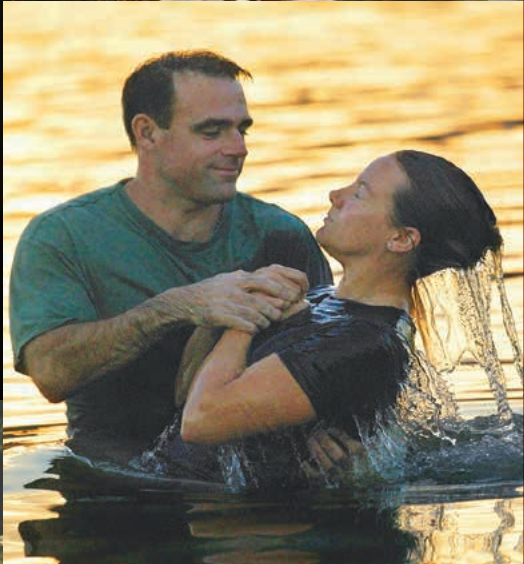


May-June 2014

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Plain Church





Inside



2014: Worship

ARTICLES

- 4 The Too-Comfortable Church | Tim Endecott
- 8 Why I Quit ‘Going to Church’ | Amber Riggs
- 10 Church: A collage on the body. | George A. Hill, Calvin Burrell, David Kidd, Marvin A. Espana Jr.
- 13 CoG7 Polity . . . Over the Years | Robert Coulter
- 14 Small Church | James McBride
- 16 What *They Say* About This Church | Seven CoG7 Leaders
- 22 All These Churches | Calvin Burrell
- 24 True Church | Ernie Klassek
- 25 Family-Style Faith | Verna McCoy

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Why a Churchman?
- 7 Questions & Answers
- 23 Mail Bag
- 30 International Congress — Festive Congress Day in May
- 31 Last Word — Just One Thing

COG7 IN ACTION

- 27 G. C. Missions, National Youth Ministries, and more

Scripture quotations

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Why a Churchman?

This is no easy time to be committed to any organization calling itself a church. It's more popular to be independent or non-denominational now than to be in "organized religion."

Younger people are often less loyal to the church of their childhood than their parents were. Distinctive doctrine has fallen in importance. The old church names are seen as barriers to growth. Cooperating with a wide spectrum of believers is more important than denominational ties.

Sometimes the church has been its own worst enemy. It's easy enough to find persons who insist it has brought them more pain than gain. In every age, the attitudes and actions of some in the church invite the critique of the disillusioned.

To you whose church experience has been less than positive, we confess its many foibles generally and the particular sins that lie at the feet of those of us seen as its leaders. We ask your forgiveness, for Jesus' sake. And we plead with you to start anew — somewhere — for your sake and your family's.

With all its problems, the church is still important and valuable to me. Commitment to Christ is the first thing, and participation in the church flows naturally from being linked to Him by faith. How can we so easily separate Jesus from His body?

Churchmanship requires flexibility. Just as individual Christians yield some independence and submit to the fellowship and leadership of a local church, so do local churches give up a little autonomy and submit to a network of like-minded congregations. They do this because every pastor needs a pastor and because congregations need the benefits and responsibilities of the network.

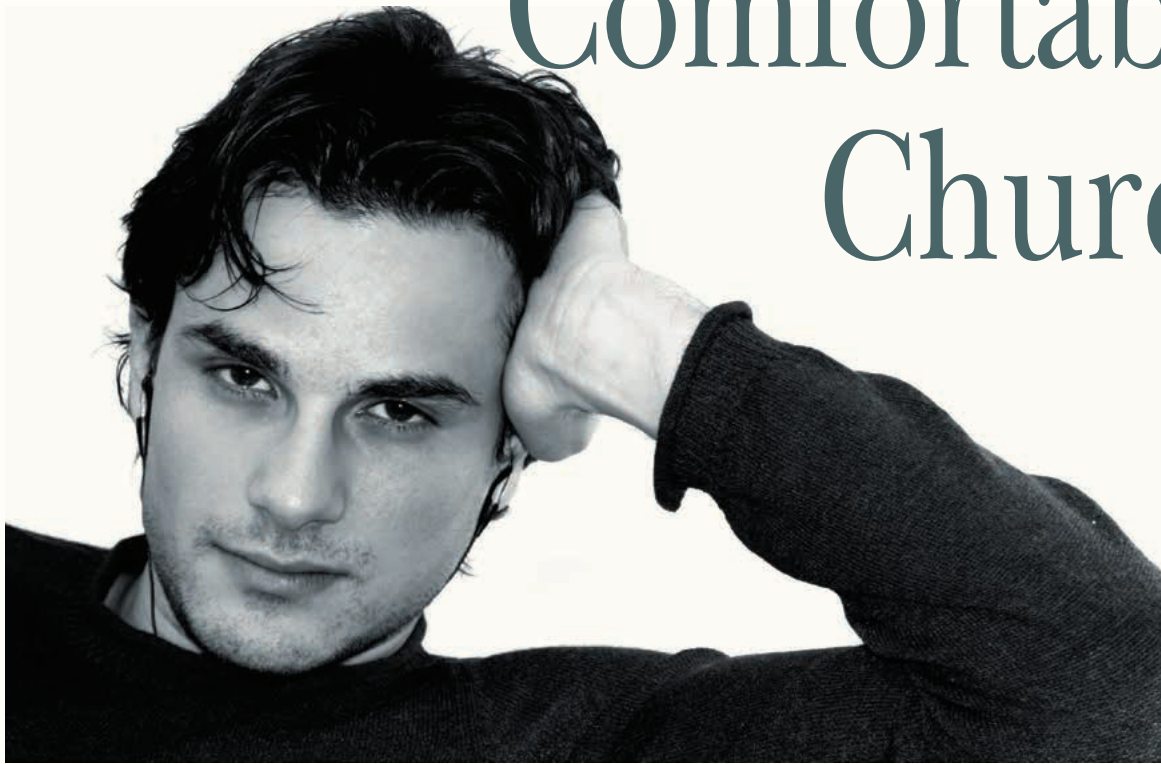
The New Testament pictures this inter-relation among local groups. People, evangelists, letters, teaching, and financial aid flowed back and forth in the early church. Personnel were recognized and recommended from one place to another. When disputes arose, counsel was sought and received outside the local area. Each congregation was linked with others in mutual gospel fellowship.

As a youth, I lived and worshiped in an environment that was skeptical of church organization and administration. I understand that think-

continued on page 23



The Too-Comfortable Church



@Tasosk —Dreamstime.com

Do other interests rise above the personal comfort of the members?

by **Tim Endecott**

Two sisters inherited the family ranch and soon found they needed to purchase a herd bull. The older one balanced the checkbook and took their last \$600 to another ranch out west, where a prize bull was for sale. She told her younger sis, "If I buy the bull, you can drive the truck out and haul it home."

The older sister arrived at the

ranch, inspected the bull, and decided to buy. The owner said his price was \$599, no less. So she gave him \$599.

After paying the farmer, the older sister drove to the nearest telegraph office to send her sister the news. She told the operator, "I want to send a telegram to my sister telling her that I've bought the bull and that I need her to hitch the trailer up and drive out so we can haul it home."

The operator said he'd be glad to help but that the cost was ninety-nine cents a word. With one dollar left, the older sister could send only one word. She thought for a moment, then said

to the operator, "Send her the word *comfortable*."

Puzzled, the telegraph operator shook his head. "How will she know to do all that if all you send is *comfortable*?"

The woman replied, "My sister's not too smart, so she'll read it very slowly: *com . . . for . . . ta . . . ble*."

Our society is obsessed with comfort and convenience. People do not commit road rage when they have the road to themselves. We don't fuss about the weather when it's nearly perfect or when we're climate-controlled. It is easy to be happy when your favorite team wins.

Safety, comfort, and security. They sound like wonderful, worthy goals not to take issue with. After all, who would willingly seek out and embrace the opposite: danger, suffering, and risk? Yet these near-universal values of the Western world – comfort and security – are in fact slowly suffocating the life from our faith.

Conflicts of comfort

Let's talk about comfortable Christianity. The Bible tells us often of God's comfort. He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). But when God promises this, it is usually in the context of people who suffer. God offers to strengthen them in the midst of their hardship.

That is what comfort is about. It's a combination of two Latin root words: *com*, meaning "with" or "alongside," and *forte*, meaning "strength." So to comfort someone is to be alongside him providing strength.

That's the comfort Christians should be looking for, but it's far from the twenty-first century variety. Our value of comfort is more about making life free from struggle, hassle, and irritation. It's about making life as soft and plush as possible. We tend to feel that no one should ever be physically, emotionally, or socially uncomfortable.

Madison Avenue backs this up. Anything that makes life easier and more luxurious is good. Conversely, anything that is difficult or stressful is intrinsically bad. With children, every player on the worst team gets a trophy so no child has to deal with the painful reality that some people are better at kicking or hitting a ball than they.

Discomfort

But the truth is, our faith grows stronger when we are forced outside our comfort zones, and it grows weaker the softer our situation and surroundings. Our cultural value that seeks comfort at any cost directly conflicts with one of the most important ways God uses to deepen our faith and relationship with Him.

The apostle gave us a glimpse of the many discomforts he experienced as a faithful follower of Jesus: among them, beatings, shipwreck, dangers in various places, hunger, and thirst (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). Paul later wrote that he had learned to be content in all circumstances, that he could endure all things through Christ, who strengthened him (Philippians 4:11-13).

How easy it is to complain when things are not comfortable and convenient! This is part of the seduction of this world, a lure that "popular Christianity" does not confront. It has the "health and wealth gospel," enticing people to place their faith in false hopes rooted in this passing world. So congregations attract new people based on their conveniences: easy parking, casual dress, exceptional childcare, entertaining services.

We should not seek to be "comfortable Christians." Such a

thing is ultimately impossible. At some point we must choose either to serve ourselves or to take up the cross and follow Jesus. The true test of our faith is how we respond when circumstances are uncomfortable and inconvenient.

Dangers of comfort

Deuteronomy 10:17 says "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe."

Is this the way you typically think about God? As great? Mighty? Awesome? Or do you relate to God more as a casual acquaintance?

One Christian t-shirt declares "Jesus is my homeboy." An action figure named "Buddy Jesus" shows our Savior with both thumbs up. This is how many Christians tend to view our God, whom the New Testament declares to be a "consuming fire," also saying it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands.

Jesus was not John's "homeboy" nor Isaiah's "buddy." Solomon warned us not to rush into God's presence with words. That's what fools do, and often what we do. Fear of God is nearly unheard of in our culture. We prefer comfort instead.

I'm not talking about the room

Our faith grows stronger when we are forced outside our comfort zones, and it grows weaker the softer our situation and surroundings.

temperature or the clothes we wear or padded pews. I'm talking about being comfortable in the presence of God. When you walk in for worship, do you stop and think that you are literally in the presence of the almighty Creator and ruler of the universe? What are you thinking about? Are you passing notes? Are you texting on your cell phone? Are you thinking about lunch?

It would do us good to read

how the Old Testament priests approached God: in fear, reverence, and honor. God is with us in worship, in our presence. Would you be texting on your cell phone, passing notes, or be otherwise disrespectful if He was right behind you? He is.

Weakened faith

The stories are breathtaking and heartbreaking. Stories of people who are told to reject

Christ or face death, who have lost everything because Jesus is Lord. In places where that happens, where being a Christian might cost your life, the gospel often thrives and the church grows.

I read about missionaries in Nicaragua who walk fifteen miles to church, about Christians in Asia who face death if they attend. They still do and their numbers are growing. In America we don't risk our lives for the church. We sing the songs we like, hear a thirty-minute sermon, and still get home before the roast burns. We cancel when the snow is bad.

So why isn't the church in America growing? Because we often make church as comfortable as possible — too comfortable. The church makes itself fit in so well that Christians are no longer different from others. We need to make the gospel accessible to all people, but when we water down Christianity to nothing more than a prayer without life change, then it has lost all meaning.

The church may not be dying, but if we don't take some cues from God about what really matters, we could be in real trouble — sooner rather than later. Fixing the problem will take some time, but with the help of God through His Holy Spirit, it will be done. **BA**

Warning Signs

Has our faith become too comfortable? These signs indicate a problem:

- When we neglect meeting with the brethren. If we wake up Sabbath morning, lie in bed, and debate if we're going to church, we're too comfortable. When did this become an option?
- When we think the church's responsibility is to feed us. Yes, we should be fed, but we should also feed ourselves. Folks in the book of Acts didn't have PowerPoint, microphones, or smoke machines. They brought worship with them. Let's start bringing our hearts full with Jesus, then help feed others.
- When we haven't had a spiritual conversation for a long while. We've stopped sharing His love with others. The law says "You have the right to remain silent," but it doesn't say you have to. Christians don't have the luxury to remain silent when it comes to Christ.
- When our Sabbath routines are more important than outreach. As long as we get our parking spot, our favorite pew, and hear the music we like, everything's fine, right? Just don't preach about what challenges us or our need for change. Just tickle our ears and do it without taking long.
- When our prayers don't seem to make any difference. We've heard Jesus' words on forgiveness, but we hold on to our grudges and wonder why our prayers go unanswered. Until we learn to forgive others no matter how badly they've hurt us, they still have all the power over us.
- When we've forgotten how to serve others first. When we help others, ministering to their needs and allowing them to see Jesus in us, we will start making a difference again. They've heard us talk long enough. Now they want to see it.

— Tim Endecott

Tim Endecott has served several years as pastor in Marion, IA, and as Central District superintendent. He and his wife, Chris, have six grown children.



Questions & Answers

Can you sum up Church of God (Seventh Day)'s identity, history, and theology on one page?

We are a fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ who are bound together and find unique identity in our combined commitment to the written Word of God as our sole authority for belief and practice, to our distinctive doctrines, and to one another as a conference of members and congregations.

With all Christians, our spiritual roots are in God's Word and in the church planted by Jesus Christ two thousand years ago. With Protestants, our theological roots are in the church Reformation led by Martin Luther nearly five hundred years ago, with special appreciation for its Anabaptist wing.

As an organization, we were birthed in America at a time of renewal called the Second Great Awakening (mid-1800's). With other Adventists, our prophetic roots are in the William Miller movement and the Great Disappointment of 1844. With other Sabbathkeepers, our "rest" roots are in Scripture, with the Mill Yard Church of London and the American movement of Seventh Day Baptists.

We became "Bible and Bible alone" Christians through Gilbert Cranmer's Sabbathkeeping churches of Christ in Michigan (1858). We became an open-creed church (its doctrine can be amended by due process) through *The Hope of Israel* magazine (1863 to the present *Bible Advocate*).

We became "Church of God" by the united action of our first General Conference in 1884. *Seventh Day* was added in 1922 to distinguish us from others with the same name. We still try to be distinct but not now exclusive. As the

General Conference of our movement, we bless our brethren in Christ who align with CoG7 offices in Idaho, West Virginia, and (formerly) Jerusalem, or with none of the above.

We embrace the Bible's revelation of one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but we decline the historic creeds of Trinity as the only way to express the truth about Deity. We've come to a fuller understanding of Jesus' nature and work: We now affirm Christ as God in the flesh and proclaim His life, death, and resurrection as the one-and-only hope for salvation and eternal life to all who believe His grace and truth.

Regarding the future, we endorse a pre-millennialism that stresses the imminent return of Christ to raise the dead from their unconscious state, to rule the nations in peace, and to restore the earth and created order to more than their first perfections. We teach the Bible's truth of resurrection for all people — change to immortality for the righteous and annihilation to the wicked — rather than the orthodox model of natural immortality for all with eternal torment to the unsaved.

In the present, our mission is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, introduce others to our Lord, teach them to obey His Word, and nurture spiritual growth in all believers.

Our hope is to be loving, faithful, and obedient as Sabbath-observing, grace-based, Christ-centered, Spirit-formed, people-serving, gospel-telling, and God-honoring people in this world as we wait for the blessed hope and coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus to raise the dead and receive us to His eternal kingdom. All glory to God!

Learn more about us at cog7.org, or write P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Why I Quit

Doing “church” right often calls for fresh, clear thinking about the subject. **by Amber Riggs**

Recently, an article entitled “5 Really Bad Reasons To Leave Your Church” (*Relevant Magazine*, January 16, 2014) appeared in waves through my Facebook feed.

It’s true. People stop attending church gatherings for really, shall we say, interesting reasons — in part, because we don’t get what church is all about. Even that article’s claim that there are bad reasons to leave your church falls short of understanding the church. Although I grew up in, and am still part of, a loving, supportive congregation, I too was accustomed to the go-to-church routine. I went every Sabbath,

then came back for Bible studies, youth events, and worship team practices.

As long as I “went to church” weekly, it remained a *place* that I could attend or not attend. It was an *event* I could evaluate based on performance — a two-hour stage show put on by amateurs (like me) that paled in comparison to Hollywood and Christian concerts, tours, and polished mega-church services.

A destination and an event. Is that what church is?

A young man slips into the back row five minutes after the service starts. When it ends, he speaks briefly to a few people, then makes his exit. But he “went to church.”

A dedicated volunteer arrives early to set up refreshments and stays busily engaged until the service begins. She has no time to visit with anyone. As soon as

the group meeting is over, she gets to work cleaning up. But she “went to church.”

A middle-aged woman clicks on a button and watches a live stream of the entire service. It’s her weekly tradition. It’s how she “goes to church.”

Is church about attendance — physical or virtual — at a weekly worship service? Is leaving your church about boycotting the service and finding another to attend that is run by people who do a better job?

Or is church about something else?

Defining *church*

A few years ago, I realized something had to change in my relationship with the church. I learned that church isn’t about being somewhere or putting on a service or special event. It’s about fully embracing and being part of a sacred community.

A community — a group of people in relationship with one another because they share something in common, like being under the rule of Christ. Do we realize what a powerful picture this is?

The prophets point to a time when the whole earth will be under Christ’s rule. As a result of His victory over sin and authority over Satan, the earth will be characterized by joy, peace, comfort,

‘Going to Church’

healing, knowledge, freedom from oppression, meeting needs, and the total presence of God.

In *Journey to Jesus*, Robert Webber observes that the church is called to be a testimony, a foreshadowing of this future kingdom, to show people what a community practicing the ways of Jesus looks like. As a result of Christ’s victory over sin and authority over Satan, our church communities should be characterized by joy, peace, comfort, healing, knowledge, freedom from oppression, meeting needs, and the presence of God. This is what it means when we claim that the kingdom of God is already here on the earth.

So what if the church is a group of people being in relationship with one another — messy, human relationships, but responding to one another in beautiful ways? What if it’s about inviting others to be part of this kingdom community — not to *come* somewhere but to be *part* of something life-changing?

Church as community

My ongoing, soul-searching study of the kingdom of God has led me to quit “going to church” and instead focus on experiencing what it means to *be the church*.

As a reminder to myself, I’ve quit using the word *church* to

mean a place or an event. This is one simple way to reject the Great Myth that church is associated more with somewhere we can go or with organized events than with a sacred community that testifies to a time when Christ will reign over the whole earth.

Do these sacred communities gather for worship and teaching? Yes. That is inherent to being a community. We gather when we want to be together and when we don’t want to be together, because that is the nature of our relationship with one another and with our King.

Do communities collaborate on formal, organized events or initiatives? Yes. Do we strive to do these things biblically and effectively? Yes — because this is an outflow of our relationship with one another and with our King.

And as an outflow of these relationships, it does the church well to recognize that its members are engaged in living out the kingdom as they go about their daily lives at home, at work, and at play. This too is a ministry of the church.

So if I no longer “go to church,” then where do I go every Sabbath morning and various other times when I gather with this sacred community?

Well, I get creative with it, usually describing the event like “It’s time to go to our worship gath-

ering” or “our church’s mission fundraiser,” or in other cases, the “church’s building” or the “meeting house.” It’s not as easy as saying “church,” but using other terms reminds me of what the church really is and who we are really called to be. It reminds me to put the emphasis of our identity not on how well we *perform* as a church on Sabbath morning but on who we *are* as a family of believers, testifying to Jesus’ good news: the kingdom of God.

Challenge

The real challenge comes when I leave the meeting place. Will I forget about my Christian brothers and sisters? Will I forget why God has joined us together? Or will I be a visible reality of Christ — a personification of the kingdom of God in others’ lives and in the lives of those who are not yet part of a kingdom community?

Will I quit merely going to church and remember to *be the church*? **BA**

Amber and Bryan Riggs live near Eugene, OR, where she homeschools their three girls and telecommutes part time with

LifeSpring School of Ministry. Read her blog at celebratetheholy.com.



Church

A collage on the body.



@ Sibgat—Dreamstime.com

Through Trauma to Truth

I left my previous church ten years ago, after twenty-seven years. Though good people were there, I was seeking more truth. I studied and attended with a reform movement pastor for seven months, then just stayed home, praying and reading.

I boxed up dozens of books (the boxes nearly reached the ceiling; comparing that stack to my Bible really hit me!) and shipped them to a used book place. They gave me postage and \$99 for them.

I started visiting Sabbath churches — one in Orlando, another in Daytona. People were nice and the services appreciat-

ed, with some excellent sermons. Still, I couldn't settle in, partly due to different understandings, but more because of my own problems. When I left the Marines in 1970 after twenty-two months in Vietnam, *instability* and *adjustment* were just words. Today the technical term for my condition is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In '79, while I worked for a prison, a colorful brochure came my way, saying I could learn about future events. It didn't say which denomination. I talked to my wife about attending this five-week crusade, saying we'd keep one foot out the door in case it turned crazy. In those five weeks, I missed only one service and learned things I'd never heard, like no zillion-year hellfire, un-

clean foods, and then Sabbath. The next day, like a Pharisee, I loudly told people at work that Saturday was the Sabbath.

Some things taught at the meetings I didn't get, but since other things were good, I thought they had to be true, too. Through sincere prayer, the Lord always helped me — with many miracles. For years I continued to study and pray for guidance.

I ran across an article by Dirk Anderson that mentioned Church of God (Seventh Day), so I found their Denver number and called. I learned that the author happened to live in Florida, like me. I finally got hold of him, and we had a good talk. Later we met again with other CoG7 pastors in the area.

On fire, I wanted to start a

group in my town, but the Lord knew I clearly wasn't the one to do this, due to instability from PTSD. Instead, I've found fellowship with a CoG7 group in Jacksonville, ninety miles away. I no longer drive, but I attend there when I can get a ride.

Last year, at age 64, I experienced more PTSD problems. Truth is, I was running again. I finally settled back in Gainesville nearer my kids, and I truly think my running days are over. No local church is near, but I keep praying for that to happen. I listen to the Jacksonville pastor's sermons on my old computer. I also love the *Bible Advocate* and appreciate in a big way the questions I occasionally ask the editor by e-mail or phone.

I pray that I get my life together and finish these years living for God and His only begotten Son.

— George A. Hill
Gainesville, FL

Which Kind of Church Are We?

Jesus told a story about two men in church — a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee was keenly aware of his good works: fasting and paying tithes. An ace in the Jewish law, he practiced a moral, obedient lifestyle — the best man-made religion of his day.

He spied sawdust in the tax collector's eye but couldn't see the tree trunk in his own. Smug, self-righteous, standing proud above the crowd, the Pharisee was totally blind to any of his own secret sins: greed, lust, despising others.

Jesus said the Pharisees shut up God's kingdom and placed heavy burdens on people who tried to enter. Their religion was mostly external — like lovely tombs, with no justice, mercy, and faith inside. Their chief skill was knowing right from wrong and imposing that judgment on others. This hindered people from finding God's love.

Are we the modern-day Pharisees?

The tax collector in the story came to worship a different way. With no praise for himself, he was fully aware instead of his own failures. So He got on his face away from those who didn't like him much, humbly whispered his sin to the God who did, and pled for mercy.

Jesus classed tax collectors with prostitutes. Disgusting, right? He also said that these despised persons who came to Him would enter God's kingdom ahead of self-righteous elders, priests, and Pharisees (Matthew 21:31b).

This tax collector got it right that day: He confessed his own sin — not the sins of others — trusted God's grace, and went home blest!

Who are the modern-day tax collectors? Drunkards, maybe, or atheists; homosexuals, heretics, and other despised souls we judge as unfit. Rare it is for such sinners to appear in church, though our pews are full of more acceptable kinds: gluttons, gossips, greedy, and others.

Would the wicked be welcome in our church? Jesus never turned them away. The only kind of sinners Jesus confronted publicly were the highly religious ones who knew all about rights and wrongs and used that knowl-

edge to justify themselves and despise others (Luke 18:9-14).

For too long, churches have blamed the world for how ineffective we are at attracting people. To the extent that we embody the spirit of the Pharisees, we will repel sinners. To the extent that we embody the spirit of Jesus, our church will be a magnet for the immoral, rebel types, and other sinners we disdain.*

* For the final paragraph, I am indebted to Gregory A. Boyd and his book *Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God* (p. 200).

— Calvin Burrell



@ Newbi1 — Dreamstime.com

No Partiality!

James reports a disturbing occurrence: A rich visitor who came to church received better treatment from the brethren than others (2:2-4). He was offered a good seat, while a poor man stood.

Does partiality occur in your church? James' point is the distinction of wealth, but race, education, disability, and appearance could be included. We should be careful: One perceived snub could turn a newcomer away

from the church and from the Lord for life.

Why do we sometimes treat guests poorly? Rarely is it due to evil motives. Usually it's because we don't feel comfortable talking with strangers or people who seem different. Our communication skills and confidence with others need improvement. Let's give more priority to both and to being "all things to all men" for the sake of the gospel, as Paul was.

James' instruction not to treat newcomers with partiality also applies to how we treat brethren. Consider:

Do the educated brethren happily mix with the less trained? Do the talkative try to lovingly communicate with those who are quiet? Do those mature in the faith spend time with babes in Christ, or do they only socialize among those whose iron can sharpen their iron?

Are fellowship events only time to catch up with family and friends, rather than ministering to wider needs of the body? Do adults converse with youth? Should family and friends always close ranks for support, or are there times when a higher standard should prevail?

Brethren, we mustn't show partiality, even to our spouses or relatives! We will spend eternity with some people we may have despised on earth, so let's get to know as many brethren as we can — and know them well!

James 2:13 says mercy triumphs over judgment. This reminds me of the children's game Rock, Paper, Scissors, where the rock triumphs over scissors, scissors triumph over paper, and paper triumphs over rock. James is telling us mercy is superior to the

judgmental spirit of partiality.

Maybe there's a person or group like the young or elderly to whom you've paid little or no attention. Maybe there's someone who annoys or offends you. Maybe there's someone often left out at church, standing around looking lost or uncomfortable. Remember: No partiality! Maybe there is a brother or sister whom no one visits during the week. May we all make the effort with one more person.

James encourages us to show compassion to all kinds of people — including the unpopular, neglected, and despised — as Christ did. Let's show the same to all who enter the church and to all who remain in the church, or we may lose many from the church.

— David Kidd
Adelaide, South Australia



Word to the World

A church will grow as far as God allows. Water and nutrition are necessary for growth, and we can help deliver both.

My dad, pastor of Jamaica, New York City CoG7, initiated a movement that created an aqueduct to the outside world. First,

he held classes to instruct the zealous to spread God's Word past the church doors. Twenty persons learned what to do and what not to do. Topics ranged from public speech and manners to avoidance of exhausting words and frightening gestures.

Then the twenty dispersed into the neighborhood to interact with those roaming the streets, ready to buy the latest trendy object. Many did not expect to "buy" the Word of God, yet they "bought" some. For those in a rush, handy flyers had been prepared, showing a man nearing a steep canyon that separated him from God.

Describing God's plan calls for verses like John 3:16; 10:10; and Ephesians 2:8, 9. His grace and forgiving love invite us to respond in faith and love. This gives way to an image of the cross bridging the gap between God and man. He makes a way and gives it away.

On the street, groups of three to five were formed to approach people. A hundred or more have been given the Word so far and offered a place where their thirst for life can be quenched through Christ.

A vision is as big as our thoughts and prayers. This plan is in God's hands. We have only slight ideas how grand it can be. We are workers together with a force far greater than man. God gives the green light. We decide whether to go.

Can't come to the river? The river shall come to you! **BA**

— Marvin A. Espana Jr.
Queens, New York

CoG7 Polity . . . Over the Years

by Robert Coulter

Founded in 1884, the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) consisted of churches in Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, and Nebraska. It adopted a congregational form of government, following the lead of the Michigan Conference. Its goal was to serve members and secure their unity of belief and action.

The Conference was reluctant to hold members accountable for disagreement with its established teachings. Too many of its early members had been ostracized by Sabbath Adventist fellowships over dubious points for it to discipline dissenters.

By the twentieth century, the Church's disunity reached a critical point. But S. W. Mentzer, Conference president (1905-1921), declined to intervene. His successor, Andrew N. Dugger (1921-27, '29-'31) made several attempts to address the problem, with mixed results. On one hand, he cast a vision for a united church, reformed its financial flow, and formalized the doctrines most commonly taught by the Church.

On the other hand, Dugger included a few of his own ideas among the doctrines, advanced them through the *Bible Advocate* magazine (while closing it to dissent), and attempted to achieve

unity by decree rather than by dialogue. He used the Church's theological diversity as an excuse to divide the Conference and establish the Church of God (7th Day), Salem, West Virginia, in 1933. Trying to imitate the early church, Salem adopted a hierarchy of twelve apostles, seven deacons, and seventy elders.

The Stanberry, Missouri Conference continued to operate under local autonomy until 1949, when the Salem church reunited with it. Membership had fallen during the schism, so Stanberry sacrificed its structure in favor of unity and agreed to a hierarchical polity. The reunited church placed control of its affairs in the hands of a board of twelve ministers.

This executive board soon recognized it had been given authority that was impractical to administer. Voluntarily, it began to restore privileges to members and local churches. This evolution in CoG7 polity extended into the 1980's, when the Conference arrived at a hybrid between congregationalism and Presbyterianism (i.e., rule by teams of elders). Its local polity is seen in the autonomy granted to pastors, congregations, and districts to administer their own affairs. Its presbyterian polity is observed in the operational mandates vested in denominational boards and committees.

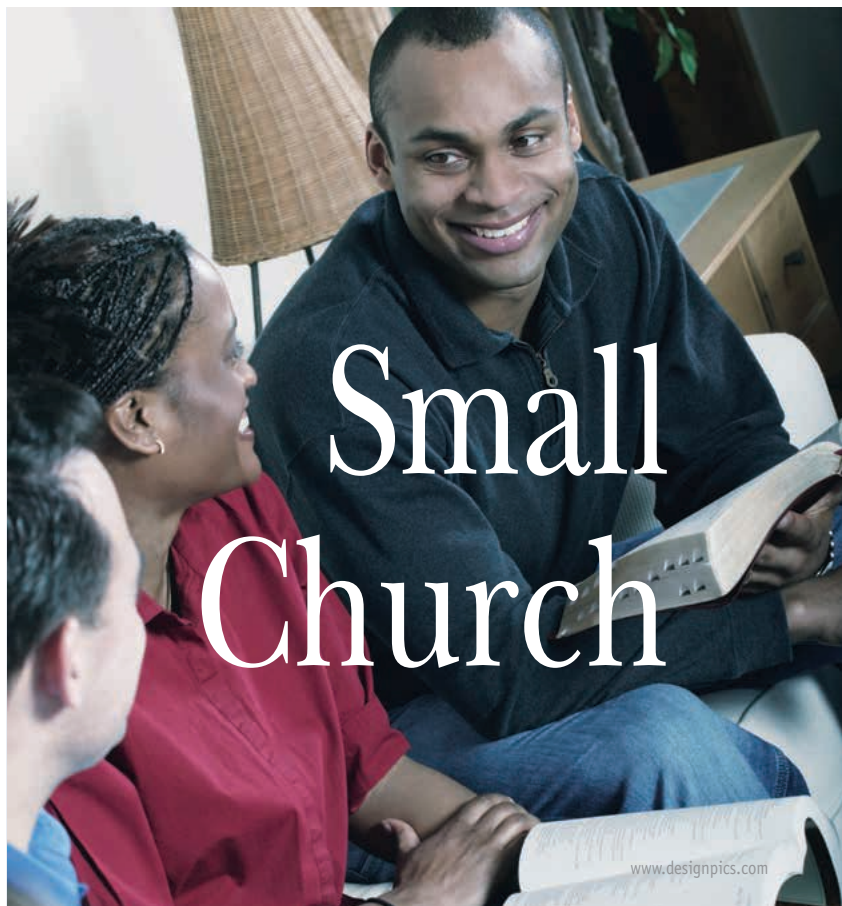
Under this hybrid polity the Conference achieved objectives envisioned by its founders. It has a ministerial staff supportive of its doctrines and stewardship program — a unity achieved by dialogue and consensus, not decree. It enables the Conference to render the services needed by its members to carry out the Great Commission without regimentation.

Recent achievements of the Church include its repudiation of Arianism and declaration of Christ's deity. It also recognizes salvation by God's grace in Christ, rather than by human effort. These decisions were followed by the issuance of its fundamental beliefs in twelve succinct statements of faith.

The General Conference is now engaged in an aggressive educational program for its clergy. Through Missions Abroad and the International Ministerial Congress, it assists in serving churches in over fifty countries. This global ministry represents the Church's fastest-growing membership. **BA**

Elder Coulter's
500-page history
of the Church is
due off the press
by May 1. Read
more on page 29.





Small Church

God's people are to be nourished spiritually and disciple others. How can this best be achieved?
by James McBride

Many Christians perceive the church as a building that's a center for religious activity. In the Bible, however, the church is people — those who've been called out of the world by the gospel to worship the true God in Jesus Christ.

Most people believe that success is measured by numbers in the building on Sabbath or by converts added. An inner city dozen trying to survive is seen as

a failure, while a new crowded edifice indicates God's blessing.

Neither is necessarily so. The small, struggling community may represent God's work in that area, while the large, enthusiastic crowd may be so far out of touch with true faith that God sees it as failure. Indeed the smaller group may be a perfect template to accomplish two basic biblical aims: personal growth and world mission.

New Testament pattern

Not for three hundred years after the book of Acts did Christians meet in buildings set apart for that purpose. Until then the pattern was what we now call

"house churches," consisting of a few families in one locality meeting in one of their homes. Many of the people Paul greets in Romans 16:1-16 were likely leaders of such assemblies. Paul's convening of the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff) implies more than two or three elders and thus several house churches in that city.

This doesn't mean there were only a few brethren in town but that they chose to meet most often in several smaller assemblies. Romans 16 confirms that there were fraternal relations among these assemblies and that all were known to the others. Apostolic letters were sent for the benefit of all Christians in a city — this network of interacting assemblies.

Origins

But the core assemblies were house groups. There would be frequent occasions when several local assemblies would meet together for church festivities or other special events (e.g., Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 11:20). The house churches in any region or city were closely linked by ties of family, leadership, etc.

This concept emerged from the synagogue and from the judicial system of Israel, the seedbeds of the Christian church. There could be several synagogues in a city (Acts 9:2), each independently organized but subscribing to common teachings and traditions. The pattern of tens, fifties, etc., introduced by Moses and endorsed by Jesus (Exodus 18:21; Mark 6:39) was firmly entrenched among Israelites.

Note: The term *assembly(ies)* is used here to avoid constant repetition of the words *small group(s)*. The word *church* designates the larger unitary congregation.

Unitary churches

In large churches energy can be generated by numbers. The variety and quality often denied smaller groups are found in larger ones: music, teaching, and services provided. But with greater size also come limitations.

A large church tends to foster cliques in which people often fellowship with the same small group and remoteness from leadership develops. Visitors can feel overwhelmed or ignored. “Quiet” brethren are left out, sidelined from action, their gifts and talents neglected. The larger the church, the more susceptible it may be to these flaws.

Most larger churches recognize such limits and try to redress them through youth, senior, singles, or sports clubs. Some establish a network of smaller mid-week assemblies called “cell groups.”

Small groups

Linked by a network of similar assemblies, a small-group church has advantages over a large or mega-church. It is far from second best.

Among a dozen or so persons, one of our prime callings is enhanced: close relationships. Here we can better understand and support the needs of brethren, pray more personally for others — even weep together.

In such an assembly spiritual gifts and natural talents of *all* present can flourish. A reading of the “gift chapters” (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12, 14) suggests numerous brethren exercising a variety of gifts — a situation facilitated by many small assemblies

rather than large ones.

A further advantage is the face-to-face interaction in Bible study and the opportunity to relate its principles to individual circumstances. Personal interaction is absent in most one-way sermons, or even in a study where questions may be asked but only the leader answers.

Outreach

The essence of an assembly is that it remains small in order to better accomplish its purposes: worship, instruction, relationships, and outreach. Its dynamic, motivated by the Holy Spirit, is still for growth. The members seek ways to enlarge the assembly so that another fellowship can be formed. Individual members can move to a more convenient geographical assembly. Gifted and experienced members may plant a new fellowship elsewhere.

A home often provides a less-threatening environment in which unchurched friends and neighbors can fellowship. Those who attend are learning to follow Jesus Christ but may still be coming to full commitment and baptism. The dynamics of such an assembly greatly assist the process: Doubts can be directly addressed, doctrinal queries explained, and spiritual help sought.

Leadership

Even in a small group, a leadership structure is needed to keep the fellowship on course. Paul, for example, appointed elders in new assemblies (Acts

14:23). These were able men, acceptable to local brethren and qualified by character, understanding, and disposition for leadership (see 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).

The work of God in a city or town was overseen by the collective leaders of house churches — the *presbytery*. Through fraternal links with similar assemblies, accountability was maintained in doctrine or ethical issues. Flexibility was allowed for minor variations. Assembly leaders (elders) should, in a spirit of unity, regularly associate with each other. By this means, “fathers in the faith” can impart understanding to newer assemblies and serve to avoid doctrinal excess.

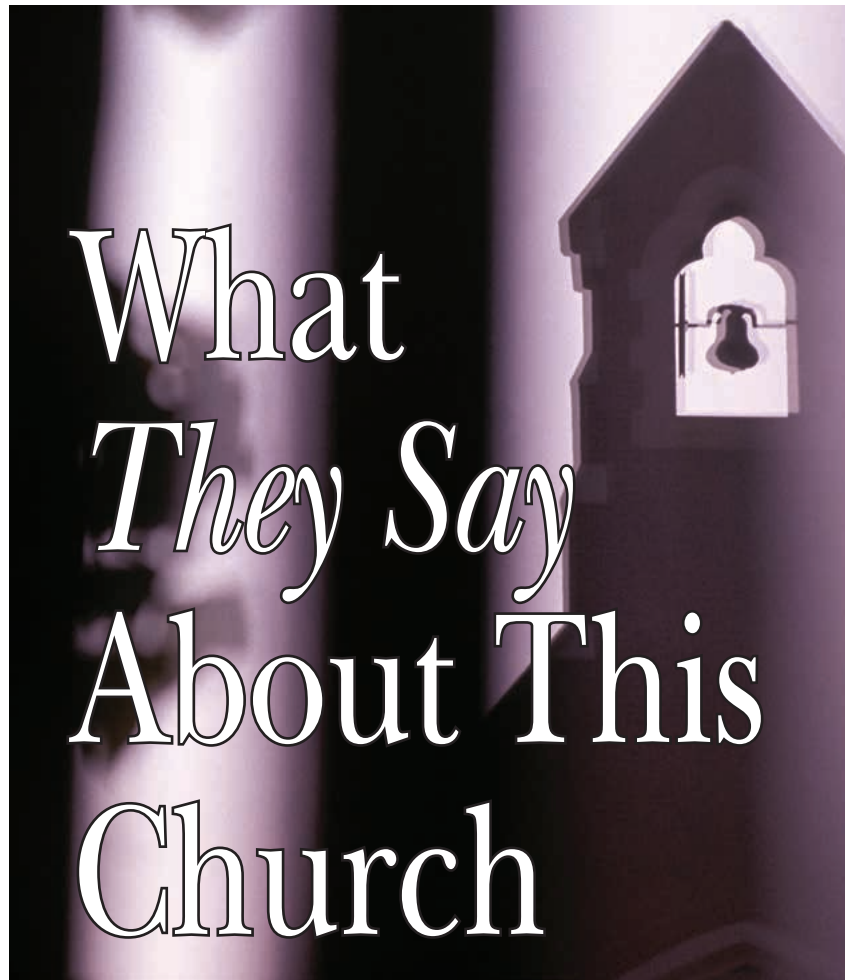
In addressing elders from the Ephesian assemblies, Paul outlined their responsibility to shepherd those in their care, guarding them from false teachers (Acts 20:17ff). Without godly, dedicated shepherds, sheep scatter!

Integrated church

The Church of God, then, can be well served when its building blocks are small, self-contained units. As the units grow, so the Church grows. In the tradition of Sabbatarian churches, much can be gained through such assemblies, with voluntary cooperation among them. **BA**

James McBride
edits *New Horizon*
magazine (Churches
of God Outreach
Ministries, Tulsa,
OK). He and his wife, Sarah, live
in Lincolnshire, England.





To link Church of God (Seventh Day) leaders with readers, BA asked these seven leaders about issues that face church members today:

- Erik Dunn, co-pastor and G. C. board member from Texas
- Kenneth Lawson, NAMC committee chair from Minnesota
- Noe Reyes, pastor and LifeSpring School of Ministry instructor from Pharr, Texas
- Amber Riggs, LifeSpring's dean of Administration and Student Affairs from Oregon
- Whaid Rose, G. C. president from Denver, Colorado
- Israel Steinmetz, LifeSpring's dean of Academic Affairs from Kansas City, Missouri
- Heber Vega, N.E. District superintendent from Maryland

On change

BA: More and more Christians are leaving the staid, stagnant churches of their youth for larger, more trendy groups. How can our small congregations keep up? Should we even try?

“Staid” and “stagnant” is a state of mind found in large and small congregations alike. However, rather than depend upon size, age, or budget, vibrant churches rely on the Holy Spirit’s work to fill people with grace, power, and vision by which we find true life and health. Reliance on the Spirit calls us to a balanced relationship with change. On one hand, we must not bow

at the altar of relevance in an effort to keep up with ever-changing trends and expectations. On the other hand, we should make every effort to connect with our culture and offer our very best in God’s service. Leaders in every congregation should ask, “How can we most faithfully fulfill the call to evangelize and disciple?” The answers will differ, but by making the most of its gifts and resources, each congregation can extend God’s kingdom in the world. — Israel Steinmetz

Staid means “having a settled, quiet character, sober.” That sounds safe, but if it means lacking vibrancy and being hunkered down in survival mode, it will not work. *Stagnant* means “not moving or flowing, foul from standing still, sluggish and dull” (*World Book Dictionary*). If any of us fit those descriptions, getting on our knees to seek the face of God and a fresh infusion of the Holy Spirit is the best road to recovery. If we learn to worship in a fresh way, the pure flowing joy of love for Jesus will return. People will be attracted to that.

— Ken Lawson

It isn’t about keeping up with trends but becoming communities that respond to life’s challenges — not with frustration or despair but with the peace and healing of Christ that characterize the kingdom of God. Of course, this often requires responding in creative ways and using our gifts and resources in ways that are new to us. We may never be the trendiest set of Christians, but this creative approach is the true opposite of being “staid” and “stagnant.”

— Amber Riggs



I'm in agreement with the comment about balance. Big doesn't necessarily mean better, and small doesn't mean

ineffective. Church growth specialists have been telling us for years that the era of the mega church is past, that there is a reawakening to the value and unique role of small churches. The most effective churches derive their ministry capacity not solely from their size but from the Spirit's work in them: spiritual formation, imparting life, impacting the world with the gospel. While endeavoring to understand and address the issues of culture, our overarching goal is to keep in step with the Spirit. This isn't some aimless "We have no idea what we're doing — just trusting the Spirit." Rather, it is taking inventory and facing the brutal facts about our state, then earnestly seeking the Lord for Holy Spirit fullness, which brings new light and life, fullness and joy.

— Whaid G. Rose

This century, we experience the departure of members to other churches that exceed our average membership. The reasons? "They" have better facilities, more economic power, and better organization. By leaving, these brethren lose fellowship with brothers and sometimes with the truth they'd known since childhood. I recommend we maintain our identity, not destroy the Word, and have a vibrant pulpit with authentic worship. We can offer this to the new generations and, with God's

help, they will see the difference plus the blessings and stay with us. — Noe Reyes

As long as our catalyst for change is to please God and be more effective in serving His purpose, then I champion change. I'm an avid advocate for relevant messages, media integration, contemporary worship, and casual dress codes: They reveal how easily our faith translates into life. At the same time, I have learned that not all change is progress. Far too often, innovation is inspired by an entertainment index. Whatever we do to draw people is exactly what we have to do to maintain them. This customer-driven approach to ministry makes for a trendy tactic, but it ultimately falls short of the church's eternal objective. Our goal is not to satisfy crowds but to invoke God's presence. Staid, stagnant, or stylish — a building void of His presence may make a great landmark, museum, or movie theatre, but it's not a church. — Erik Dunn



In church matters, mechanisms are needed to regularly evaluate what we do and how we do it. Our measuring

stick should be "Does this benefit God's work here and now, with eternal significance?" If the evaluation shows that change is necessary, let's find a solution that allows us to serve more effectively in an ever-changing society. — Heber Vega

On culture

BA: The world is so much with us: electronics and entertainment, sports and social networks, fads and fashions. Can this scene be adapted to the gospel's favor, or should most of it be rejected for a simpler life of faith, hope, and love?

Adapting or rejecting culture is not our only option. Jesus did neither. His approach teaches that the gospel isn't anti-cultural but rather transcends and transforms culture. By word and example, Jesus calls us to engage culture, all the while living cross-culturally — that is, living unencumbered by culture's goods and not allowing the world to squeeze us into its mold. This isn't so much about how many gadgets we own as it is whether or not they own us and influence the way we live and conduct ministry. Being salt and light requires engagement, adding flavor and causing a preserving influence, shedding light on the present darkness. We don't live cross-culturally by cursing the darkness but by lighting a candle.

— Whaid G. Rose

The simpler life of faith, hope, and love calls us to a deep, thoughtful interaction with our ever-changing culture. By *faith*, we trust that God has placed us here and now. We are His ambassadors to the world around us — not yesterday's world, but today's. We trust God to guide us through the process of living in the moment while remaining righteous salt and holy light. By embracing *hope*, we join Paul in becoming "all things to all men so that by all possible means I

might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22, NIV). It is the hope of salvation for the world that drives us into the world, not because we're enamored with a sinful world system but because we have compassion for those under its dominion. It is *love* that empowers this faith and hope. Love for God protects us from the threat of compromise and syncretism with the sinfulness around us. Love for people calls us to be among them, finding any possible means of reaching them with the gospel. God has not called us to cloister but to go, reaching out.

— Israel Steinmetz



There are days when all of us long for a simpler life and slower pace — less daily mayhem. Yet there is no more glorious time to live in than *now!* The church should use every possible means available to spread the gospel. Gadgets? Jesus did a lot of "texting." We are just on the edge of even more near-incredible inventions. My grandson said to me, "Papa, by the time I'm your age, we'll have a colony on Mars." If it's sinful, call it what it is. If it's not, use it wisely for God's glory.

— Ken Lawson

Without a doubt, "modernism" has reached the church. But the Great Commission given by our Lord Jesus Christ did not escape the impact modernism has had on us all. We can take advantage of the advance in communications to facilitate publicity and to promote conventions,

reunions, etc. for the church.

Before modernism, the church had more fellowship; you could feel the warmth. It felt like home. Now with all the technological advances, the church feels cold — further away from the person next to you and more robotized. A healthy balance would be to take advantage of technology for special circumstances. But for successful practice of spreading the Word and the worship offered by God's people, we should continue ways that have worked successfully.

— Noe Reyes

Failure to leverage the advancements of our modern era (or deeming them secular and unusable) is tantamount to condemning Paul for utilizing the Roman roads and established trade routes of his day to spread the gospel. Social media and the Internet are as beneficial to our generation as Gutenberg's printing press was to the dissemination of Martin Luther's views on grace. Like our lives, these tools can be redeemed for the glory of God. — Erik Dunn

We need to use anything and everything that benefits God's work. I get much greater response through Facebook than through e-mails. I give many announcements in a three-minute video with musical background, and it's more effective than a newsletter. People should be shocked to walk into church today and find us operating as if we were still in the early twentieth century. Sound and video must be top of the line. It already is in our homes and vehicles.

— Heber Vega

On grace

BA: There's been a recent "grace awakening" in GoG7. What impact has this had on us?

In the last two decades, this grace awakening drew awareness that God gives us what we don't deserve. It moved us further away from legalism, from being an exclusive church. We have benefited by accepting non-CoG7 believers and by numerical growth. Our limited worship experience has turned to more joy as what we are with grace is manifested in contrast to what we are without it. — Noe Reyes



I think we're struggling with the benefits because our conversations on grace are often pitted against obedience, as if the two are rivals. The pendulum of my own perspective has swung in both directions in different seasons of my spiritual development. Now I see the entire argument as a false dichotomy. This controversy has divided churches, strained relationships, and distracted us from our mission, but it's based upon the flawed premise that there is a competition between how God has chosen to express His love for us (grace) and how He desires us to respond (obedience). We'll experience true grace awakening when we set aside our biases (influenced by our heritage or by modern faith trends) and see that grace and obedience are intimately inseparable. The tension arises only when we seek to

promote one to the exclusion of the other. — Erik Dunn



For some the new emphasis on Christ and His grace is seen as a threat to our historical emphasis on doctrine and

truth. Sadly, this view misunderstands the relationship between these words. *Doctrine* is simply another word for *teaching*. The most significant teaching for us as Christians is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ. And it is through Jesus that we receive both grace and truth (John 1:14-17). The “grace awakening” we’re experiencing is a biblical re-prioritizing of our doctrines to recognize Christ as central and preeminent (Colossians 1:15-20). By emphasizing Christ and His grace, we can truly understand and faithfully practice our other doctrines. Without Him in His rightful place, nothing else will be in its rightful place. The impact on us is positive and evolving. — Israel Steinmetz

This “grace awakening” almost didn’t happen for me. I was raised in a time when doctrine and prophecy were our church’s strong emphases. My early sermons emphasized “true doctrine first.” Understanding the priority of Jesus, salvation by faith, and the deep value and meaning of grace was a struggle. Calvin Burrell’s sermon “With Both Hands” woke me up. He encouraged us to find, on one hand, the real place of truth and obedience, and the real place faith and grace on the other. The idea

of relying on faith and grace was a struggle at first. When I found that beautiful balance, Jesus was my number one message. Reliance on faith and God’s grace changed me and filled me with almost more joy and hope than I can handle! Hanging on to law for our salvation just won’t work. I hope you are teaching “With Both Hands” at LifeSpring.

— Ken Lawson



I can assure you that our instructors are teaching “with both hands” at LifeSpring. You’re right: God’s grace can’t realisti-

cally be understood or even appreciated outside His truth. Likewise, His grace allows us to truly delight in His holiness. It is a *true* grace versus the misconception we sometimes see, that grace does away with any standard of holiness. For example, we are growing in our appreciation that the Sabbath is holy to God and truly a gift — a grace — to tangibly experience each week our rest in Christ. Grace takes the weight off our shoulders in that we don’t earn or even keep our rest in Christ by “keeping the Sabbath.” It puts the focus on Christ and the rest we have in Him as He shapes us into His image even as we respond to Him by setting the Sabbath apart from the other days.

— Amber Riggs

Most of us have benefited greatly from this clearer understanding of God’s love. We joyfully live and serve in loving response to salvation. We are

no longer tormented by doubt and insecurities of measuring up, doing enough, and achieving perfection. By God’s grace, we surrender completely and, led by the Holy Spirit through the Word, we move forward in a life of sanctification that glorifies God and edifies the Church. We never consider “going back to our vomit” and cheapening His grace. — Heber Vega

Grace is part of our vision of a vibrant twenty-first century CoG7, a vision that’s owned by the Church’s leadership and is taking hold in greater and greater ways. God be praised! But like becoming Christ-centered, awakening to grace is a journey, not a destination. We have a long way to go. Many among us have yet to experience the likes of Ken’s transformation, and don’t think we need to. — Whaid G. Rose

On worship

BA: Some say worship is romance with God. From your experience, what is the status of worship in CoG7: good and not so good?

“Romance with God” is an inspiring notion because it conjures up thoughts of an occasional, extraordinary, and sometimes extravagant expression of love. I’m glad to see churches take on a more romantic attitude toward worship. I’m equally encouraged by our increasing emphasis on the daily, simple, and practical expressions of worship revealed through lifestyle. It’s the combination of passionate expression and practical exercise (obedience, service, evangelism)

that moves the heart of God. I see the Church growing in both.
— Erik Dunn

Good things I've observed in our worship include greater freedom to kneel, raise hands, and move while singing; greater variety of musical instruments and styles; use of different Bible translations; and modern technology for projection, sound, lighting, etc. Such freedom and the abundance of resources have facilitated our expressions of worship. Exalting the Lord's name, bowing before Him, hearing His voice in the spoken Word, and fellowshiping with the saints each Sabbath should complete our personal worship of the previous six days. These elements are unlikely to be experienced outside a congregational setting.

Bad things I've observed include misuse of our freedom and resources that can turn worship into "performance" in which the congregation is absent due to high volume, contemporary rhythms that nobody identifies with, unknown songs, and other practices "imported" so we can do things the way someone else does. Such "worship" leaves us with the lone consolation that it finally ended, no sense of having been before the throne of grace.
— Heber Vega

Part of the beauty of an open creed is that it calls us to embrace the mystery of God. We live in awe of a God who is known and yet unknown. We tend to be deeply committed to and defensive of the part of Him that we know through divine revelation. However, the unknown part unsettles us a bit: It isn't easy to allow ourselves to

be challenged by scriptures that don't neatly fit our usual interpretations. For example, we've recently delved deeper into the mystery of Christ's incarnation, but it hasn't always been comfortable. — Amber Riggs

You folks have nailed it — but a reality check is needed. If I think worship is about what pleases me, my worship is instantly diluted. If we're still fighting music wars, inspiration will be blocked. If I'm scowling because I don't like the music, my folded arms won't connect with God. If I'm bitter, my worship can't rise. If sin reigns in my heart, I may need "heart stents" to remove the spiritual blockage so worship can flow unhindered. Repentance, forgiveness of others, cessation of gossip, softening of heart, and opening of hands toward Him will produce sincere romantic worship — adoration of God. No genuine romance with God is possible until I fall in humility before Him. — Ken Lawson



The Church's worship has changed somewhat from traditional to more contemporary. I'm referring to not only the "style" or the songs chosen but also the emphasis we place on the importance of worship and bettering our relationships with God. The weekly service is an opportunity to get closer to our Creator and form a stronger foundation of faith.

— Noe Reyes

There's a "worship evolution" taking place. Many of us have a growing hunger after God that spills over into corporate worship. Worship is given higher priority in many places. It's part of our corporate vision, the theme of this biennium and of this summer's Conference Tour. The goal is to become a worshipping church in greater ways, and it's safe to say we're on our way.

But there are challenges. We bring both good and bad to our worship experience. We struggle to define the word, and we tend to mimic the culture as we practice it. That's why I'm skeptical about defining *worship* as "romance." It sounds so trendy and can lead to a subjective approach that's all about happiness and meeting our emotional needs. True worship is about God, not us. It's our heart response to His character and the truth of His Word. More than what we do on Sabbath, worship should inform all that we are and do. — Whaid Rose

Erik's comments remind me of marriage. At times, marriage is characterized by spontaneous expressions of affection and desire. At other times, it is a difficult and sacrificial commitment where emotion doesn't match devotion. To remain faithful to God in this change process, we'll need to understand the fundamental nature and elements of worship. Our current Conference emphasis on being "Passionate in Worship" will help guide us through. Stay tuned! — Israel Steinmetz **BA**

More 'Plain Church'.org

Note: Here are snippets from others who wrote for this issue. Their uncut articles may be read at baonline.org.

The heavens and earth, the sun, stars, and all creation have their glory, but this does not compare to the glory and grandeur for which the family of God was created. Since the church will never cease to exist and all God's children will live together forever, let us start today to love the family of God. If I don't love it, will I enter eternity to extend my hand and eat from the Tree of Life? Since all the church will live together forever, we'd better get along today as God's family. How do we know when we love the church?

"Most Glorious Idea"
by Gustavo Guerrero
Irving, TX

We see all around us the systematic destruction of the family. As a result, many of those coming into the church come hungry for the love, nurture, and guidance absent in their biological family. Some come as single parents struggling without role models to draw from, with broken hearts from broken relationships. Still others come without the emotional, social, or financial

skills needed to enjoy any kind of stability. So much of what they lack stems from the absence of parental or familial support and instruction. Are we, the Church of God (Seventh Day), ready to be the family such people need?

"Church Is Family"
by Loren Gjesdal
Marion, OR

Living under the umbrella of a moody climate, I often suffer from the weather shifts: flu to fever to colds. When it gets complicated, I consult a physician. It's the same with my church. I don't attend for the sake of attendance but as a response to inner needs. Exposed to the world's radiation day by day, our medication comes when we step into God's house each Sabbath. After a good visit to the doctor and once the prescription kicks in, I am free from what used to pin me to bed. And after a joyful moment at church, I am able to face another week, spiritually pumped and refreshed.

"The Church"
by Manasseh Mark Bombeo
Mindinao, Philippines

With only two words, she rocked my world. In a sentence I don't remember, within a presentation I can barely remember, Dr.

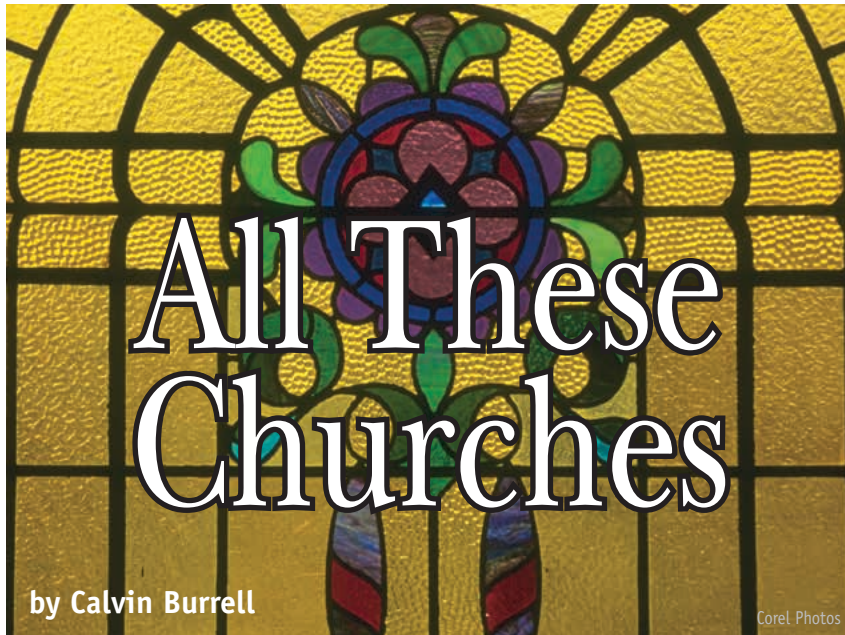
Brené Brown rocked my world. A handful of Lodi CoG7 leaders and I were attending last summer's Global Leadership Summit at a satellite location near Lodi, California, where I live and serve as pastor of our city's Church of God (Seventh Day) congregation. In a line that I doubt was even in her prepared notes, Dr. Brown put two words together that grabbed my attention and imagination like the flash of a falling star across the inky blackness of a desert's night sky. She said, "Practice love."

"Practice Love"
by Loren Stacy
Lodi, CA

What is the number one responsibility of the church? Is it to have a one-, two-, or eight-hour service on the Sabbath once a week? Is it small group or youth group programs? Is it to entertain? Is it to uphold the traditions of the previous generation? Is it a Band-Aid for broken lives?

None of these, I believe. They are not the reason we are called to be the church. Rather, the church is called to reflect God's kingdom realities.

"Number One Purpose"
by Brian Franks
Walla Walla, WA



World Christendom is largely divided among Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches. The latter is further split into denominations. Millions of Christians and many congregations self-identify as independent, or “none of the above.”

Roman and Orthodox (Greek, Russian, etc.) churches claim the high grounds of sacred tradition and direct lineage to the apostles. Protestants appeal more to Scripture than tradition, and to believers’ duty to read and search Scripture for themselves. This individual emphasis and diligent study of a complex Bible by earnest souls has led to varied viewpoints — and many denominations!

The true church of God is a spiritual body built by Christ — an organism, not an organization. Its true

members are known only to Him (2 Timothy 2:19). Denominations are an imperfect system of organizing Christians and making the church visible on earth — in clusters. At worst, denominations foster hatred, contention, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissension, and heresy — listed with the sins of adultery and murder in Galatians 5:19-21.

The problem is not denominations but the people in them. We

*If all the seas were one sea,
 What a great sea that would be!
 And if all the trees were one tree,
 What a great tree that would be!
 And if all the axes were one axe,
 What a great axe that would be!
 And if all the men were one man,
 What a great man he would be!
 And if the great man took the great axe,
 And cut down the great tree,
 And let it fall into the great sea,
 What a splash splash that would be!*

Mother Goose

are selfish dissenters by nature. That goes for those who pride themselves on being “none of the above,” too.

The human tendency to divide and divide again — total independence — is a blight on the body of Christ! Let’s correct our past schisms through Christ-honoring forms of ecumenism and by reuniting splinter groups whenever this can advance God’s grace and truth. This is not a call for a one-world church organization, a cure worse than the disease it addresses.

The bright side of our denominational system is caught in the quote “The great strength of American Christianity is its diversity.”

Based on Jesus’ words and prayer (John 10:16; 13:35; 17:20-23), every Christian should be something of an ecumenist, working for unity among God’s people regardless of affiliation. Start by affirming and celebrating a degree of fellowship with anyone who confesses faith in Christ, even if the evidence is not very convincing. Higher levels of fellowship are rightly reserved for those with whom we have greater harmony in lifestyle and doctrine.

In an imperfect world, every church has faulty members and operates under a defective system. Our choice today is not between a perfect, true church and an imperfect one. The choice is between following Jesus to walk faith’s journey with others — or not following Him at all. **BA**



Why a Churchman?

continued from page 3

ing, but I have largely outgrown it — mostly by broader exposure. My experience with what some cynically call “organized religion” has been more positive than negative, by a ten-to-one margin. The Church of God has been good to me, and I thank God for it!

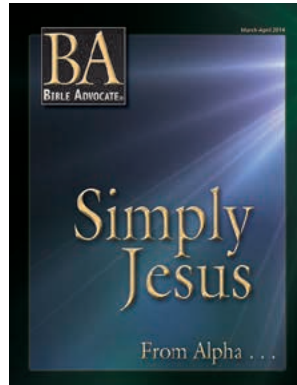
In a time when Christian denominations are viewed with skepticism, I am a churchman, a member of a church that has not reduced its teaching to the least common denominator. If we share most scriptural understandings that distinguish our church, then being churchmen and churchwomen should be both natural and rewarding to us.

Please don't confuse this with the self-righteous exclusivism of some groups. No church organization can honestly claim — with a straight face — to be God's one and only. Someday denominational identities will finally fade into one flock with one Shepherd (John 10:16).

Until then, little can be gained by abandoning our plan for walking and working together in the gospel. Improve the plan? Yes. Give it up for independence? No! Any group of two or more people working together has some system of mutual dependence, no matter how much it claims to be Spirit-led.

The church is God's idea, not ours. It is the betrothed bride of Christ, and we should support its gospel efforts in every way we can. It does not need one more critic.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Simply Jesus

Well done. I have been waiting fourteen years for this issue. I read it cover to cover without stopping.

D. D.
Shawnee, OK

In the center and on the back, you have a typical representation of what artists think Jesus looked like. Both depict Him with long hair. Paul says it's a shame for a man to have long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14). As part of the Nazarite vow, a man would have long hair that singles him out and, in that sense, “shames” him. I know the world recognizes that depiction, but should we not make Jesus appear as masculine?

P. S.
Worcester, England

Another great edition. I'm reading N. T. Wright's book, also titled *Simply Jesus*. Thanks for all the thoughtful and prayerful work that goes into each BA.

J. K.
Northan, Western Australia

Great issue. Great cover. Great centerfold. Great “Not a Fan” story by DDM [Debra-Diane McDonnell].

We are called to be like Jesus to others and to see the likeness of

Jesus in others. He calls us to care, listen, encourage, forgive, show hospitality, love one another as He loved us, and lay down our lives for friends.

B. M.
Liberty Center, OH

“Purpose-Driven Christ” [p. 11] is the best article I've read this year. Thank you, Dr. Donna Sherwood in London, UK.

N. M.
Facebook

Worshiping Church

Whaid Rose does us proud with a quote from Archbishop William Temple [Last Word, January-February 2014, p. 31]. Temple [also] said, “It is a mistake to suppose that God is only, or even chiefly, concerned with religion.” These words panicked me, until I prayed them through.

D. H.
Vancouver, BC

Thank you for another great issue. I always enjoy the BA.

M. W.
Eugene, OR

BA Blessings

I value your stance for the truths of the Bible without claims of exclusive understanding and custodian of divine truths, like many churches.

F. T.
Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

God's blessing on BA for wonderful work you are doing in this worldwide magazine. It helps me and my listeners know more about God's kingdom and understand the difference between good and bad teachings.

L. U.
Okija, Anambra State, Nigeria

True Church

by Ernie Klassek

When I was a boy in the 1930s, churches were mysterious buildings. In Central Europe, I knew only two kinds: ones with stained glass windows, lots of ornate stonework outside and statues, woodcarvings, and pictures inside. The other kind had only a cross or two. All had steeples. The big ones were called cathedrals, the smaller ones, churches, and the very small ones in the countryside, chapels. Their names had *St.* in front, meaning “Saint”: St. Martin, St. Anna, and many more.

Churches with all the ornaments were open day and night. Ducking into one for shelter during a storm, I marveled at the artwork and felt a bit spooky seeing candles or other dim lights flickering. On a Sunday, I might stand at the back and wonder why men and boys were in the pews on the right and women and girls on the left, with a long, wide aisle between. The chanting by the priest at the other end sounded eerie.

After the war, I heard about the large number of denominations and churches in America. When I migrated to Australia in the 1950s, I found a variety of churches there too, some with no steeples.

When I became an Australian citizen, I was given a King James Bible. I had never read a Bible before. In one verse I noticed that the most common name was *church (or churches) of God* and *churches of Christ*. I had never heard these names in Europe. The churches I read about in the New Testament were not buildings.

I was also amazed that Paul addressed the church of God in Corinth as “saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2), describing it as a group of people sanctified in Christ Jesus. He said that Jesus was Lord of all people everywhere who called on His name.

What an eye-opener! A church was no longer a building full of mysteries, named after a particular saint, but a gathering of people who were all saints! A

church could be described as people who came together with their Lord Jesus Christ.

Although I had heard of Christians in America and elsewhere who met on Saturday, the majority I knew about met on Sunday. But Sunday was an enigma to me, since the early Christians met on the Sabbath (Acts 13:44) and non-Jewish believers also went to synagogues every Sabbath (15:21).

My wife and I had made our home in Tasmania and began keeping the Sabbath in the early 1960s, with Bible studies and question times for our children. After many years of keeping Sabbaths at home, we attended our first church service the last Sabbath in June 1969. To our surprise, there were 117 of us — families with four generations (great-grandchildren to great-grandparents) and the fruits of the Spirit present, with joy the most dominant. We endeavored to gather once a month, many driving long distances. As the church grew, there were four congregations, suitable for different areas, with weekly or fortnightly services.

Hebrews 10:24, 25 tells us to not forsake assembling together, especially as we “see the day approaching.” With the Day so much nearer now than two thousand years ago, it’s our turn to remember the preciousness of God’s church. **BA**

Ernie Klassek lives in Booragoon, Western Australia. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.



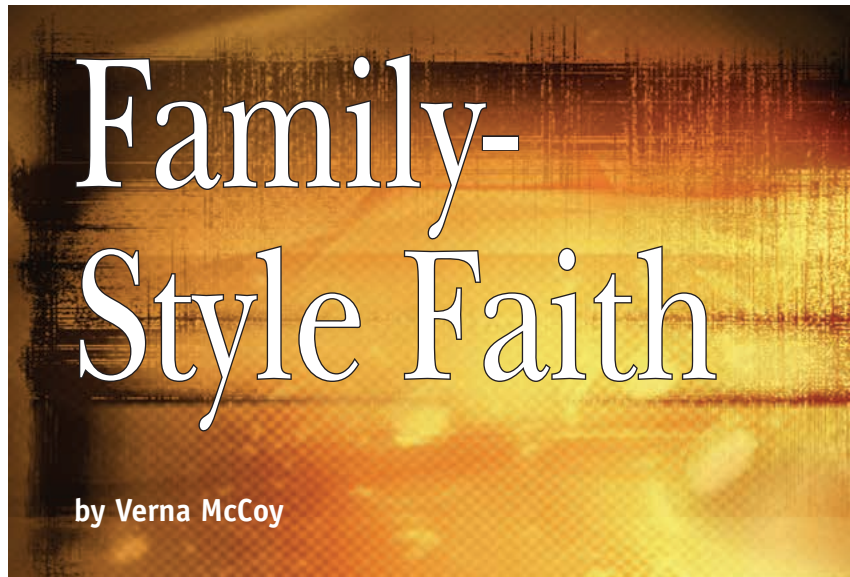
My first memory of “church” was at Grandpa and Grandma DeWind’s home on a hill by the Grand River — the one that runs through Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I recall pleasant walks along the river to afternoon service, when a car wasn’t available. A few times we rode a boat, and we could go on ice at river’s edge in the winter. Walking the distance was simpler than climbing over or under fences that separated neighbors’ properties. That posed the risk of tearing our “Sabbath best.” Our services were “plain church,” but we dressed up for it!

The living-dining area in that grand old farmhouse gave ample room for services. We youngsters (siblings, cousins, other offspring of attendees) sat at a big oval table in the kitchen for Sabbath school. Others remained in the living room for Bible study, using quarterlies from the Publishing House in Stanberry, Missouri.

For “church,” genuine antique wooden chairs were lined up in rows in the living room. In four-part harmony, we sang from the blue *Hymns of Truth*, with the twins (Mary and Martha) or me playing the upright piano. Grandpa would often request “Where All Things Are New”: He steadfastly looked forward to Christ’s second coming. Then Grandpa would stand in his black suit at the dining room table pulpit and preach — at great length. One had to admire his fervor and adherence to the truth he discovered in his forties.

After our family moved in with Grandpa, Grandma, and Aunt Susie, part of our Friday duties was to clean the living-dining areas, arrange the chairs back into



rows, and set out the hymnals.

The house had a long dirt driveway that ended after a narrow, steep “cut” through a tree-lined hill. In heavy snows, cars were left above and folks walked down the final grade. Dressed appropriately, the faithful would collect their Bibles, tie on their bonnets, and trudge to church. If some did get through, driving back up through the cut was a serious challenge, with a sight-impaired curve near its crest.

During spring thaw, that dirt road was a muddy mess. It often refroze at night, leaving deep ruts and making driving difficult. But those earnest believers continued to make it for services. “Neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet” — nor mud — could prevent devoted brethren from getting to church on time.

My husband (Mickey) and his brothers (Ken and Buster) were also blessed to have the example of faithfulness from their parents and grandparents. One of the earlier Conroe (Shady Grove), Texas church buildings had just one room, so the children met in a ’39 Oldsmobile when weather

prevented them from having Sabbath school class on an outdoor bench. Mickey’s mother usually taught the lessons.

When I joined the McCoy family, the congregation was meeting in a “church house” across the road. Mickey did the electrical wiring for that building, and his dad and other relatives were among the loyal, willing men who helped on numerous workdays. Many years later, with much help from the brethren, the current building was erected on the property. When any call to worship was scheduled, whether mid-week, Friday nights, Sabbaths, Sabbath evenings, or revival/evangelistic meetings, Arnold and Virginia McCoy were promptly in their pew.

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). **BA**

Mickey and Verna McCoy of Huntsville, TX, have three grown children, one of whom wrote the poem on the next page.

My Church, My Home

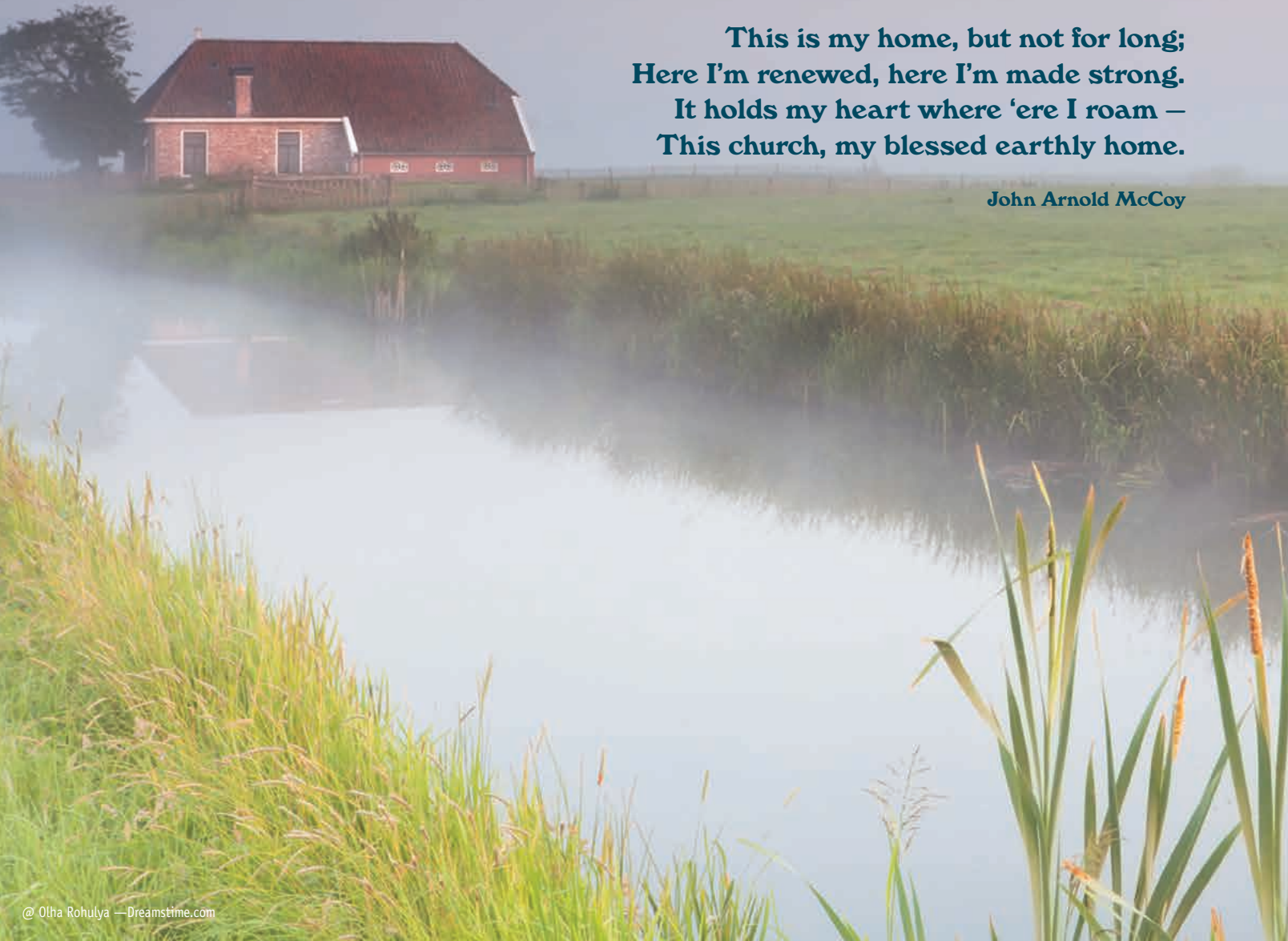
It started on a dusty road, a long, long time ago
A simple little gathering, and it began to grow;
A humble little building, a faithful little bunch
Who loved to share the gospel and their potluck lunch.

Rest home singing, VBS, games at Family Night;
Ice cream socials, CYC – I recall a mustard fight.
Chili cook-offs, *Afterglow*, workdays now and then;
Sabbath school and worship singing where everyone joins in.

We lay on hands, anoint with oil, eat snow cones in the heat,
Laugh and cry together, wash each other's feet;
Watch children grow, lay friends to rest, see others move away,
And everyone looks forward to God's reunion day.

This is my home, but not for long;
Here I'm renewed, here I'm made strong.
It holds my heart where 'ere I roam –
This church, my blessed earthly home.

John Arnold McCoy





IMC Sabbath: May 17, 2014

On this special Sabbath all CoG7 congregations around the world will receive reports of the Church's global work and support it with their prayers and offerings earmarked "IMC Sabbath."

IMC, of course, means International Ministerial Congress, whose purpose is to unite the Church (currently in about 40 countries) in the grace and truth of God's Word and in its efforts to take the name of Christ to every nation and people group.

Your IMC offerings on May 17 are a primary source of funding for our global church. Thank you for your generous gift this year!



CoG7 Missions team (L to R): Heber Vega, Calvin Burrell, Bryan Cleeton, Ramon Ruiz, Whaid Rose, Brian Baker. Troy Gedack, facilitator, not pictured.

G. C. Missions

Also known as Missions Abroad, G. C. Missions exists to glorify God around the world by proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, teaching the Word, and equipping believers to serve the nations.

- Proclaiming: We will utilize twenty-first century technology to improve communication.
- Teaching: We will communicate our mission statement (first paragraph, above), our objectives, and our distinctive doctrines to all IMC members and friends.
- Equipping: We will teach global missions and provide avenues for members to utilize their gifts and callings.

In the final days of March your CoG7 Missions leadership team created a new mission statement and an action plan for the next three years. Starting now, please pray for the team (shown above), reflect on how you can join the team in its efforts to make Christ known to the nations, and consider supporting G. C. Missions to make these plans a reality.



G. C. Missions
P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233
[facebook.com/GCMissions](https://www.facebook.com/GCMissions)
gcmisions@cog7.org • 303-452-7973



Plaque from Nigeria. At the recent African convention in Rivers State, Nigeria, this plaque was presented to the Bible Advocate Press staff "In recognition of outstanding and continuous ministry to the development and growth of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Africa." Back home, G. C. President Whaid Rose passes it on to LeRoy Dais, a 58-year BAP veteran.



NAMC to Alabama

Ministerial Council is scheduled for September 15-20 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, 1314 Shocco Springs Road, Talladega, AL (www.shocco.org). The theme is "Worship: Leading the Way." Free Birmingham airport shuttles September 15 at 12 noon and 3 p.m.

Ministerial Licenses

The Church's License and Credentials Committee has approved and issued ministerial licenses to the following: Aubrey Williams, Mississauga, Ontario; John Gonzalez, Fontana, California; Hector Alvarenga, Houston, Texas; Barry Mauldin, Stillwater, Oklahoma; and Ronald Rousseau, Crest Hill, Illinois. Felipe Orduño (Escondido, California) was recognized with a Local Pastor Certificate.

CoG7 Action Calendar

- May 1 - National Day of Prayer in the US
- May 16-18 - Florida Women's Retreat at Canterbury Conference Center, Oviedo, FL; contact Alrna Largie (253-638-1416) or Sharon Henry (407-719-0173)
- May 23-26 - National SWORD Retreat, Brookhaven Camp, Hawkins, TX
- May 24-25 - Graduation exercises at Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI
- June 6-9 - Men's Retreat at Still Waters Retreat Center, Alfred, ND
- June 8-14 - Dover Family Camp, Kingfisher, OK
- June 26 - July 1 - Refuge in the Rockies Youth Camp, Silverthorne, CO
- July 7-13 - Capital Mt. Youth and Seeker Camps, Weimar, CA
- July 20-27 - Sis-Q Meadows Youth Camp, Cave Junction, OR
- July 20-27 - Arizona Youth Camp, ages 13-18

July 27 - August 3 - Sis-Q Meadows Seeker Camp, Cave Junction, OR

August 13-17 - Sis-Q Senior Adult Retreat, Cave Junction, OR

August 29 - September 1 - National Hispanic Women's Retreat, Chicago, IL; contacts: Eva Delgado (708-955-5475) or Gloria Arzet (773-593-1425); e-mail: retironacionalhispano2014@gmail.com; Facebook: *Retiro Nacional Hispano*.

October 3-5 - Northeast District Women's Retreat, Mackinaw Island, MI; theme: "S.W.A.T." Registrations being accepted. Contacts: Esther Winchell (esther416@charter.net; 989-574-7325) or Linda Rodriguez (frogbabe523@msn.com).

For more information on any event, e-mail bibleadvocate@cog7.org.



Spring Vale Senior Class. This group will graduate from the academy near Owosso, MI, the weekend of May 24-25. Left to right: Norma Perez, Katy, TX; Kristina Prince, Lennon, MI; Anna Salgado, Arlington, TX; Christopher Barrett, Philadelphia, PA; Amanda Miller, Buffalo, MO; Carrie Nienhuis, Devil's Lake, ND.



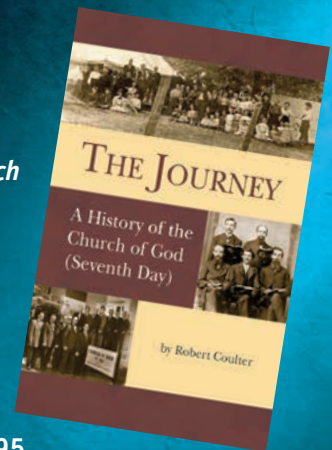
Dover's "Old Main" burns. Early Sunday, February 16, the school building that served 50-plus years as worship hall and dormitory for the Church's Dover, Oklahoma campgrounds burned "to an almost unrecognizable state" and was soon leveled. Cause of the fire is undetermined. The annual campmeeting at the site, often called Camp Cimarron, will take place June 8-14 this year as scheduled, using other meeting and sleeping facilities constructed in recent years on the 20-acre grounds. For more information, e-mail jerad.ullrich@yahoo.com.

CoG7 History Book

The Journey: A History of the Church of God (Seventh Day), by Elder Robert Coulter, is now available for purchase. At 500+ pages and in hard cover, the book's cover price is \$29.95.

For a limited time, it will be sold at \$25 per copy (*postage not included*).

Order by e-mail (bap.orders@cog7.org), online bookstore (cog7.org), or mail: P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.





@ Pariwattip—Dreamstime.com

International Congress

Festive Congress Day in May

On Sabbath, May 17, all Church of God (Seventh Day) congregations around the world will celebrate recent global progress and pray for this work to increase even more.

This special Sabbath increases our ecclesiastical awareness as we are reminded of these fundamental gospel truths:

Unity of all believers. Despite obvious cultural, ethnic, historical, political, and linguistic differences that divide the world, we acknowledge, in a special way this day, that we see ourselves as part of all believers in Christ. We are one and will continue as one. One purpose of the IMC is to promote doctrinal unity among all members. Our unity has a testimonial significance: that the world may believe the gospel (John 17:21).

Pilgrimage of all believers. Regardless of how attractive current materialism in the world may be, we acknowledge that we are pilgrims in this life. With no narcissistic attachment to earthly things, we set our hearts and minds on things above, where Christ and the city to come are (Colossians 3:1-3; Hebrews 13:14). We support basic needs programs around the world: Widows and Orphans, Disaster Relief, Jardín del Edén (inner city kids), SHINE, etc.

Universality of the gospel. Notwithstanding nationalistic and cultural barriers and borders that divide nations, we acknowledge our commitment “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV). Therefore, this day we will pray uniquely for missionaries and financially support our evangelistic work through Change for Your World, Cristo Viene, and Pioneer Missionary Training.

As members and friends of the Church, we feel privileged for the Lord’s calling, by His infinite grace, to be a part of this denomination, still characterized by its faithful adherence to God’s Word. Conse-

quently, this day we are reminded in a special way of these words: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

— Ramón Ruiz Garza, President
International Ministerial Congress



Ghana



India



Chile



Just One Thing

These days my heart is increasingly warmed by this verse: “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Psalm 27:4). David had narrowed his heart’s desires down to just one thing.

When life overwhelms us, it helps to come back to “the one thing” that affects everything. Considering his circumstances, David could have justifiably set his affection on other things, such as deliverance from his enemies (he had plenty of them!), favor upon his rule as Israel’s king, and the well-being of his family. No doubt he cared about these. But David’s highest desire, his one passionate pursuit, was the presence of the Lord – there to gaze upon His beauty and inquire of Him. Don’t read over that too quickly. Let that sink deep into your soul. Pray it back to the Lord:

Create in me a heart that longs for Your presence, a heart that wants to be where You are, in Your dwelling place forever. I don’t want to worship from afar, so draw me near to where You are. Like David, may my heart always cry, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (23:6).

Bless me with fixed and ready eyes – my gaze always set upon You, to lovingly admire and reverently adore Your beauty, and eyes always ready to look in Your direction: “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek’” (27:8).

Grant me an inquiring mind, one that longs to know Your will and ways, the deep doctrines of grace and truth, the depth of Your love, the wideness of Your mercy, and the rightness of Your

justice. Life doesn’t always make sense to me, so “Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths” (25:4).

A longing heart, fixed and ready eyes, and a seeking mind, combined in one holy passion – this is worship, the most important activity in which Christians can engage. If you’re serious about “plain church,” about uncluttering life and ministry, about living simple faith, take note. The true measure of a church is its capacity to honor God with biblical worship, not its many activities. That’s why God seeks worshipers (John 4:23), not workers. Our work matters to God, but work void of a worshiping heart is idolatry. That’s the spiritual application of Luke 10:41, 42: “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’”

A day is coming when all of human history will narrow down to just one thing: the ceaseless worship of the Lamb upon His throne. Meanwhile, the Christian life is preparation for the worship of eternity. According to the apostle Paul, that too can be narrowed down to just one thing: “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13, 14, NIV).

– Whaid Guscott Rose





The whole world clamors for young attention. Bold marketers, in-your-face artists, sizzling graphics, zombie apocalypse, hot bods and hot rods – all compete for youths' insatiable appetites and thirst for extreme life, leaving them thirstier.

Enter Jesus. With bold marketing (“I am *the Way*”), in-your-face quips (called religious leaders hypocrites), mind-blowing graphics (He walked on water, for crying out loud!), a zombie apocalypse (see Matthew 27:52, 53), and a “raised bod” that never dies, He is the ultimate thirst quencher! Drink from Me, He says, and you’ll never thirst again (John 4:14).

National Youth Ministries partners with local churches, youth workers, parents, and teens to offer Jesus. Take Him. Lift Him. Guzzle!

youth.cog7.org