first called Pharisees (i.e., "separatists"). Nor did they distinguish themselves as holier than the multitudes; those were first called Sadducees (i.e., "righteous ones"). They were not known as scriptural lawyers; those were the scribes — self-proclaimed keepers of jots and tittles.

None of these three groups received the commendation of God but rather the *condemnation*. Again and again, Jesus described them as spiritual snakes, waiting in the high grass of the church of that day for their next victims. Those who listened to them would be filled with the destructive venom of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Their final condition would be spiritual paralysis — unable to do real good for God's kingdom.

The Antioch Christians of Acts 11 differed in two ways. First, their God urgently proclaimed to them not new theology or a need for separation or distinctive



Skjold Photographs

truth, but a genuine need: a coming famine. Second, the reaction of these believers was different in that they heard, heeded, gave, and went.

Jesus' prayer for Christian unity is fulfilled globally whenever Christians move from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness, from idealism to reality, and from majoring on differences of opinion to majoring on our common call and the purpose of Christ: "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

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Ecumenical Challenges

by **Steven Kyner**
Jamestown, North Dakota

Growing in Christ, we feel both a want and a need to work together in unity with other servants of Jesus. As our spiritual family grows, we find many in that circle of a different fold (congregation or denomination) but with whom we enjoy unity of the spirit, much agreement in the Word, and fellowship in Christ.

One difficulty in this more ecumenical way of thinking is how to be open and accepting of others without compromising our own convictions or losing our identity. The struggle is to "seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:11), without turning from truth.

We are not unique in this struggle. Many denominations have undergone a transformation

More on Ecumenism

Former BA staffer Richard Wiedenheft (1946-2007) contributed much to this topic of inter-church relations in an article titled "Acceptance Without Compromise." Early on, he wrote:

"Today, we have those who are vegetarians and those who eat meat, those who drink wine and those who abstain, those who wear makeup and jewelry and those who don't, those who observe annual feasts and those who don't, those who observe non-biblical holidays and those who refuse, those who use the 'sacred names' instead of God and Jesus and those who don't. On and on we could go!

"Yet in the face of all the differences of belief and practice among Christians, we are exhorted by Scripture to have unity of spirit (Ephesians 4:3). But how?"

Read Richard's answer and the entire article at www.cog7.org/BA.



from sectarian to a more open attitude to "outsiders." Unfortunately some have given up biblical convictions, and some have nearly lost their Christian identity in the process.

A maturing process is needed as we evaluate what is most important and learn to respect those with whom we differ. There is also a reaching out to all, including those with different points of view. Loving others is not optional for God's children.

In the Bible, the distinction between light and darkness was usually an easy call: Jew or Gentile, God-fearing or pagan, believer or infidel, Christ or antichrist. Today the waters seem more muddied, and the temptation is to swallow both the gnat and the camel. A type of political correctness has invaded Christian thinking to a degree that we feel guilty for any criticism we give or any conviction we hold. The kaleidoscope of ideas and practices

hiding under the Christian banner makes the choices of fellowship or endorsement often confusing, if not impossible. What is the point at which denial of biblical truth or practice becomes denial of Jesus? At what point do our efforts to "just get along" or participate in "good causes" end up compromising our faith or violating our convictions?

For me, Jesus is the key. His example of loving, caring for, and forgiving the weak, the ignorant, and the sinner must be seen in me. His opposition to sin and commitment to God must be manifest in my life and attitude. He is also my line of demarcation: When words or actions demote or dishonor Jesus, my "amens" stop. Where Jesus is denied, I must not cooperate. The teaching, example, and person of Jesus are where we stand. "Nor is there salvation in any other . . ." (Acts 4:12). **BA**

heart speak

a brave new world

Keeping the faith when you've left home

BY LAURA CORTEZ

@ Espion—Dreamstime.com

I remember dancing with a friend to a live band in a bar, drink in hand. I spun around and stopped face to face with a guy I knew — one who knew me as the Christian Laura, not as a half-drunk friend.

Later, as I lay awake in bed, I had a nagging feeling I had finally been busted. This was what I had to show for my three years away at college.

OK, now I've said it: I didn't exactly do a great job keeping my faith when I left home. Back then, I had my room packed in a trailer and my heart and mind stuffed with a false confidence in my faith, ready to take on the world. I thought I'd start going to church and that everything in San Antonio would be as it was back home. Yeah, right!

I never imagined Satan had prepared a legion of demons to bring me down. Within three or four months, I knew all the hot spots in the new city. My rookie faith was no match against a seasoned battalion. I thought

I was a strong enough Christian but was afraid to ask for help when I slipped. I felt like a failure.

Since the "fall" of 2004, God has worked all my mistakes for good. To all of you soon to depart home, here you go, straight from the Man himself.

ASK FOR DIRECTIONS

What was the first thing Jesus did when He left home to live out His destiny? Find the cheapest place to eat? Seek a group to join in the town square? Check out all the chicks in the local temple? No! He went into the desert for some one-on-one with His Dad. Praying, fasting. He sought to know His Father's plan.

Think you know what God wants from your life? Better be sure, 'cuz someone in that wilderness will surely tempt you to change it — not for the better. Before you set out on your dreams, try prayer and fasting. I'm not talking about having no food because you can't figure out the kitchen like your mom does. I mean honest fasting with intentional prayer, fully expecting God will answer. Check out Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

MIND YOUR BUSINESS

The first time we see Jesus away from His parents, He's only twelve and still living at home. But He already had the right idea. When Mary scolded Him, Jesus

continued on page 17

Seniors

HELLO SENIORS

WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF LIFE BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL. OH YES, THIS IS YOUR RIGHT OF PASSAGE. YOU'VE REACHED THE PROVERBIAL CROSSROADS INTO A NEW STAGE IN LIFE. FOR THE PAST YEAR YOU'VE BEEN AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN, BUT IN A FEW WEEKS YOU'LL RETURN ONCE AGAIN TO THE STATUS OF ROOKIE. SO HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO KEEP YOU FROM GETTING EATEN ALIVE OUT THERE.



5 successful tips for getting through college

KNOW YOURSELF

It's important to know what you can do and work with it. If you're not a morning person, don't take an 8 a.m. class. If you're not a good writer, take only one writing-intensive class per semester until you improve. If you're a leader, look for opportunities like group projects. Spreading yourself too thin can cause you to settle for just good enough grades.

OFFICE HOURS

The easiest way to get behind in school is to not ask questions. Most professors will give you times when you can visit their offices one-on-one. Take our advice: USE THEM! Professors want you to pass; if you're struggling, they will help you. It's their job.

DO YOUR BASICS EARLY

Most of these classes are extensions of courses you took in high school, but you still have to take them. The further along you get in school, the more you'll want to focus on your major and the less likely you'll want to take something like college algebra.

MAKE FRIENDS

College is hard enough, so I'm always trying to find ways to make it easier. One thing that works is making friends, but not just anyone. You need those two or three friends who will support you in your studies. Finding them can be a huge difference in making college life less complicated.

TEXTBOOKS ARE EXPENSIVE

Costs for college textbooks can kill you, so listen up. First, plan to spend about \$200-\$300 each semester. Whether it's financial aid or your own cash, that's a nice chunk of change. Second, don't buy early. Some profs use books like air; others never crack it open. Before shelling out the dough, go to your first day of class and ask if you'll need the assigned textbook. Professors know the cost and will try to spare you if they can. Then try buying from Web sites like Amazon.com or Half.com. Don't forget the shipping time that might set you back. Again, timing is everything.

finding purpose

BY ISAI MELGOSA

Sitting in Sabbath school, I reach over and grab my mother's Bible. It's highlighted with notes in margins and small drawings to illustrate what she reads. On the first blank page is this handwritten note: "I was designed for the purpose of pleasing my Maker."

Deciding on a degree plan for college, I chose to prepare for helping those who need healing and those who don't have rights. I finished my bachelors degree with a major in psychology and minor in Christian studies, and now I'm working with inner city youth who have been labeled and forgotten. They are youth who cause people to cross the street, live on the streets, or deal drugs in an alley. Some are

raised by grandparents while their parents do jail time or get high.

Soon I will complete my masters of arts in counseling — another tool to help others through counseling in marriage and family and chemical dependency. By next fall, I hope to begin a doctorate in psychology. That will continue a life-long calling for me.

Like my mother, I believe that "I was designed for the purpose of pleasing my Maker." Many young people beginning college have an important choice to make. Will you allow God to move through you, or have you made your own plans and put God on the sideline?

Campus Ministries

BY NATURE, COLLEGE CAMPUSES ARE VERY MULTICULTURAL — HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS WITH JUST AS MANY DIFFERENT BELIEFS. FINDING A PLACE WHERE OTHERS SHARE YOUR PASSION FOR CHRIST AND WHERE YOUR FAITH IS CULTIVATED CAN BE AN INCREDIBLE WAY TO MAKE YOUR COLLEGE CAREER MORE SUCCESSFUL. HERE ARE A FEW CAMPUS MINISTRIES WORTH LOOKING INTO.

Chi Alpha

Though it sounds like a fraternity, Chi Alpha equips students to transform the university, the marketplace, and the world. Through worship, small groups, and social activity, it creates a great environment for students — not to mention their sweet-looking Web site. www.chialpha.com

Campus Crusade for Christ

One of the oldest and most recognizable ministries, CRU (as it is known for short) has spread to countless campuses. CRU's mission is to connect with every student — a great way to get involved. www.campuscrusadeforchrist.com

Baptist Collegiate Ministries

Found on many campuses — private or public, community or four-year — they host noon lunches and evening worship to reach students, Baptist or otherwise. www.bcmlife.net

Single-campus ministries

At almost every college, ministries specific to that campus will likely exist. Visit your college's Web site, search campus organizations, or just keep your eyes and ears open: A good campus ministry will make its presence known.

Most campus ministries are affiliated with denominations, so visit their meetings, talk to the leaders, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Also, get plugged in to your church's college-age ministry; it may be just as valuable as a campus ministry. If your church doesn't have a college ministry, start one!



said, "How is it that you had to look for Me? Did you not see and know that it was necessary . . . for Me to be in My Father's house and . . . about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49, *Amplified*).

If you want to be faithful, then be about God's business — anything from a church ministry with accountability to serving in the community. Remember, if your hands aren't busy doing your heavenly Father's work, Satan will certainly put them to do his.

KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND YOUR BFF'S CLOSER

On most college campuses, you'll find about every type of person. Just think of one type you would never expect to encounter there, and they will be sitting next to you in your American Lit class — I promise. It's OK to talk to them. In fact you might learn something, and they can learn from you. When you're on your own, I hope you'll meet and get to know a variety of people. But when it comes to the people who will greatly influence you, please be selective.

When Jesus chose the twelve men He would later entrust His gospel to, He did so with great purpose. He needed people who were like-minded and would give their lives for Him . . . eventually. Your inner circle, your family away from family,

should be those who will hold you accountable for your actions, support you during tough times, and pull you away from the fire when you get too close.

Still think you're ready to fly solo? I'm not going to lie to you: It's difficult, it's fun, and you'll be tempted to do anything and everything. Satan wants you to think you're strong enough to resist them all, but you aren't. You will have many pop quizzes of the soul and will probably fail some of them.

But God's love can reach even further than you can fall. You can learn something from everything you experience, even the most mundane. Don't trust in your own ability to remain faithful or in your plans for your future. Trust in the calling God is placing on your heart and His promise: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b, NIV).

Laura Cortez is a middle school teacher in San Antonio, TX, where she lives with her husband, David.

inside the nfyc

NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK AND HUNGER LOCK-IN

April 17-19, 2009 (Suggested. If this weekend doesn't work for your church, pick any weekend through June 30.)

This is a great way to get your church involved in foreign missions — without the travel! Half the money raised goes to help build an orphanage school in Ghana. If each church donates only \$50, we'll pay for the school's foundation. Individuals can send offerings (marked "Hunger Lock-In") directly to the Denver office, whether or not your group gets involved.

Packets have been sent to all local youth workers and are available through the NFYC office. Contact Kurt Lang, NFYC director, at nfyc@cog7.org.

CONNECT. GROW. THRIVE. HOW?

- Sign up for weekly *Youth Flash* newsletter at <http://cog7.org/mailman/listinfo/youth>. Don't miss another issue!
- Sign up for cell phone text list, and we'll send a daily verse, joke, thoughts to ponder — a little something each day to remind you of God. E-mail your name (first, last), cell phone carrier, and number to nfyc@cog7.org.

THE ENCOUNTER

July 6-11, 2009
Corpus Christi, Texas
Is your soul ready?

COMING UP

SIS-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp
July 19-26, 2009
SIS-Q Meadows, OR, campground
Contact: Harold Ogren, camp director
(hogren@msn.com or 541-689-1387)

For a complete list of events, go to <http://nfyc.cog7.org>.

ATTENTION SENIORS!

If you are a high school senior, ready to graduate in 2009, the National FYC would like to give you a gift! Please e-mail your name and address to nfyc@cog7.org, along with what local CoG7 church you attend, and we will send you a Congratulations 2009 DVD from Interlinc. (Available to residents of the U.S. and Canada only.)

Love from an Unloved Child

by **Katie Guadalupe King**

At the age of twenty-one, I had nothing to live for, so I came up with the perfect plan to end my life: Take a week's vacation off work and buy as much cocaine as I could get my hands on, plus three bottles of sleeping pills and a twelve pack of beer. I would go to sleep and never wake up again. But God had other plans.

I grew up in a home where love could not exist. My real dad, whom I never met, separated from my mother before I was born. He was in and out of Big Mac (a prison in McAlester, Oklahoma). He came back for a one-night stand; I was the result of that night.

My mother never forgave my father for getting her pregnant and so blamed me for everything that ever went wrong in her life. Thanks to her drug habit, I was born addicted to cocaine and screamed for the first nine months. My mom admitted years later she would have done anything to make me quit screaming.

She did do anything — like trying to kill me before I was two. Weighing only eighteen pounds, I suffered from malnutrition to the point my hair turned orange and my stomach distended. I could not walk or talk. While

I was in the hospital receiving treatment, the nurses couldn't take the diaper off me without ripping the skin, so they soaked it off. Because of such gross neglect, the authorities removed me from my mother's care.

But I also failed to find love with my adoptive parents. They were church leaders who knew how to look good at church while they tortured me physically, sexually, and emotionally at home. By the time I was five, my adoptive mother convinced me I was pure evil — the antichrist. If she was right, I told myself, even God could not love me. Checking out would save God the trouble of the final showdown.

After the age of five, I begged God every night to let me die. Each morning when I woke up, I was furious with Him, convinced that He hated me, too. I vowed to hate God the rest of my life.

Two weeks after graduation I was kicked out of the house and never went back. I worked five jobs at fast food stores to make ends meet and to keep from thinking about my life.

I eventually met a guy named Bryan and married him two weeks later. He became abusive in time, and we divorced.

During this time, my great-grandfather took ill and died. He was one of the few people in my

life who truly loved me. On the night I tried to take my life, he appeared to me in a dream. He tried to convince me that my life wasn't over, that he loved me, and more important, that God loved me. He was sure I'd get my life straightened out one day. He hugged me and then disappeared.

I was furious! I screamed at God, "If Grandpa is right and You do exist and You really do love me, then You'll have to send someone who can explain You to me so that I'll want to have something to do with You." That was no small order.

Eight years later, I gave birth to a daughter by Billy, a man I eventually married despite an on-again, off-again relationship. I ended up leaving Billy because I was convinced he was abusing Shelby. I wanted to protect my daughter and myself at all costs, so we left Arkansas and moved to Idaho when Shelby was four. After five years of separation, Billy moved to Idaho and convinced me that he had changed completely. Because Shelby wanted a dad, I married Billy.

But the marriage didn't last. After a year, I left Billy for the last time. He wouldn't agree to a divorce without trying to get custody of Shelby, so I remained legally married but separated.

Three years later, Billy's dad begged me to come see him in Arkansas, so I took Shelby with me. He told me he knew that this was the last time I would see him alive, that he was ready to die. *How can he be so at peace about death?* I wondered. I was terrified of it. I couldn't ask him because it would be like giving my OK for him to die.

When my father-in-law died three weeks later, I cried for the first time in over thirty years. *God, why? Why Dad? He was the closest thing to a dad I'd ever known. You know he loved me!* Standing at the casket, I told God, "I had just decided to give You another chance, and You did it again! I hate You!"

I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't die (God wouldn't let me), and couldn't live. I hated God yet wanted the peace Dad had before he died. I was preoccupied trying to find out if death was the end. I felt like a thirty-seven-year-old child who had lost her only parent. I was lost, scared, and lonely.

At that time, I worked for a school bus company. After a month of constantly bugging two of my drivers for answers, I gave my life to Christ. The drivers are now my pastor and his wife.

Coming to Christ was not easy for me. Two weeks after attending church, I was confronted with



Shelby and Katie

a lesson on marriage in Sabbath school. I shut down emotionally and wanted to get up and walk out. I knew I couldn't serve a God who wanted me to go back to Billy and give up the peace and safety my daughter and I had just gained. Billy started stalking me in Idaho and even tried to kidnap Shelby, so I was awarded a temporary protective order. After finding out how much trouble he could be in if I pressed charges, Billy agreed to a divorce. I also wanted to break the last of the bonds with my past, so I legally changed my first, middle, and last names to match the new person Christ had made me.

Somehow I knew that giving my life to Christ wasn't the end. I wanted to show God's love to the unlovable, to share what I had found with them. But how? When I heard about Pioneer Missionary Training, I knew I'd found the right answer.

God made a way for me financially to go on the trip, so in late December I found myself serving beside my fellow Christians in Monterey, Mexico. During the ten-day trip, I learned how to minister to others and share my faith. One day during street witnessing I shared my faith with a stranger. The man asked the interpreter if I would pray with him to accept Jesus as his

Savior.

That's not the only transformation I saw thanks to participating in PMT. Last summer Shelby (then eleven years old) gave her life to Christ at the Meridian, Idaho, campmeeting. She could hardly believe the change in me over the last year, especially as I prepared for and served through PMT. Now Shelby can't wait till she's old enough to go on a PMT trip herself.

So many times Christ should have given up on me, but He didn't. He went beyond what I thought He could do — saving me from my past — and planted a desire in me to share the peace I have found in Him. I want those who have nothing to live for to know that there is hope. I want them to know that if God could take an unloved person like me and love her, He can do it for anyone.

Search for Unsung

Not more celebrities, we pray, but significance for the insignificant. **by Peter Youngs**

Wanted: mothers in Israel. Must be ordinary, willing to give up everything, and quietly fade into obscurity.

These mothers are unsung heroes, a term that describes those who deserve hero status but never hear it. Our culture seeks heroes who make good copy. Hero stories sell, perhaps because of the unsung hero lurking in the private fancy of us all.

By exalting a hero, we infer that success is singular. With flying feet and hands, the one alone wins the battle against evil and becomes larger than life. Unfortunately, the term *celebrity* becomes attached to the archetypal modern hero – an untouchable. Never have there existed more choices for the individual to emulate and hope to never become.

Let us celebrate instead the touchable role models who faithfully operate closer to real life than we ever realized. In the unsung heroes of Scripture – women – we find significance for the insignificant.

Old Testament women

In fulfillment of the inclusive, adoptive nature of God's original plan, there remained women outside Israel who carried hope of a kingship within them for which they would believe and fight to the end of their days. Rahab and Ruth began as outsiders to Israel, having their own people and comforts. Something prompted them to dedication elsewhere.

Rahab would choose the Hebrews over the highest walled city in the land. She saw victory for those nomads camped near her town of Jericho.

Orpah cried over Naomi and then did the logical thing by returning to Moab, the home of her birth. Ruth, however, "clave" to her elderly widowed mother-in-law. Why? As a Moabitess, she had a small future with Israel and might have been prohibited from ever entering the congregation (Deuteronomy 23:3).

Both women were blessed as mothers of David and Christ. What made them so devoted and faithful against the odds? There wasn't much logic for either of them to make the choices they did, but each possessed a maternal instinct that followed higher truth to a greater end.

It is perhaps fitting that we know so little about the mothers of Israel like Rahab, Ruth, and Deborah (Judges 5:7). Each has brief mention before the story

returns to the "main" character. The least mentioned among them may be the most powerful. We can consider the space left by the unsaid inference, pregnant with meaning, a place for us to join the story.

New Testament women

In the second Testament, the vestiges of maternal security are found in the woman at the well (John 4). This woman, like every other true mother in Israel, was there not merely to satisfy her own thirst but to serve others, beginning at home.

This woman knew mostly failure. She had been married five times, and the man she currently lived with was not her husband. She also thirsted for fulfillment. The testimony of the Word is that she truly carried home living water and multiplied it among others who shared her thirst.

Again Jesus encountered an unnamed woman taken in adultery, thrown at His feet (John 8). Face to face with her who symbolized the unfaithful of His own Jewry, He stooped to write. As Emanuel (God with us) touched the earth, was He struggling with His own anger? Was He there to condemn, writing their own names?

What we know is that Christ chose both to uphold the law and to bear the sins of all who were convicted by His words that

Heroes



day: "Let him that is without fault among you cast the first stone." Then to her: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Like her accusers, we have difficulty respecting that woman, believing she actually lived a cleansed life. In this nameless, shameless one we find challenge for our own faith. Did she go, like the woman from the well, bearing the good news? In the text, we look in vain to see or hear her again.

All those who bear often the smallest tokens of selfless love toward those within their gates will find it plausible that she did indeed go forward in the grace of Jesus. She too became a mother in Israel.

Those who bear this heritage are not aggrandizing heroes. They are those who have carried these promises to us through the centuries. Their choice, like Christ, is to enable and ennoble others. They innately understand that it is people, not a person, who embody Christ.

Modern women

"Mothers' love" is not something the logical man understands, but we can recognize it in the mothers around us. My parents placed me with many Church mothers and fathers. Two were particular examples of faith for me.

My mother, Orabelle Youngs,

is defined mostly by her motherhood; her life has been only for others. We

could never buy her a gift unless she could use it for her children. The term *children* for her extended well beyond her birth family. One of her great joys was that of being a mother to any child she saw that needed a mother's love.

One of the many children my mother claimed was Cyndy (Kester) Stucker. Cyndy made me realize I do not understand the hope that is buried in the heart of a mother.

As a girl, Cyndy wasn't much noticed, and even less appreciated. Her stubbornness was irritating. Upon being told, "You can't do that; give it up, Cyndy," she would continue, seemingly oblivious to overt signs of rejection and discouragement from the social cliques so apparent to others. There was strength in Cyndy that contradicted the expectations of the majority and the norms of social science. What made her continue with so little acceptance and support?

Years later, Cyndy penned these words that gave me a glimpse of who she truly was as a young girl and maturing woman: "We have a life of true confidence in Christ"; "we have to acquire a vision of what God

wants in our lives"; "true success is measured in an inner awareness that you have accomplished what God wanted you to do . . ." This is confidence, faith, inner strength!

Cyndy waited patiently for her blessing, and it came through a loving husband, Dale Stucker, and four faithful children now in their teens (photo, above). Their mother died last year.

Like my own mother, Cyndy didn't become a celebrity. What she did become was a mother in Israel who applied the laws of love and service to her family and all others.

These are the reachable role models among us. My blessing is not that of understanding a mother's love, but of realizing that we are whole only by the integral offering of every small "stitch" in the seamless, white robe of Christ. **BA**

Peter Youngs and his family recently moved to Hutchinson, KS. They attend and serve with the church in Wichita. Visit Cyndy Stucker's online memorial at <http://americasmemorials.com/memorials/223>.



Applause for January-February

Thank you for the magazine. I've enjoyed it for many years and often share it with friends. I especially enjoyed articles by Israel Steinmetz ["Weathering the Storm," p. 10] and Gordon Feil ["Best of the Good Book," p. 12]. By the way, you should speak out more clearly against spiritual adultery. . . .

J. B.
Curryville, New Brunswick

Yesterday I took my clothes to the laundry. As I put them in the dryer and started the machine with a quarter, I read the "Oil and Faith" article [p. 8]. The dryer stayed on *45 minutes* on that one quarter! I finished all my clothes, with a couple of minutes to spare.

Coincidence? Possibly. Evidence of how God can still provide for our needs today? Absolutely!

R. B.
Columbus, GA

Change is good. I like the *HeartSpeak* centerfold. God said He would write His words in our hearts and our heart of hearts (Holy of Holies). Many of us want to explore the kingdom of God

within, [but] our fears keep us from discovering who we are and what our purpose is. "The Church as Counterculture" [p. 4] was excellent; I also love the new "Faith-Plus Forum" [p. 7].

The "Evangelical Manifesto" [p. 24] is a document for people who focus more on "the gospel about Jesus" than the "gospel of Jesus Christ."

Jesus Christ is the Word; the words that Jesus said are the "gospel of Jesus." Jesus came to teach us to live and show us how to love one another as He loved us by laying down His life for His friends. Christians need to listen and live the words that Jesus said, recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

B. M.
Liberty Center, OH

'Secret Sin'

"Secret Sin" [My Journey, p. 20] brought a flood of tears as I read it. Jesus did not come to condemn but to save (John 3:17). As I read, I thought of the gospel song that asks, "What sins are you talking about?" They're gone, forgiven, cleansed through the blood of the Lamb of God, behind God's back (Isaiah 38:17), and cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Thank you, Darla Mills, for telling of so great a salvation. Thank you, BA, for printing this remarkable testimony. Thank You, dear Lord, for Your gift of salvation that made this possible.

L. P.
Manassas, VA

I really appreciate "Secret Sin." Counseling two young ladies who found themselves pregnant at a young age, I saw how people

judged and made comments about them. Darla is our sister, loved and forgiven in Christ as we all are. I only hope that we can show God's forgiveness and compassion to all our teens when they confess their sin like we have to Darla.

J. H.
Houston, TX

'Atheism's Angry Attack'

A Web site I frequent uses the best and newest research on our earth, disputes evolution, and proves the world was created [p. 22]. It's the best I've seen. They also have a regular TV show. You can type in *answersingenesis.org* and read many articles. They also show current events from a biblical perspective. I get a weekly newsletter from them that I very much enjoy. So far I've not seen anything that I could object to.

K. V.
e-mail

Dropping the ball

If I hadn't seen my blue and gold Editor's Circle pin in my desk drawer, I wouldn't have written this. Whenever I wore my suit, I also had this pin in my lapel; it stood for something, and I'd proudly give an explanation when asked — all this from someone who is not a Church member.

Going back to the days when your Editor's Pin was issued (circa 1981), the publication had good biblical content. The ball has been dropped! Nowadays, I find it hard to find any reference to the Bible or to its passages. The meat from the publication of yesteryear has been lost.

H. P.
Loyal, WI

Faulty reasoning?

I recommend you ask Israel Steinmetz ["Faulty Foundations?" p. 14] to read Joshua's conquest. Did God tell him to *ask* for space in Canaan's land? No, He told him to kill every man, woman, child, and beast. God hated the sins of the American Indian the same as He hated the sins of the Canaanites.

And did He not allow slavery? He even set rules for treatment of slaves. We must learn good from evil, and much of this comes right out of the Old Testament (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). Lessons learned via the Old are what led God to use the American war machine to wipe out the pagan societies on this continent. Much of that failed, as did some of the Israelite tribes, but that was not God's will.

S. S.
La Pine, OR

Response from Israel Steinmetz: No other nation on earth than Israel was ever God's chosen people or instructed to slaughter other nations at God's discretion. Canaan was given to Abraham's descendants, but the followers of Christ are not given any earthly locale to claim as their own. Unlike the ancient Israelites, Jesus' people are called to be peacemakers — to not struggle with flesh and blood. Christians are never instructed to fight or conquer through military might or to act as God's executioners. Instead of executing God's judgment on sinners, we are to share the gospel of Jesus Christ so that fewer sinners will suffer the wrath of God.

While some forms of slavery were allowed for the Israelites, God's ideal is that love for our neighbors will never allow us to consider another person our property or treat that person as less than those who bear the Creator's image. The whole


law is fulfilled in love that does no harm to its neighbor through slavery, degradation, or slaughter.

Israel's concepts that America was founded with slavery intact and the native population systematically pushed aside for the benefit of European immigrants are historical truths. However, we believe his contention that the economic power of the U.S. was born on the backs of African slaves is inaccurate.

Slavery existed legally in this country from 1776 to 1865, though it was basically dead in the North by the 1820's, but at no point did the presence of slavery encourage economic development to any great degree. Thomas Jefferson, himself a slave owner, said famously, "Slavery is like holding a wolf by the ears; you don't like it, but you don't dare let it go." In the first six decades of the nineteenth century, the increasingly slave-free North outpaced the slave-ridden South in every single economic aspect. The reason the South lost the Civil War was simple: Slave economics there stagnated for sixty years while the North grew — industrialized and enjoying the fruits of free labor, capitalism, and entrepreneurship.

Further, [Israel's] contention that Native Americans were helpless victims against the white juggernaut carries more political than historical weight. While we're being careful to cite our faults, let us take care to remember the positive progress our democracy has made since 1776.

P. R. / R. R.
Denver, CO

Read the unedited version of this letter at www.cog7.org/BA. 

Response letter from Israel Steinmetz: This verifies much that I wrote and underscores that the displacement and destruction of native peoples opened the door for European colonization of North America and that slavery was a foundational piece of the early American economy. Historians do argue how many native Americans died from diseases introduced by Europeans versus how many died through warfare with Europeans. Economists do argue how viable the slave trade was as an economic system and how much the United States profited from it. What cannot be debated is that these terrible things happened, that they must be regretted, and that deliberate efforts should be taken to reverse their ill effects. Such realities should caution Christians against a blind patriotism that would paint an idealized portrait of early America and its founders.

My encouragement that we look on our heritage with a deep sense of repentance toward God and compassion toward those we afflicted is not a call for shame and guilt, but for a change from attitudes of racism, imperialism, and superiority that enabled our forefathers to abuse others and empower oppressors to do the same today. It is a call to look on those who yet suffer the effects of that oppression with compassion and a willingness to serve. The call to repent for the sins of our forefathers is biblically, not politically, motivated. The prophets of God often cried out in confession and repentance for their sins and the sins of their fathers (e.g. Psalm 106:6; Jeremiah 3:25; 14:20; Daniel 9:8). Their cry was to "let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24).

Serving the Senate

Capital faith: prayer needed. A BA exclusive interview with Barry Black.



Editor's note: U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, took time from his busy schedule recently to answer a few questions from the Bible Advocate.

BA: Christian Americans easily grow cynical about their political leadership. Comment on the level of faith you see demonstrated among those you serve in Washington D.C.

Chaplain Black: I see a great deal. I know senators whose spirituality dwarfs my own.

BA: The fact that the U.S. Senate still employs a Christian chaplain is significant. What keeps you busy on an average day at work?

Chaplain Black: The Senate can employ non-Christian chaplains as well. We have had Unitarians, Catholic, as well as Seventh-day Adventists. The thing that keeps me busy is being a pastor to seven thousand Senate employees. It would be like being a pastor at a seven thousand-member church. Senators participate regularly in a prayer breakfast and a weekly Bible study. Paul explained in Philippians 4 that saints exist in Caesar's household (v. 22).

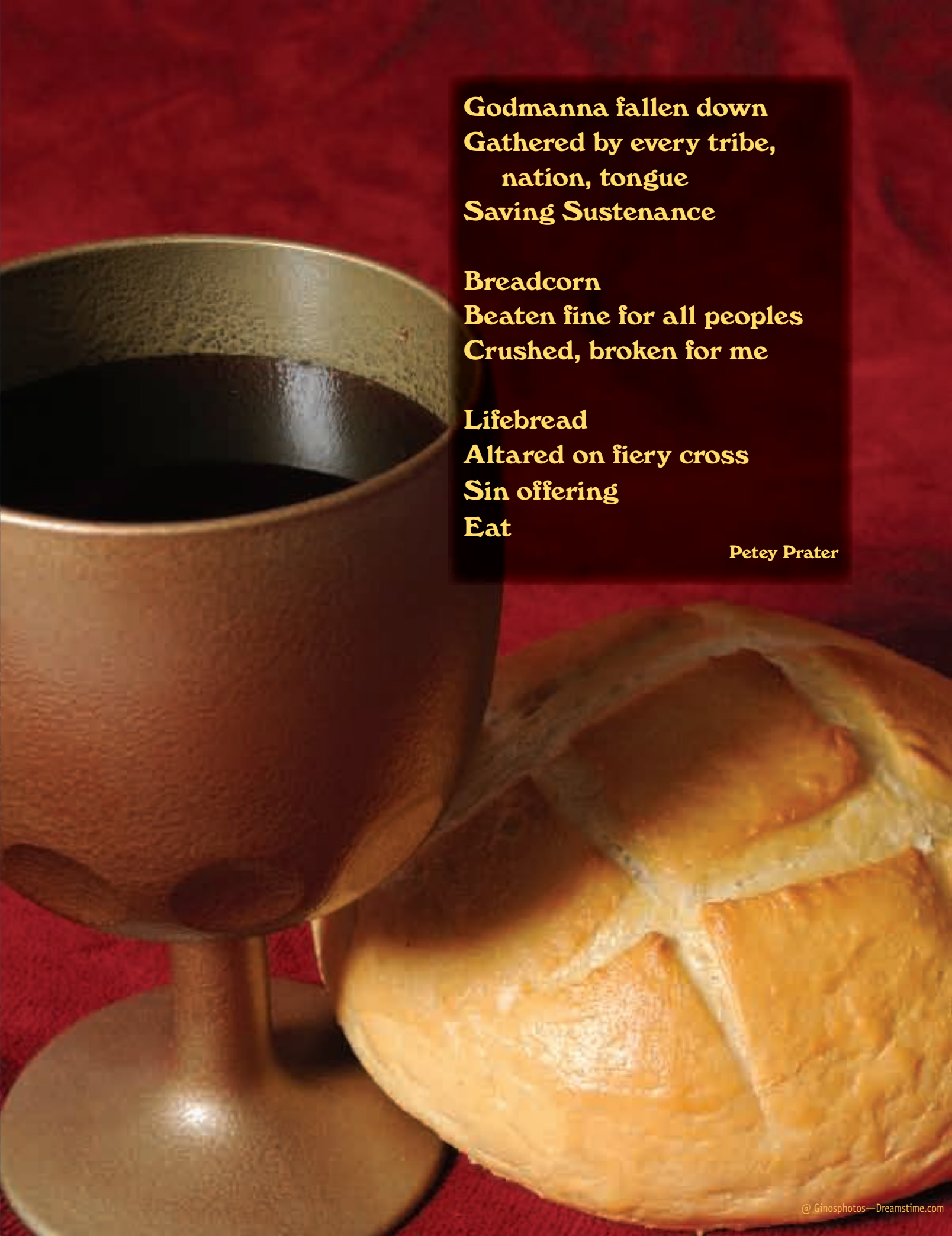
BA: What do you recommend Christian Americans do to guard national freedoms of faith and its expression?

Chaplain Black: Christian Americans need to embrace the sentiment of Alfred Lloyd Tenny-

son: More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. This notion is also expressed by James in chapter 5 of his Epistle: The effectual, fervent prayers of the righteous avail much.

BA: How may we best sort through the political maze of '08 and '09 to make good choices for the future of faith and country?

Chaplain Black: James 1:5 provides us with the most significant guidance for dealing with challenging questions and issues. If anyone lacks wisdom, let him or her ask of God who gives liberally. These challenging times require more than human insights; we need supernatural assistance. All Christians should regularly pray for God's wisdom. **BA**

A wooden chalice filled with dark liquid, likely wine, stands on the left. To its right is a round, golden-brown loaf of bread with a cross-shaped cut on top. The background is a deep red, textured surface.

**Godmanna fallen down
Gathered by every tribe,
nation, tongue
Saving Sustenance**

**Breadcorn
Beaten fine for all peoples
Crushed, broken for me**

**Lifebread
Altared on fiery cross
Sin offering
Eat**

Petey Prater



Did you know . . .

- that the LITES Ministry (Leadership in Training for Evangelism and Service), based in Stanberry, Missouri, will complete its tenth year of operation in June? Plans for the eleventh year will be announced in the next BA.
- that a CoG7 school for ministry first began in Stanberry, Missouri, back in 1951 using the name Midwest Theological Seminary, and that Elders Burt Marrs, Roy Marrs, and Paul Heavilin were among its first faculty?
- that you can listen to a CoG7 radio station (Spanish language), streamed live from the country of El Salvador? Click here to listen: www.radioabbaiglesia.dediosseptimodia.org.

Ministries Training System

Larry Marrs Now Leads MTS

Elder Larry Marrs, director of the LITES team in Stanberry, Missouri, for ten years, became director of Ministries Training System on April 1. He now leads the Church's efforts to identify and prepare men for vocational and pastoral ministry, as well as to offer a broader range of training for all members.

Elder Marrs, son of Roy Marrs, who once directed the Church's first school of ministry (Midwest Bible College), was chosen for this position after a six-month search by the MTS board of regents. Applications or letters of interest were received from five persons, and three interviews were conducted. The General Conference board confirmed the selection on February 16.

After his appointment, Larry said, "It is with gratitude to those who have paved the way that we commit to continuing the process of raising up spiritually and educationally competent candidates for the various ministries and leadership needs of the Church. I am pleased to pick up the baton and seek God to take us to yet another level, increasing the rigor in preparing others and ourselves. Please join me in crying out to God for His power and direction."

As the new director, Elder Marrs follows Calvin Burrell, who served the position since MTS began in 2002 and who will continue as instructor and member of the school's board of regents. Other regents are Mary Jean Knoll (chair) and Elders Joe Corrales, Max Morrow, and Loren Stacy.

You may contact Larry at 816-383-2597.





Mission to Honduras

The Medical Mission team has been privileged to serve brethren in Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, giving medical and dental care and desperately needed medications to the least of these, while also sharing the powerful Word of God. This spring, we are headed to Honduras!

The joy of seeing needy faces fill with hope and gratitude is an amazing experience that words cannot express. Our Lord has been with the mission teams as they work tirelessly to overcome challenges. We have the reassurance that the power of our Lord Jesus Christ will again manifest itself on this mission. We depend on your generosity to help us care for those who cry for help (Romans 15:1).

Honduras, here we come – onward and with courage, because God is love!

Pictured above: Leaders and members in the Sacramento, California, area who sponsored Medical-Dental Missions, serving underprivileged people in Honduras this month.

– Pastor Ruben Frausto

Congratulations to . . .

- Elden and Cecyl Fischer of Perry, Michigan - married 50 years, May 24
- Harvey and Barbara Fischer of Grass Valley, California - 50 years, married June 7
- Al and Lou Brenneise of Sacramento, California - 50 years, married June 14
- Henry and Dorothy Turcott of Albany, Oregon - 50 years, married September 5

- Nick and Dorothy Nimchuk of Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan - 50 years, married December 19

Please notify the editor of other CoG7 golden couples in 2009.

CoG7 Events

June Feast at Dover Camp

The annual Dover Family Camp is scheduled for June 14-20 at the Church's campgrounds near Kingfisher, Oklahoma. The 2009 theme will be "Come and Dine."

Ministers and teachers who will attend this year are Ruben Marquez, Ed Lewin, Wesley Walker, Bud Ullrich, John Martinez, Chip Hinds, and two guests from abroad: Oscar Mata from Guatemala and John Klassek from Australia.

A full slate of children's, youth, and adult activities are planned for this camp, with plenty of free time for relaxation and informal fellowship. To inquire about any phase of the program or to get directions, call Allan Burlison at 405-229-1186 or e-mail aburlison@cox.net.

Light in Iowa

A youth and young adult retreat is planned for April 10-12 at Camp IODISECA near Solon, Iowa, with Israel Steinmetz as speaker. For more information, e-mail abe.endecott@cog7.org.



Led by Pastor Robert Crawford, a team of youth from England recently served a short-term missions assignment in Kenya, during which they helped to reopen a Church-sponsored school there.



2009 General Conference Convention

July 6-11 • Corpus Christi, Texas

Tuesday seminars

- They Like Jesus But Not the Church - Amber Riggs
- Meeting the Challenges of New World Teachings - Alex Ciurana and Ramon Ruiz (Spanish)
- The Work of the Spirit in the Life of the Believer - Brian Larson
- Contemporary Youth Ministry That Really Works - Kurt Lang
- Financial Planning - LeRoy Dais

Wednesday seminars

- Handling Finances God's Way - Ken and Elizabeth Keim
- Importance of Mentoring: Equipping Others to Follow Jesus - Larry Zaragoza
- Growing Older, Staying Healthy - Calvin and Barb Burrell
- The Case for Creation - Jody McCoy

Daily devotions

Tuesday - Steve Kyner
 Wednesday - Samuel Holland
 Thursday - Victor Del Toro
 Friday - Dale Lawson

To register for convention online, visit <http://convention.cog7.org> or call 303-452-7973.



India: Elder Jacob Rao, joined by Elder P. Kennedy and TV Rao, dedicated a new church building in Khammam District (financed with the assistance of the Church in Mexico) and attended a conference of 25 pastors in the West Godavari District, February 14-17.

Women in Michigan

- Northeastern U.S. and Eastern Canada Women's Retreat, April 10-12, in Saginaw; contact Deb (231-544-2036)
- Michigan Women's Retreat, September 11-13, in Gladwin; contact Esther (989-274-0104 or esther416@charter.net)

Lord's Supper Service

The annual communion service in every CoG7 congregation is set for Tuesday, April 7, after sunset. Baptized believers in Christ are welcome.

English Experience

Church women are invited to attend the Elect Lady conference in Manchester, U.K., May 22-25. Inquire of Mary Ling (maryling@oh.rr.com) or contact Cynthia Bourne in England (bourne001@hotmail.co.uk).

Spring Vale Graduation

Baccalaureate and commencement exercises are planned for May 23 and 24 on the academy campus near Owosso, Michigan. Call 989-725-2391.



Nigeria: Shown here is a group of youth leaders, with national and state conference leaders, at the 2008 Youth Ministry Convention, hosted by Rivers State in Port Harcourt. The conference was led by Brother Gift Nkweke (kneeling, center)

Seven Reasons We Need Your Support



We're working for you around the corner and around the world sharing the good news of Jesus Christ!

CoG7 congregations in the U.S. and Canada graciously send 15 percent of local tithes to our central office. In turn, the General Conference dedicates 10 percent of that — or 1.5 percent of tithes — for missions. This supports a missions department with a limited infrastructure and budget, inadequate to keep up with Christ's call for our expanding global church. That's why we ask your consistent support for G. C. Missions ministries.

Thankfully, you continue to answer this call. The grassroots initiative called Cristo Viene, for example, challenges each of us to support world missions. Hundreds of contributors now give a \$20-per-month Cristo Viene offering that feeds evangelists in the harvest. We also have a Medical-Dental Missions team going to Honduras this spring, with your support. Sponsors of our Orphans and Widows fund are serving hundreds, and our Disaster Relief Fund keeps meeting challenges around the world.

Only *your* faithfulness permits us to send literature and support pastors, evangelists, missions, and whole conferences in all of our Global Mission Zones — seven good reasons that we need your support.

— Bill Hicks, Director

Visit our new Missions Web site
(www.cog7missions.org) to learn
more about the seven zones.

International Tour

Brazil/ Argentina

On December 1, 2008, Pastor Manuel Eneias Dos Santos of the Adventist Church of Promise (Igreja Adventista Da Promesa — IADP) in Brazil met International Ministerial Congress President Ramon Ruiz and Executive Director William Hicks after their overnight flight to Sao Paulo. Their purpose in coming was to meet with new IADP leadership, helping them better understand the operation of the congress and determine future participation in it.

In a tour of their conference offices in Sao Paulo, Elders Ruiz and Hicks were introduced to the IADP department directors. This church with 1,000 congregations over 26 regions in Brazil has been an IMC member over 20 years and has sent regular delegations to the congress. Now the meetings with IADP President Jose Lima de Farias Filho, its executive officers, and regional delegates were held to increase communication between the two bodies. The president expressed his intent to inform all leadership so IADP can openly discuss how they might work more actively within IMC.

These meetings were important in achieving the IMC's primary reasons for existence: to

promote doctrinal unity among those who keep the commandments of God and hold the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12b) and to cooperate with them in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world. We extend special thanks to all who were involved in these meetings and to the Adventist Church of Promise for providing for the needs of Elders Ruiz and Hicks in Brazil.

* * * *

Elders Ruiz and Hicks arrived in Buenos Aires on December 4, 2008, and motored to Escobar and Macia before continuing the next day to Obera, Misiones, in northeastern Argentina. Here they attended Sabbath service in Guarani in association with the Argentine church's twenty-fifth Ministerial Council, attended by 800 brethren. Elder Hicks reported on the Church around the world, and Elder Ruiz preached. The two-day council was held adjacent to the new conference offices under construction in Obera. Some 25 congregations meet in Argentina each Sabbath, with approximately 1,300 in regular attendance.

In this council, President Jorge Gillig led the Church's ministry



in intense reflections on the life of the pastor and the disciplines that make for effective ministry. These efforts to first bring the ministry into better relation with God and each other were uplifting, in contrast to cases where guidelines are mandated to membership before being honestly applied by leaders. The challenge to have all pastors agree to set the example was something drawn from the life of Christ, our example who came not to be served but to serve.

Those present at this historic council made their commitments to God and their peers in areas like personal devotion and tithing, thus setting the tone for future growth in Argentina and Uruguay. All present were moved by the willingness of their leaders to address the foundational aspect of ministry within the body of Christ. Their prayer is that all of us will seek the same emphasis as the Lord opens doors for ministry around the world.

— Elder Bill Hicks



Surviving Downturns

Pictures from the Hubble Telescope are common in our day. But the first photo of planet Earth, taken by the Apollo 11 space mission crew (1969), was a new and fascinating experience. For the first time, the earth was seen

from a distance of 238,856 miles. Its relative smallness against the backdrop of the vast expanse of space put things in unique perspective.

A good illustration of perspective is how fans react to a football game. It's the last game in the playoffs, and your favorite team isn't doing well. You call a friend and are soon conversing about the players' bad moves and the coach's poor decisions.

You then return to the game and discover your team made two touchdowns in the last quarter and won the game. Curious as to how they pulled this off, you later watch a recording of the game. This time the players don't look so bad, and the coach makes some good calls. The longer you watch, the better they seem; negativity and cynicism are no longer part of your demeanor.

What's different as you watch the game the second time? Perspective: You know how it will end. This changes the way you view the earlier fumbles and saves you from frustration in the final seconds.

This world's playoff is in its last quarter, and things don't look good: oil crisis, economic collapse, moral and political unrest. But we don't despair. We have perspective; we've read the last chapter and know Who wins!

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written during a personal downturn. The apostle was under house arrest and faced execution at any moment. But his perspective on all this inspired no less than sixteen admonitions to joy and rejoicing in his brief epistle. In 4:6-13 he provides helpful principles for surviving downturns.

The first is a three-fold principle: Don't worry about anything, pray about everything, and let God's peace rule your heart. Though contrary to human nature, this is the message of verses 6 and 7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Second, when the chips are down, think on things upward. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble . . . whatever things are of good report . . . meditate on these things" (v. 8).

Third, learn to be content: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (vv. 11, 12). Contentment brings us back to what really matters and reminds us of how rich we are. The poor among us in the United States have more than the average person in many countries.

Paul's admonition suggests that contentment can be learned. Surviving difficult economic times depends less on how much we *earn* and more on what we *learn*: Being better off isn't always better; sometimes less is more; downturns are inevitable because our economic system is fragile, run by faulty and greedy people.

Fourth, downturns are opportunities to grow our faith. Experience confirms that faith is increased not by abundance but by famine. Christians gave more to the cause of Christ during the Great Depression than during the flourishing of the U.S. economy.


And finally, downturns are good times to reaffirm trust in our faithful God: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (v. 13).

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

Congratulations '09 seniors graduating from Spring Vale May 23 and 24



After 60 years of preparing students for college and life, Spring Vale Academy still has room to grow. For fall '09 enrollment information, contact the Owosso, Michigan, school at 989-725-2391 or visit www.springvale.us.

For an inspiring report of student life and an update on academy progress, go to www.cog7.org/BA. 

Front row (L to R): Erin Harris, Tiffany Massamino, Whitney Morrow, Courtney Coulson, Erin Noble
Center (L to R): Elsa Smith, Sarah Noble, Abigail Nienhuis, Hannah Klopfenstein, Erika Avalos, Lindsay Ciavarella

Back (L to R): Kelen Caswell, Ryan Shapitka, Justin Shapitka, Derek Fauth

Not Pictured: Jonathan Guerrero, Elias Paguada