



BOBBY ROSS JR.

The crowd, including the "God Squad," sings at the Tulsa Workshop in Oklahoma.

Church in decline: U.S. culture to blame?

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

TULSA, Okla. — In 21st century America, who might attract Jesus' attention?

Muslims? Drug addicts? Religious "nones."

The recent Tulsa Workshop — the free annual gathering started in 1976 and known for many years as the "International Soul Winning Workshop" — explored outreach to all three groups.

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them," said Shane Coffman, who works with Terry Rush to direct the four-day event, which drew roughly 3,000 attendees in its 40th year. "That's how we ought to be as we serve our community and engage our culture."

Like many denominational groups, Churches of Christ in the United States are losing members.

In a nation where an increasing

number of Americans never go to church, engaging the culture poses a God-sized challenge.

Last year, 43 percent of U.S. adults said they had not attended church

See **CULTURE**, Page 16

RELATED COVERAGE

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Survivors of the Taliban find new life

PERSECUTED BY ISLAMIC extremists, refugees from Pakistan live as aliens in Bangkok, where a Church of Christ embraces them.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

BANGKOK, Thailand

She didn't get a Nobel Peace Prize — just a bullet wound. Sonia was 5 when it happened. She and her family were returning from her aunt's funeral to their home in Karachi, Pakistan.

As they passed their church's compound, they heard gunshots. One ripped through Sonia's arm and out her back.

Her mother had received a box of sweets from a young man who said "this is for your family." Inside was candy, a note demanding 10 *lakh* rupees (about \$9,800) and two bullets. They were the calling cards of the Taliban, the militant Islamists who shot another Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, for speaking out about women's right to education.

In Sonia's case, "the main thing is, we are Christian," her mother said.

Five days after the shooting, her father got a phone call demanding the money. "They said, 'If you can't give us money, then you become a Muslim,'"

See **SURVIVORS**, Page 11



ERIK TRYGGESTAD

Sonia (full name withheld), age 7, watches her father make chai tea for visitors to their one-bedroom apartment in Bangkok. At left, her mother talks about the threats they received from the Taliban and the bullet that almost took Sonia's life.

Developing

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Apps

DR. KENAN CASEY
B.S., Freed-Hardeman University
M.S., Ph.D., Auburn University

Educating students about computer science, a field that continuously changes, is a challenge Dr. Casey enjoys. His iTunes U courses often rank in the Top 10 of the engineering category, and his students' paid internships and job placement rates are high. While he includes the latest languages and tools in the classroom, he also emphasizes another skill. "I focus on helping my students become independent, continual learners in order to succeed in tech careers," he added.

Whether leading his students as they create apps for clients or sharing faith in and out of the classroom, Dr. Casey is one of the many faculty members who makes Freed-Hardeman a university **WHERE FAITH AND REASON CREATE CHRISTIAN LEADERS.**



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APRIL 2015

Mother and child reunion shifts my view of foster care

We agreed to meet at the park of her choice, at the time of her choice. It was a tricky situation. He is her biological son.

I was his legal guardian.

She was young and confident that she knew what was best for him — as most

mothers do. But the truth was, she hardly knew him anymore, just seven months into his foster care.

Inside Story



Laura Akins

She chose to throw his

first birthday party during his naptime at a park filled with strung-out adults roaming around playground equipment too advanced for a 1-year-old. She doted over him all afternoon, lovingly offering him a full can of Coke to wash down his uncut slice of pizza.

It's easy — too easy — to point fingers here.

I believe this mother truly loves her son. She was doing the best she could for him with what she had.

After fostering five children, I've learned that foster care is more than learning to give up our comfortable life for "the least of these" Jesus talks about in Matthew 25.

Foster care can mean walking alongside a child's birth mom — and allowing her to learn how to be a better parent — no matter how messy that looks.

Katie Hayden, a therapist who leads my monthly foster care support group,

See **REUNION**, Page 4



BOBBY ROSS JR.

Minister Arnelious Crenshaw Jr. tells the Northeast church about the news conference where black leaders surrounded fraternity member Levi Pettit as the 20-year-old apologized.

Forgiving a racist chant

AMID NATIONAL OUTRAGE over a video referencing the N-word and lynchings, a Christian senator seeks to bring healing.

BY **BOBBY ROSS JR.** | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

OKLAHOMA CITY

State Sen. Anastasia Pittman chose forgiveness over bitterness.

Pittman — the only African-American female among Oklahoma's 149 legislators — made national headlines when she stood beside an expelled University of Oklahoma fraternity member at a March 25 news conference. Levi Pettit, who is white, apologized for his role in a racist chant caught on video.

But what brought the respected state senator and the disgraced frat boy to the same stage?

"I can't promote Christianity or Christ-like values in policy, and

then when I have an opportunity to forgive, I don't," Pittman, a longtime member of the Northeast Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, told *The Christian Chronicle*.



Pittman

Christ. He became bold in saving and winning souls."

With regard to 20-year-old Pettit,

See **OKLAHOMA**, Page 15

Sexual identity, sin and silence

CHURCHES MUST BECOME safe places for those experiencing same-sex attraction, transgender issues, say experts at youth ministry conference.

BY **ERIK TRYGGESTAD** | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

NASHVILLE, Tenn.

On their smartphones, young Christians read headlines about more and more U.S. states recognizing same-sex marriage.

At school, their friends increasingly embrace gay, bisexual and transgender lifestyles.

In the pews, many of them struggle with same-sex attraction — in silence.

"Seriously, how many times have you heard this talked about at church?"

Steve Holladay asked a fellow Christian during lunch at a conference titled "Tough Topics of Youth Ministry: Sexual Identity, Sexual Abuse and Shame."

Only shrugs and murmurs followed.

Across America, "your kids *are* talking about this," keynoter Mark Yarhouse told more than 150 ministers, parents and Bible students from 18 states during the conference, hosted by Lipscomb University.

"How would a youth struggling with sexual identity view your youth group?" asked Yarhouse, a professor of psychology at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va. Would they see a community of "warmth, depth and hospitality" — yet committed to God's word?

Or would they find a group of Christians "so concerned about civility that you can't tell what they believe?"

Robin Gough, college minister for the South Baton Rouge Church of Christ in Louisiana, said he attended the conference because "this is a hot topic for millennials." It's also why they're leaving church, he said.

Young believers want to know how to interact with gay friends, Gough said, and they perceive that their

See **SEXUAL IDENTITY**, Page 28



Yarhouse

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REUNION: The bigger picture may not include us

FROM PAGE 3

cites research showing that children do better in their birth home than in foster care, assuming there is no threat of harm in the home and conditions of abuse and neglect have been eliminated.

Do I believe her? Wholeheartedly.

But that wasn't my opinion four years ago.

When my husband and I began fostering children, our goal was to eventually adopt and be done. We were going to be a family with a large number of children — all obviously not ours through birth — and people would *just know* we love God. #AdoptionSavesLives.

As we took in child after child, we began to see the bigger picture — and it didn't include us posing with an armful of children wearing perfectly mismatched clothes with the caption, "Love knows *NO* bounds!"

We learned that, in our case, the bigger picture may not include us. It involves family reunification. While some cases do end in adoption, that is no longer my goal when I accept a placement.

I am thankful that God put the desire to foster on my heart. As Romans 2:4 says, "God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change."

I believe he has done this for me — leading me into a radical life-change perspective of birth parents.

And now it is my job as a foster parent to grab each of them by the hand and assist as God leads them into their own life-change.

If not me, then who?

Four years and five foster children later, I agree with what the research and my support group were trying to tell me. If there were no threat of harm, and if the conditions had been properly addressed, my foster son would have done far better with his biological mom than with me.

But sometimes, no matter how hard we try to lead someone into a radical life-change, it just can't be done — such is this case with this birth mom. Although some might see her as a failure, I don't.

"The Message" paraphrases Luke 6:37-38 this way: "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults — unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang."

Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back — given back with bonus and blessing"

This is my hope for all birth moms — to be treated fairly by everyone involved in their foster case, to not be criticized or condemned, but to be lead firmly by the hand into a radical life-change.

CONTACT laura.akins@christianchronicle.org

SPOTLIGHT

A special man

RALEIGH, N.C. — “A lot of our students are sad this morning. We have encouraged them to talk about their feelings and try to do something constructive with them. Erin and Stephani decided to make cards!”

So said a recent note on the Facebook page of the Brooks Avenue Church of Christ’s special-needs ministry. The children were sad because of the sudden death of deacon Barry Woodhouse, 54.

Woodhouse and his wife, Paula — inspired by their daughter Melissa — started a ministry for children with special needs at the Brooks Avenue church. The ministry’s annual carnival serves hundreds of children.

RELATED MEMORIAL, Page 26



BOBBY ROSS JR.

The Brooks Avenue church make children with special needs a priority.

TENNESSEE

CULLEOKA — “Keep Calm and Stay Faithful!” was the theme for the Scribner’s Mill Church of Christ’s recent Ladies Day. Ira Booker from the Bird Street Church of Christ in Shelbyville, Tenn., spoke. “Our congregation is about 100 to 110,” Freda Dean said. “The fact we had 109 in attendance was remarkable.”



PHOTO PROVIDED BY FREDA DEAN

Attendees pose for a picture at the Scribner’s Road church’s Ladies Day.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY NICOLE CARDOSA

Florida school’s ‘Faith Works’ day shows appreciation for firefighters

Students from Mount Dora Bible School in Florida offer expressions of gratitude to firefighters as part of the school’s recent “Faith Works” day. School leaders said community service is a vital part of the mission to “educate for life and eternity.” All the school’s students — from the early childhood center to high school seniors — performed acts of service on the Mount Dora campus and throughout central Florida, organizers said. That service ranged from cleaning rooms at two Ronald McDonald Houses to donating socks and time to the Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida to participating in a walk-a-thon to raise money for service animals.

ARKANSAS

BENTONVILLE — The Recovery for Life ministry at the Bentonville Church of Christ offers recovery-related Bible studies, mentoring and spiritual support. The ministry’s Sunday and Wednesday classes reach between 60 and 70 people, outreach minister John Dyas said.

“We have contact with many others each week,” Dyas said. “Hundreds have been taught the Gospel, and many have given their lives to Christ.”

A related prison correspondence course ministry serves more than 600 each month, Dyas said.

“Church members who never considered themselves Bible teachers have become actively involved in teaching the Gospel and bringing others to Christ,” he said.

CONNECTICUT

MANCHESTER — “Energizing the Small Church” served as the theme for the recent eighth annual New England Church Growth Conference, hosted by the Manchester Church of Christ.

The conference, featuring keynote speaker Howard Norton, drew hundreds of participants from New England as well as New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. A special presentation was made to the family of the late Michael Landon, 57, who served as minister for the Groton Church of Christ in Connecticut and chairman of the New England Church Growth Conference. Landon died Oct. 4, 2014, after a short illness.

MAINE

BRUNSWICK — The Brunswick Church of Christ sends coffee to

U.S. troops deployed overseas.

A local roaster, Wicked Joe, contributes to the project by selling coffee to the church at a reduced rate, minister Charlie Harrison said. Other friends of the church donate money to help the cause.

“There are some ‘cookie ladies’ that make cookies to send, and we also send other snacks,” Harrison said. “It is a much-appreciated effort.”

OREGON

PORTLAND — More than 150 people attended a recent Faith & Facts Conference hosted by the Metro Church of Christ.

Church member Jake Doberenz, a high school senior who started the not-for-profit Creationist Company, co-sponsored the seminar.

Through pain, an angelic spirit smiles

IN ALASKA, a crash survivor's spunk and determination inspires her church family and community

BY DANA JAWORSKI | FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

ANCHOR POINT, Alaska

I got a new dog! Her name is Stubsy! She was rescued from the side of the road after being hit by a car. Isn't she great?"

Angelica Haakenson cradled the three-legged, mangled mutt in her lap. She'd given it a hot pink "faux-hawk," matching her single pigtail.

That was nearly six years ago.

Now age 11, Angelica is herself an amputee after surviving a Christmas Day car accident. But the love and acceptance she showed her dog, paired with unyielding determination, is helping her heal. Her energetic spirit has inspired her church family — and is bringing her rural Alaskan community together.

TRAGEDY, PRAYERS AND HYMNS

In rain boots and a red satin dress, she was a whirling dervish at church potlucks, always on the move. On summer days she worked alongside her mother, Mathany Satterwhite, who runs a tow service.

Her dad, Matt Haakenson, captains a tender boat called the Totem. She spent weeks aboard with the crew, who transport 2.5 million pounds of salmon per season to processing plants, navigating the treacherous waters of the Cook Inlet.

Her great-grandparents were among the first homesteading families in Anchor Point — a tiny community on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula — and were original members of the Church of Christ here. Her grandfather and father grew up in the congregation. Her great aunt, Mary Haakenson Perry, teaches her Bible class.

Perry and her husband were sharing Christmas dinner with one of the church's ministers when they got a heartbreaking phone call. Angelica and her mother were headed home from their own Christmas celebration when they had car trouble. They pulled off the dark, icy road and waited for a jump start from Angelica's grandfather.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Angelica Haakenson tries out her new legs during physical therapy in Seattle.

As Angelica's mother attached the jumper cables, an oncoming car slid into theirs, pinning Angelica between the two cars and throwing her mother into a ditch. The accident broke several of Angelica's vertebrae. Doctors had to amputate both of her legs above the knees.

The Perrys and the minister rushed to the emergency room. Other church members followed, offering prayers in the hallways and singing hymns in the intensive care unit as they pleaded with God to spare Angelica.

WHEELCHAIR DAREDEVIL

Since the accident, she has endured countless surgeries, excruciating wound debridement — removing dead and damaged tissue in hopes of better healing — and

painful physical therapy. Through it all, her family of faith has done their best to turn her agony into joy.

All the while, Angelica has inspired them. As she recovers at Seattle Children's Hospital, doctors are fitting her for prosthetic legs. Meanwhile, she uses a wheelchair to get around. She's already been reprimanded for "daredevil" driving.

Don and Ann Bailey, members of the Anchor Point Church of Christ, visited her and her family recently and took them to lunch.

Returning to the hospital, "as we approached a flight of stairs, I brought Angelica's wheelchair to a stop and prepared to help her up the stairs," Don Bailey said. "Before I could blink, she hopped off her chair, grabbed the handrail and —

hand-over-hand — hoisted herself up not one, but two flights of stairs.

"Now, that sure put things in perspective for me."

PLANE RIDES, SPAGHETTI, ROAD FLARES

Across Alaska, family members and complete strangers have heard about Angelica's recovery and have contributed to help with medical bills and the necessary home renovations that will help Angelica when she returns. Raffles, auctions and spaghetti dinners have raised more than \$50,000.

A Church of Christ in Hawaii sent a sizeable donation, as well as congregations across "the lower 48" states. Friends and family set up a GoFundMe account for her.

"Thousands of people have come forward offering what they can," said Angelica's aunt, Emily Haakenson. "Whether it's a prayer, well wishes, lodging, food, rides, plane tickets, donations or one of the many, many other ways people have offered to help, we cannot express enough how thankful we are."

Concerned Alaskans also want to keep accidents like this from happening. A group that includes the Alaska State Troopers is selling "Angel Kits," which include a flashlight, flares and an information sheet to assist those making roadside stops. Volunteers have assembled 300 kits so far, and their sale will be an ongoing fundraising effort.

The journey ahead will be difficult. Angelica receives regular words of encouragement, just as her spirit and determination encourage others.

"You have so many people thinking of you and praying for you. ... No battle is too large to overcome," one contributor wrote on her GoFundMe page, and then quoted Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

FIND LINKS to contribute to Angelica's recovery at www.christianchronicle.org.



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AUSTRIA

FILZMOOS — About 50 Christian women from across Europe dug into the book of Exodus during a Come Before Winter missionary renewal retreat in this town near Salzburg, Austria.

“Each time I’ve participated in one of these renewals, my spirit has been lifted and renewed by the team that hosts the time together — as well as the other participants,” said Amanda Haskew, who serves on a mission team in Vienna, Austria.

The next Come Before Winter is scheduled for June in the Philippines. See www.comebeforewinter.org.

INDIA

KANDRIKA RAMIDICHERLA — Jugs, jars, pots, buckets and bottles lined the floor of a humble building in this southern Indian village. Their owners wanted to make sure they were among the first to receive clean, safe drinking water.

Church members including Dr. Mani Pagidipalli installed a reverse-osmosis system to purify the village’s water. Some people from the surrounding communities told the Christian physician that they previously had to walk many miles to get drinkable water.

“Please continue to pray for this village as we continue to provide them not just with safe drinking water, but also the ultimate living water,” Pagidipalli said. “This is our goal and purpose.”



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MANI PAGIDIPALLI

Jars and bottles line the floor near a new water filtration system in southern India.

JAPAN

HACHINOHE — Missionary Joel Osborne and a team of six student from Ibaraki Christian University traveled to this city on Japan’s eastern coast for a Tohoku relief trip — a quarterly effort to help in recovery after the devastating earth-



PHOTO PROVIDED

Emergency baptism protocol in Tanzania

Boaz Kasiba prepares to baptize a young man in Chimala, Tanzania, while another church member — Bible in hand — instructs other soon-to-be Christians as they wait their turn for immersion. Eight baptisms took place after a recent Sunday service in this East African nation, said Bill Stinson of Chimala Mission Hospital and Schools.

The young men are students in the school operated by the mission. “They were going to do the baptisms in the church baptistery, but because of our water issues, there was not enough water to fill it,” Stinson said. Thankfully, fellow missionary Chad Wagner keeps a small swimming pool on his patio handy for such occasions. “It was a great day knowing that the angels were rejoicing in heaven.”

WEBSITE: chimalamission.com

quake and tsunami of March 2011.

The team served people in temporary housing, assisted in local ministry efforts and led worship for a church in Hachinohe.

“Through the daily devotionals and meeting with young Christians, the image I had of the Bible, Christians and Christianity was changed,” one of the students said.

MALAWI

LILONGWE — In the U.S., most used, empty pill bottles for prescription medications end up in landfills.

Dick Stephens wants them to go to this southern African nation instead.

“As one of the poorest nations in the world, (Malawi’s) rural hospitals often must dispense medications in a piece of dirty newspaper” — or by just handing it to their patients, said Stephens, whose ministry, the Malawi Project, assists in medical, agricultural and ministry programs.

“When the patient gets home they must find a way to store the medicine,” Stephens said. Often the only

place is still within reach of small children, insects or rodents.”

To learn how to prepare and send old pill bottles for the effort, see malawiproject.org/ or medicine-bottles-for-malawi.

MEXICO

REYNOSA — Children’s ministry at the Balcones Church of Christ, just south of the Texas border, is an increasingly massive undertaking.

The Church of Christ North in Pharr, Texas, which supports mission work and church planting in Reynosa, reports that church attendance at Balcones is in the 200s. At least half of that number is children.

“The ladies of the congregation began meeting every Saturday for study and planning ways to reach the community and train their children,” members of the Pharr congregation wrote in a recent report.

The church recently added new classrooms, a kitchen and a large fellowship hall to its facility, doubling its size.

SPOTLIGHT

Devastation in the South Pacific

PORT VILA, Vanuatu — Missionaries ask for prayers and support as they assess damage and begin the long process of rebuilding in this South Pacific nation.

The nation of 267,000 souls, spread across more than 65 islands northeast of Australia, sustained a direct hit from Cyclone Pam, which claimed lives and destroyed or damaged at least 90 percent of the buildings in Port Vila, the capital.

“For over 24 hours, it sounded like a freight train and had the impact of a tornado,” said Tobey Huff, a long-time missionary in the South Pacific who was building a ministry training school in Vanuatu. “It will take at least six months for most of Vanuatu to be somewhat self-sufficient again. They lost all their gardens, coconut trees ... and many more fruit trees.”

Eric and Shawnda Brandell, members of a mission team in Vanuatu, housed at least 15 church members from a nearby village after the storm destroyed their homes.

The couple is coordinating relief efforts. Healing Hands International, a church-supported relief ministry, is collecting funds for water filters.

Randy English, a missionary based in American Samoa, also is assisting in relief efforts.

FIND LINKS to contribute to relief at www.christianchronicle.org.

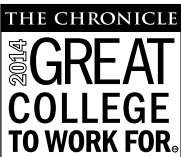


PHOTO PROVIDED BY ERIC AND SHAWNDA BRANDELL

Passing toppled buildings, a man in Vanuatu cycles to a river to wash clothes.



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See acu.edu/academics/provost/positions.html for complete descriptions of these positions. In a letter to the appropriate dean or chair, applicants should address their qualifications for the position. They should include in the application a statement of how faith informs their teaching; a discussion of their spiritual journey; a curriculum vita; transcripts of all undergraduate and graduate work; and names, addresses and phone numbers of five references. Review of applicants will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Nominations of and applications from qualified women and minorities are especially encouraged.

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SURVIVORS: Refugees live under threat of arrest

FROM PAGE 1
said her father. If not, “then I am an enemy of Islam, so then they will shoot me and my family.”
He remembered his daughter’s courage on the way to the hospital. Though she asked, “What have I done that Jesus punished me?” she also said she was thankful the bullet hit her and not the church gatekeeper “because he has small children.”

Her father would not convert — and he would not pay. “Whatever you want to do to me, you can do,” he told the caller.
A year later, as Yousafzai received the Nobel Peace Prize for standing up to the Taliban, Sonia and her family were living as refugees in Thailand, struggling to survive. But here, amidst the urban chaos of Bangkok, they found a prize beyond measure.

“We are staying in Thailand, really, because of the Church of Christ,” her father said. “There, people are very loving. There, people love us like we are their family.”

NEW HOPES — AND NEW FEARS
“You are our family,” said Michelle Ford, sitting on the floor of the one-bedroom apartment Samavia shares with her parents and two sisters — sipping chai tea that her father insisted on preparing for their guests.
Ford and her husband, Gary, serve as missionaries in Bangkok, working with the Somprasong 4 Church of Christ. The congregation has adopted several families among the estimated 6,500 Pakistanis living as urban refugees in the city.

Many grew up Catholic. Others are Ahmadis, a branch of Islam whose followers are persecuted as heretics by militant Muslims.
Serving the refugees, who sold most of their possessions to make the journey to Thailand, means assisting with food, bus fare and medical bills.
It also means visiting them in jail — and convincing authorities to

keep them from being deported.
The Pakistanis register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and receive the status of “persons of concern” — the first step in official recognition as a refugee.
However, as the UNHCR considers their cases, this status “means nothing to the average Thai policeman or immigration officer on

a raid,” said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights.
The Pakistanis are unable to earn income in Thailand legally and live under the constant shadow of arrest for overstaying their visas.
“The core problem in Thailand is that there is no recognition of ‘refugee’ as a legal status under Thai law,” Robertson told *The Christian Chronicle*. “It sounds absurd, given that Thailand has served as a refuge for millions of refugees from Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Vietnam and other countries over the past 50 years, but that’s the reality.”

CULTURE CLASHES AND SEEDS OF FAITH
Despite the persecution they’ve endured, Sonia and her family count their blessings. Due to the shooting and other health issues, they have an asylum hearing scheduled in May.
Other Pakistanis say their hearings won’t happen until 2017.

As they wait, they worship — and seek fellow believers.
In late 2013, one group of refugees passed the building where the Somprasong 4 church worships. They couldn’t read the Thai letters — just the bold English ones underneath, “CHURCH OF CHRIST.”

Soon, the church was flooded with Pakistanis. They behaved differently from the Thai Christians, who value calmness and quiet.

For the Thais, serving the refugees’ needs is a challenge. Pakistanis

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See more stories from our series on Churches of Christ in Southeast Asia at www.christianchronicle.org.



Sermlertaree



PHOTO PROVIDED

Members of the Somprasong 4 Church of Christ, including missionaries Gary Ford, far right, and Michelle Ford, with a heart on her shirt, help Pakistani refugees with food, transportation and Bible studies. Several of the refugees have been baptized.

like a particular kind of rice that’s hard to find in Bangkok. Some resist learning to cook Thai food. Their native dishes are reminders of a homeland they were forced to leave.

Sonia’s family started attending the church just weeks after the Fords arrived from the U.S. The couple does their best to help the Thais and Pakistanis navigate their cultural differences. They also study the Bible with the refugees.
Sonia’s parents have been baptized, and recently one of Samavia’s older sisters asked to be immersed.

Despite the clash of cultures, the experience benefits the congregation, said Sam Sermlertaree, one of the ministers for Somprasong 4.

“We Churches of Christ here have to learn about them,” Sermlertaree said of their Pakistani guests. “We love the truth, but sometimes we lack hospitality.”

Shortly after they started worshiping with the church, Sonia and her sisters learned to say “*sawatdi kha*,” the traditional Thai greeting, with palms pressed together in prayer-like fashion.
That “melted the heart of the Thai Christians,” Michelle Ford said.

“They love these guys.”
The family “has been very bold in teaching others,” Gary Ford said. The refugee Christians “want new visitors to know the Gospel.”
As they live as aliens in a foreign land, “we put a little seed of faith in their heart and pray that God will make it bigger,” Sonia’s mother said. “God loves us, all the time,” she added. “When we are in worry, God helps us.”



ERIK TRYGGESTAD

In a Bangkok apartment building housing Pakistani refugees, managers attempt to urge residents to stay quiet.

LEARN MORE about Bangkok’s urban refugees — and how you can help Christians serve them. Find links at www.christianchronicle.org. The Fords requested that we withhold some names.

‘Here, we feel God’s words working in our life’

JAILED REFUGEE FAMILY shows true beauty in Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand

She may be the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met. And I almost didn’t meet her.

Her name is Angelina. She was crouched in a corner of the one-room apartment she shares with her husband, Rahama, and their three children, pounding out chapati flatbread for us when we arrived.

She chatted with Gary and Michelle Ford, the missionaries who brought me to her home, as Rahama stirred a pot of boiling chickpeas, set atop a hot plate in the tiny kitchen that doubles as their bathroom.

Across their bed — the only real piece of furniture in the room — they placed steaming plates of Pakistani delicacies. They had precious little money to spend on such a meal, but they insisted we eat. It was a feast.

In Pakistan, they were middle class. Rahama was a pipe welder who worked abroad. Angelina was an educator and healthcare worker who took part in campaigns to vaccinate children. Some Muslims protested, claiming she and her Christian friends were trying to sterilize them. Threats followed. They had to flee.



Road Notes

Erik Tryggstad

In Bangkok, they live as illegal aliens. The Thai government doesn’t recognize their refugee status, and they’ve overstayed their visas. They live under constant threat of arrest and deportation.

But they rely on God. I nearly didn’t make the trip here from Singapore, where I was reporting on Churches of Christ. I had booked a cheap ticket on an airline I’d never heard of — AirAsia.

Days before I left home, I got a news alert on my phone. AirAsia Flight 8501 had disappeared en route to Singapore. As I prepared to board the flight to Bangkok, rescue workers were pulling wreckage and bodies from the waters of the Java Sea.

I thought about skipping this part of the trip but went ahead. With every bump of turbulence, I prayed. “This is it! We’re going down!”

We didn’t, of course, and the Fords gave me a world-class tour of their ministry in Bangkok. Shortly after they moved here, I learned, Pakistani refugees began showing up for worship at the Somprasong 4 Church of Christ, where the Fords serve. The couple and Thai Christians help the refugees with clothes, food and transportation.

It takes Angelina and her family three buses and more than an hour to reach the church building, but “we go there and we hear the words of God,” she said. She studied the Bible with Gary Ford and asked to be baptized.

Angelina rose from the watery grave beaming. “I want to serve God,” she declared. “I want to be a servant!”

After the feast in their apartment, she talked about their former life in Pakistan. Their children used to spend 500 rupees (about \$5) on ice cream and sweets — and refused to eat their vegetables. Now there are days when they can’t afford vegetables.

When one of their children was sick, she went to the doctor, not knowing how she would pay. A Thai man in the waiting room noticed her and handed her money.

“You know, we have not worried



ERIK TRYGGSTAD

Angelina makes chapati for visitors to her one-room apartment in Bangkok.

about anything,” she said, “because we know God.” What she used to take for granted — sweets, new clothes for her kids — “all these things are just things. They don’t give us any happiness, any eternal life.”

She paused, and Michelle Ford spoke up. “Their faith is huge, man,” she said, and asked me if I was OK.

I was blinking through tears, trying to see my notepad. The terror I felt a few days ago — at the thought of boarding a plane — seemed ridiculous now.

“You ... you put me to shame,” I said. Then Angelina wept.

In Pakistan, “we were reading the Bible, but we were going by our own wisdom,” she said, choking back sobs.

Now they cling to God’s words — the promises he makes through prophets such as Jeremiah: “*For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*”

“Here, we feel God’s words working in our life,” she said. “God gave us this opportunity.”

Weeks after I met them, Angelina,

Rahama and two of their children were arrested — the victims of a raid by police targeting human traffickers.

Their 2-year-old son was taken to a children’s home. The Fords and their Thai brethren rushed to the refugees’ aid. They got permission to take the other child from the jail cell to Rahama’s parents, also refugees.

The Thai believers fought tirelessly to keep their fellow Christians — and others arrested in the raid — from getting deported. They got help from

a dedicated lawyer and advocates for the refugees, eventually securing their release.

While they were in jail, the couple told Gary Ford that “no other churches or non-governmental organizations helped the jailed refugees as much as our congregation

did,” he said. “When people asked Angelina, ‘Who are these people and what is this church?’ she would proudly tell them, ‘They are my brothers from the Church of Christ.’”

That’s true beauty.



PHOTO PROVIDED

At a Bangkok jail, Rahama says goodbye to one of his daughters.



ERIK TRYGGSTAD

Rahama and Angelina stand with two of their three children in their apartment. The walls are lined with Bible verses including Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?”



During a power outage on the first night of this year's Angkor of Faith, Dr. Evelyn Ignacio and her daughter, Hannah, of the Philippines, worship by flashlight.

In Cambodia, an Angkor for my soul

SIEM REAP, Cambodia

When I was 15 years old, my view of the world turned upside down.

That was the first time I participated in Angkor of Faith, or AoF, a weeklong gathering of Christian youths and missionaries from across Southeast Asia.

It's named after the ancient Angkor Wat temples that draw thousands of tourists — and street kids who beg for their coins — to this city in western Cambodia. The country is a source of, and destination for, human trafficking. Children here are sold for sexual exploitation and forced labor.

The mission of AoF is to reach the street children and witness to them about Jesus Christ through Vacation Bible School-type activities. We feed them lunch and have a "hygiene day" when we wash their hair, remove lice and teach them basic hygiene skills.

That first year, the mission proved to be faith-challenging. I was lifted out of my comfort zone and placed in positions where I really had no clue what I was doing. I had to keep going and working hard — even when I reached the point where I had burned out all of my energy.

After I went home, I felt the fire I had within me start to dwindle. But I returned next year, and it was at my

second AoF that I realized my heart belongs to missions and serving the Lord with the gifts that he gave me.

Recently, I attended my fourth AoF. Every time I go, I feel the nearness of God. I feel his presence while we worship, while I walk with the kids down the streets, while I dance and sing VBS songs with them.

What I like most is serving a community alongside brothers and sisters in Christ from very different cultures. Youths come here from Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia. I

love the fellowship and worship times we all share and the incredible, encouraging atmosphere.

It seems a little bit like heaven because we are all from different tribes, nations and tongues. I also have developed lifelong friendships with the Cambodians and love reconnecting with them.

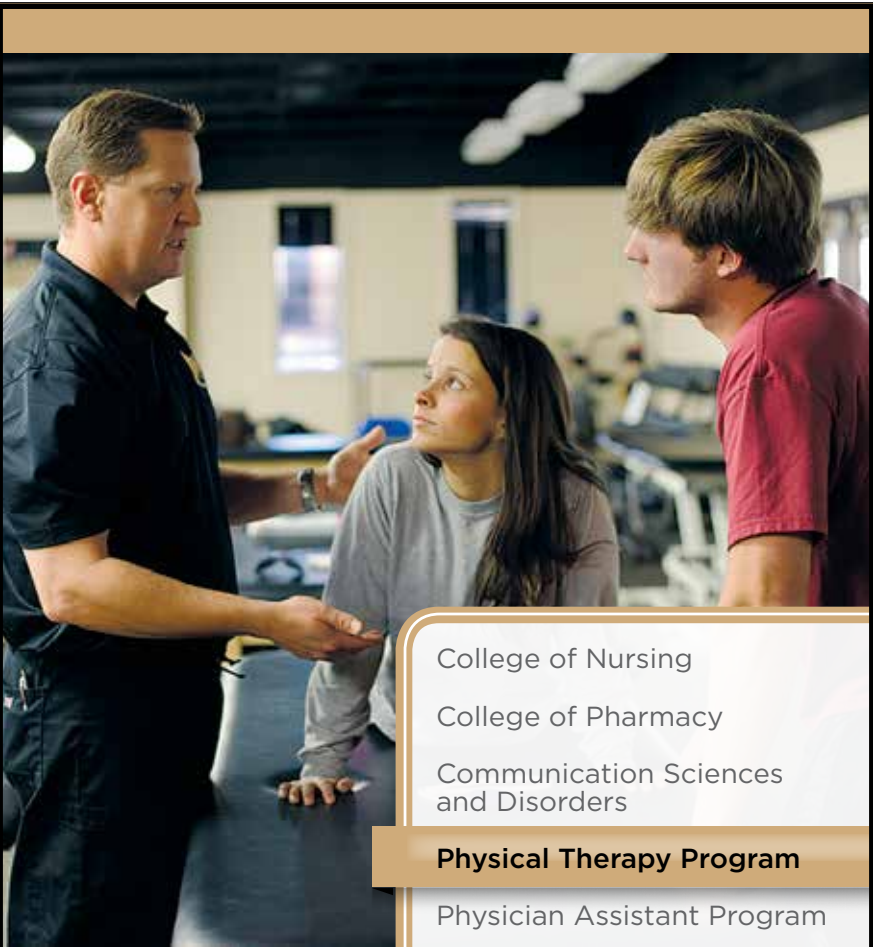
Through this mission, I get to see God doing amazing things in the lives of Cambodian children and the hearts of the participants — including me. God is leading me, teaching me, preparing me for more to come.

MIKAYLA BEZNER grew up on the island of Okinawa, Japan, where her family serves at Okinawa Christian School International. She is a sophomore at Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City and helped coordinate a team from the university to participate in this year's Angkor of Faith.

Voices



Mikayla Bezner



College of Nursing
College of Pharmacy
Communication Sciences and Disorders

Physical Therapy Program

Physician Assistant Program
Premedicine

Improving spiritual and physical wellness

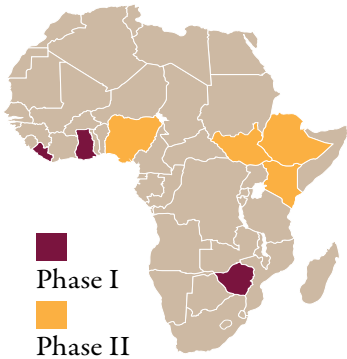
Harding University's physical therapy program strives to create physical therapists equipped with the ability to improve the spiritual and physical wellness of the world. Started in 2011, the three-year program leads to a Doctor of Physical Therapy. The initial graduating class had a 100 percent first-time board exam pass rate. There is a strong focus in medical missions with students traveling to Zambia where they practice what they've learned. Students are taught patient-centered care that ensures optimal physical therapy outcomes delivered through the highest standards of Christian service.



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State Sen. Anastasia Pittman, D-Oklahoma City, poses with children at the Northeast Church of Christ before the church's Sunday morning worship assembly.



Members of the Northeast Church of Christ in Oklahoma City stand as they pray. Northeast is the home congregation of state Sen. Anastasia Pittman.

OKLAHOMA: ‘Although not deserved, I ask for your forgiveness’

FROM PAGE 3
she said, “I think this young man has a bright future.”
The chant by Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity members aboard a chartered bus referenced the N-word and lynchings and sparked national outrage.
After the leaked video went viral, Pittman issued a statement condemning the fraternity’s chant and praising University of Oklahoma President David Boren’s swift response.
The March 9 statement said Boren’s “immediate decision to order all members to vacate the fraternity and call for OU to cut all ties from the national SAE organization ... sends a message that such disgraceful behavior will not be tolerated.”
But later, Pettit contacted Pittman and said he wanted to apologize.
Pettit, who is from Dallas, had been baptized in a Church of Christ, the senator said.
“My job as a leader in this state is to find common ground, to utilize my Christian values and my morals in everything I do,” Pittman said of her response to Pettit. “So when he said, ‘I want to apologize to you face

to face,’ I fostered an environment where he could do that in a safe place, which is the church.”
‘WOUNDS DON’T ALWAYS HEAL’
Pittman arranged a meeting with Pettit, his parents and Northeast minister Arnelious Crenshaw Jr. in the church conference room.
The senator said she wanted Crenshaw there so he could offer words of encouragement and pray.
During the meeting, Pittman said she educated Pettit on African-American history and gave him a publication called “The Long Road to Liberty,” about Oklahoma’s black experience.
“I don’t believe that Levi Pettit understood the volume of the history,” Pittman said. “I believe he knew (the chant) was wrong, but I don’t believe he knew the volume of what lynching means or how wounds don’t always heal.”
Pettit’s apology impressed Pittman as sincere, and she told him, “If you really want to make amends, you can’t just apologize to me.”
That advice resulted in Pettit meeting with a larger group of civil rights leaders and pastors at

the Fairview Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. After Pettit listened to their stories, the group joined him at a news conference.
“Thank you, Senator Pittman, for inviting me here today — for you are a blessing to me and my mom and dad,” Pettit said in his prepared statement. “I can never thank you enough for the way you have embraced me and opened my eyes to things I had not seen before.”
“Let me start by saying that I am sorry ... deeply sorry. I am so sorry for the pain I have caused, and I want all of you to know that directly from me. Although not deserved, I ask for your forgiveness.”
‘GOD OF SECOND CHANCES’
In his March 29 sermon, Crenshaw noted that a newspaper photo of Pettit’s apology had “made some of us infamous.”
“This young man did something very foolish,” the minister told the 200-member congregation. “I wonder if there are any among us who have ever been college freshmen that have not done something foolish.”
Crenshaw’s 70-minute sermon, which drew frequent amens and applause, focused on the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15 and the “rejoicing in heaven over one sinner

who repents.”
“Young people who mess up need to know that God is a God of second chances,” said Crenshaw, noting that Pettit plans to attend the congregation’s previously scheduled April 19 service focused on healing.
Later in the sermon, the preacher proclaimed, “I cannot rid the world of hate and prejudice if I’m full of hate and prejudice.”
Outside of the Northeast church — a predominantly black congregation known for bringing affordable housing to Oklahoma City’s poorest quadrant — the decision to forgive Pettit drew mixed reactions.
A *Dallas Morning News* editorial praised Pittman for seeing an “opportunity not only to heal him but to help him heal us.”
On the other hand, a flood of nasty comments on social media called the senator an “Uncle Tom” and other derogatory names.
Brushing aside the criticism, Pittman said she thanks God for Pettit’s courage and willingness to admit a mistake.
“If the blood of Jesus will cover all sins, if you believe the Bible is right, then there is no big sin and little sin,” she said. “Forgiveness is for all.”

NUMBERS
BY THE YEARS

2015

Churches: 12,300
Members: 1,183,613
Adherents: 1,519,695

2012

Churches: 12,447
Members: 1,209,136
Adherents: 1,554,231

2006

Churches: 12,963
Members: 1,265,844
Adherents: 1,639,495

2003

Churches: 13,155
Members: 1,276,621
Adherents: 1,656,717

2000

Churches: 13,032
Members: 1,264,152
Adherents: 1,645,645

1990

Churches: 13,174
Members: 1,284,056
Adherents: 1,684,872

1980

Churches: 12,762
Members: 1,240,820
Adherents: 1,601,661

1948

Churches: 10,089
Members: 682,172
Adherents: 886,824

1926

Churches: 6,226
Members: 433,714
Adherents: 563,828

1916

Churches: 5,598
Members: 319,211
Adherents: 414,974

1906

Churches: 2,649
Members: 159,658
Adherents: 207,555

SOURCE: "Churches of Christ in the United States" published by 21st Century Christian.

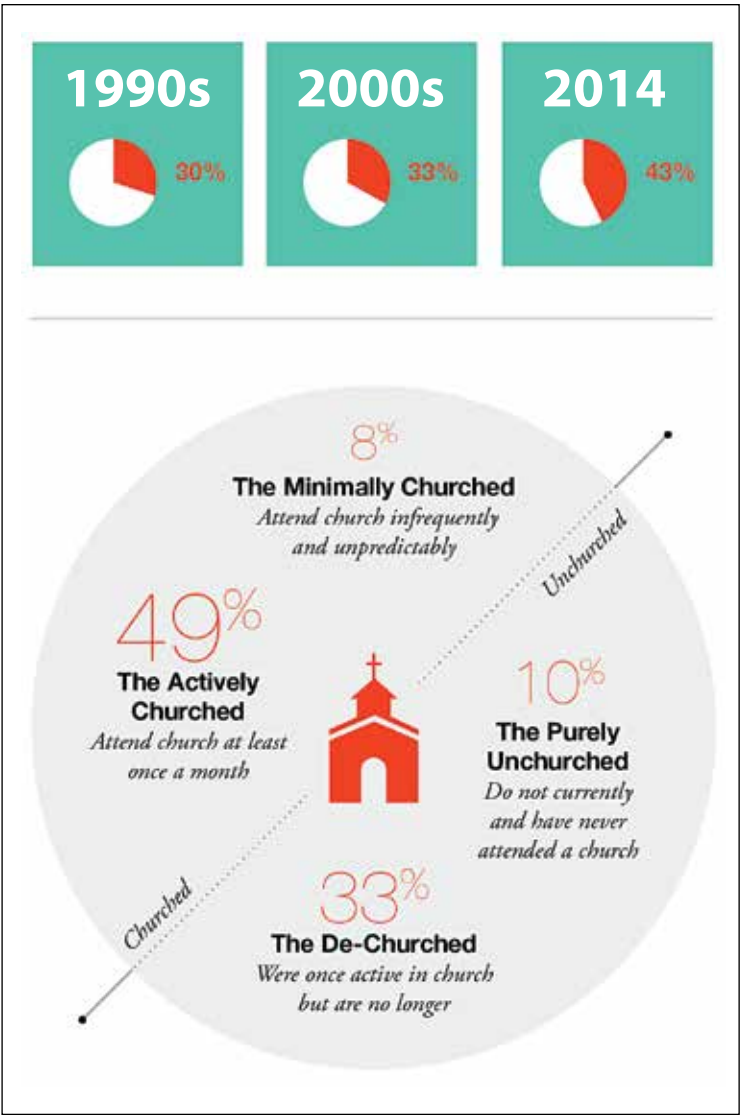
CULTURE: Changing society poses a challenge for Christians

FROM PAGE 1
in at least six months, reported the Barna Group, which studies religious trends. "There is a discernible rise of churchless Americans," Barna President David Kinnaman told *The Christian Chronicle*. "This consists of three trends converging: an increasing percentage of atheists, a growing number of nominal Christians disengaging completely from churches and more pressure on well-intentioned churchgoing families who don't attend as many weekends per year as they would have 10 years ago."

RISE OF THE 'NONES'
In Churches of Christ, the total number of men, women and children in the pews has dropped to 1,519,695, according to the 2015 edition of a national directory published by Nashville, Tenn.-based 21st Century Christian. That number of adherents represents a decline of 165,177 souls — or 9.8 percent — in the last quarter-century. In the same period, the U.S. population rose to an estimated 320 million — up 28 percent from 250 million in 1990. "We will face the same challenges as others in a post-denominational world because we look, smell and act like a denomination, even though we lack the kind of denominational structures that characterize others," said John Mark Hicks, a Restoration Movement scholar at Lipscomb University in Nashville. "Nevertheless, our congregational polity offers some opportunity for transcending this label and becoming a place where people can find Jesus without denominational baggage or hindrance."



Hicks



The rise of churchlessness in America: The graphic shows data from the 2014 book "Churchless," edited by George Barna and David Kinnaman.

Struggling rural areas — a traditional stronghold of Churches of Christ — and falling birth rates probably account for some of the numerical drop, said Ed Stetzer, president of evangelical LifeWay Research. The changing culture is a factor, too, Stetzer said. "Growing secularization, the decline of nominal Christian identification and a growing sense that tolerance means not evangelizing would all have a big impact," he said. Another factor that partly skews the data: The 1990 count

included thousands of members of the International Churches of Christ — once known as the Boston Movement. But starting with the 1994 directory, the ICOC congregations chose to identify as a separate body. Inevitably, declining overall membership sparks debate over doctrinal differences, worship practices and other internal issues. However, Carl Royster, data



Nored

compiler for the "Churches of Christ in the United States" directory, points to a larger societal trend. One-fifth of Americans — and one-third of adults under age 30 — have no religious affiliation, according to a 2012 Pew Research Center study. Researchers dub that group the "nones."

CULTURE REJECTS 'WHO WE ARE'
As Harold Shank sees it, three realities strike at the heart of Christianity: creation, sin and redemption. But modern-day America emphasizes evolution over creation, scoffs at the notion of sin and sees no need for redemption, said Shank, president of Ohio Valley University in Vienna, W.Va. "Numerous biblical books are written to people who existed in a culture that despised what they believed in," he said. "And we have yet to make that transition of, 'How do we minister to a culture that is so different and rejects who we are?'" Here in Tulsa, the workshop's breakout-session speakers included James Nored. Nored preaches for the Fairfax Church of Christ in Virginia. He highlighted that Washington, D.C.-area congregation's outreach to Muslims — four of whom have been baptized in the last year. "It is God who touches hearts, brings people into our path and causes evangelistic growth," Nored told the *Chronicle*. "There is a lot of doom and gloom out there about the decline of Christianity in the U.S.," he added. "While this is certainly happening, there are still many opportunities all around us."

AUDIO AND VIDEO of the Tulsa Workshop — including Ebola survivor Dr. Kent Brantly's keynote — can be purchased at www.workshopmultimedia.com. The sales help support the workshop.

‘The church is people, and people matter’

CARL ROYSTER discusses the challenges of compiling an accurate count of ‘Churches of Christ in the United States’

BY LYNN McMILLON AND ERIK TRYGGESTAD
THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Almost every church has a “deacon of the count” — someone who pokes his head into Bible classes and tallies the number of attendees.

Carl Royster does that for the whole country. As part of Nashville, Tenn.-based 21st Century Christian, he serves as system administrator and data compiler for “Churches of Christ in the United States,” a directory produced every three years by the publishing company.

He has deep roots in the fellowship. Ancestors on his father’s side launched the Knob Creek Church of Christ in Graves County, Ky., in 1834 — believed to be the oldest extant congregation in the Jackson Purchase area. His father and grandfather were preachers, serving Churches of Christ in Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Royster found a different way to serve the church, graduating from Lipscomb University in Nashville with a degree in computer information systems in 1989 — the same year he started working with 21st Century Christian. He worked alongside Lipscomb professor Mac Lynn as Lynn compiled the 1997 edition of the directory. Lynn turned the work over to 21st Century Christian after the 2003 edition. The newly released 2015 edition is Royster’s fourth as data compiler.

“To what degree should statistics matter in the church?” Royster asks in the book’s introduction. “The church is people, and people matter.”

Royster is a member of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies and has previously served on its board of directors. The association produces the Religious Congregations and Membership Study, or RCMS, every 10 years. It’s the only county-level religious census produced since the U.S. Census Bureau stopped collecting such data about 1940. The data Royster compiles for “Churches of Christ in the United States” is recorded in the RCMS.

Royster’s wife Carrie, is project coordinator for 21st Century Christian. They worship with the Pegram Church of Christ in Tennessee, where Carl Royster assists in youth ministry. They have two daughters, ages 22 and 19.

“First and foremost, I am but a sinner,” he says when describing himself. “However, I am also loved by God, and I am saved by his grace through the blood of his Son. All praise and glory go to him.”



PHOTO PROVIDED

Carl and Carrie Royster

How are you able to collect so much information for thousands of congregations?

The key to it all is the kind cooperation received from thousands of Christian brothers and sisters all over the country. Without their thoughtful consideration and the time that they volunteer, it would be impossible to conduct such a project.

Of course, Dr. Mac Lynn laid the groundwork — basically starting from scratch in the early 1970s. He traveled extensively, visited congregations, spoke with church members, obtained directories, made numerous telephone calls and wrote many letters. It is one of the reasons that I say that “Churches of Christ in the United States” will forever be his work.

Mailing out data update forms to congregations continues to provide much of the information. The Internet provides extensive amounts of valuable resources and communication avenues. Periodicals occasionally provide information, while other times it may come from a church ordering materials from 21st Century Christian’s bookstore. Basically, I am happy to get it any way I can.

What criteria do you use to identify what is a “Church of Christ?”

In any historical, statistical project such as this one it is vitally important that one adhere as much as possible to the project’s defined scope.

Dr. Lynn’s purpose, defined in the early 1970s, was for a current “united” national directory and statistical record of the a cappella Churches of Christ — as none existed at the time.

That purpose remains the same today. The scope that defines the collected data, as stated in the directory, is simply this: “A continuing effort to provide a compilation of current information relative to those congregations aligned with the ‘Restoration Movement’ or ‘Stone-Campbell Movement,’ which have been historically known for their a cappella worship.”

Despite what some think and others even request, the presence or exclusion of a congregation has never been based on any doctrinal views.

How do you verify the accuracy of church size information?

Sometimes that is easy. Sometimes it is not. After processing tens of thousands of updates for many years, one develops a kind of “feel” for what is going on. Some churches are blessed with members who are very thorough and frequent with their information. Some are more apt to give round, yet fairly accurate figures, while others simply refuse to provide any numerical statistics for one reason or another.

Reported figures are not simply taken at face value. If something does not “feel right,” then some investigation is done to validate (or disprove) what was reported.

For the most part, however, I am relying significantly upon what someone from a congregation reports.

What insights into Churches of Christ have you gained from this project?

Definitely too many to discuss here, but one thing I think that we all need to realize is that declining attendance and membership is a problem much greater than so many of the issues that have been debated for so long.

The thing that concerns me the most is the ever-increasing number of people who believe in God, identify themselves as Christians, but choose to have no affiliation to any church of any kind.

The younger generations increasingly are buying in to the worldly idea of “it’s just you and Jesus,” “you don’t need a church family,” “have it your way,” “whatever works for you,” “there’s an app for that!”

What other information have you considered including?

My goal, always, is to make the next edition better than the one before. I receive several requests and suggestions from readers.

As churches incorporate new technology, communication methods or particular characteristics (such as the multi-campus churches introduced in the 2015 edition), I make note of what I observe.

These are all evaluated and discussed with other staff here at 21st Century Christian and/or Dr. Lynn.

Anything deemed to be in keeping with the spirit of the project — and a useful improvement to the content

— is selected, including statistical data, communication tools, congregationally described characteristics or historical information.

HOW DO YOU ESTIMATE church size? Are there churches that decline to participate? See Carl Royster’s answers to these questions at www.christianchronicle.org.

‘Declining attendance and membership is a problem much greater than so many of the issues that have been debated for so long.’

Carl Royster

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Youth Associate Minister

The Southside Church of Christ in Lawrence, Kan., is seeking a Youth Associate Minister to lead and develop the youth group by nurturing their spiritual growth through Bible study, service and missions.

The Youth Associate Minister will also work with the Pulpit Minister and Elders.

Send applications to:
southsidecofc@gmail.com

The **Sunnyside Road Church of Christ**, located in Decatur, Ill., is seeking a **Full-Time Pulpit Minister**.

Our Sunday morning attendance averages 75-90. We have three elders and three deacons. We are debt free with excellent facilities for learning and fellowship.

Please visit our website to learn more.
www.sunnysideroadchurch.com

Anyone interested in applying for the position, please submit a resume and two sermons on CD to:

821 North Sunnyside Road
Decatur, IL 62522

USA Missionary Wanted

Orchard Hills Church of Christ
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We desire someone who is:

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Contact Ray Nasser for more info:
(217) 442-3561 or ray4mail@comcast.net

University Minister

Sunset Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas, is seeking a full-time university minister to coordinate and head a thriving university ministry that serves Texas Tech University, Lubbock Christian University, South Plains College, and other university-age students.

For more info go to www.sunset.cc or contact Jeremy Smith at jeremy@sunset.cc

Full-Time Preacher Opportunity

The **church of Christ in Claude, Texas**, is seeking a full-time preacher. We are a small congregation near Amarillo. Please request an application packet from:

claudecoc@gmail.com
or
(806) 282-7758

Preacher Search

The **Oregon Trail church of Christ** in Pendleton, Ore., is looking for a preacher for our small congregation of 30 members. This is a great opportunity for those first starting out and those that are retired. We offer a partial compensation package, but additional income within your household is recommended.

Please contact:
Tom: (541) 969-1211
Dave: (541) 966-6776

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jansessions@d2project.com

DIG DEEPER · GROW STRONGER

Youth Minister Position

Airport Freeway Church of Christ located in Euless, Texas, is seeking a full-time Youth Minister. The Youth Minister will develop and implement a vision and strategy for evangelism and spiritual development among 6th-12th grade teens in our church family and our community.

If interested, send your resume to:
airportfreewaycoc@gmail.com

For more information contact Wes Sharbine at 817-832-1583

www.airportfreewaychurchofchrist.org

PULPIT MINISTER POSITION

Holmes Road Church of Christ in Lansing, Mich., is a multi-cultural church that seeks a Bible-based pulpit minister to anchor and help facilitate a ministry team in encouraging spiritual and numerical growth. Holmes Road believes the church exists to reach the lost and save souls. We have established elders and deacons, a youth ministry, and an active women's ministry.

Send cover letter, resume, two personal references, three professional references, and a recording of two lessons to:

Search Committee
321 E Holmes Rd
Lansing, MI 48910

The 38-year-old **AMEN Ministry** connects Christians in the United States Military with local churches of Christ both overseas and in the U.S.

Please send name, email, and other contact info to:

AMEN Ministry
amen@amenministry.info
135 Larchmont Drive
Hendersonville, NC 28791
828-891-4480

ALABAMA

Churches of Christ: **854**
Adherents: **110,215**

"God is working mightily through our outreach-focused membership, which is dedicated to serving our community with a missionary's spirit. Our congregation has grown in number, faith, zeal and holistic reach over its short existence due to God's empowering of his evangelistic-minded people."



— **Patrick Stone**, *Westview Church of Christ in Huntsville, Ala.*

God at work in U.S.

BY **BOBBY ROSS JR.** | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

What can God do through 1.5 million souls devoted to him? As the overall membership of Churches of Christ in the United States declines, it's easy to focus on the negative.

Yet Ephesians 3:20 points to the power of God at work within us. Among the 1,519,695 men, women and children who make up our fellowship nationwide, God

can do – and is doing – "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

To highlight that fact, The Christian Chronicle asked Christians in all 50 states and the nation's capital to answer this question:

"How is God working in your congregation?"

JOIN THE CONVERSATION: To share your own story of God working, email bobby.ross@christianchronicle.org. Some quotes have been edited for brevity or clarity.

ALASKA

Churches of Christ: **28**
Adherents: **2,461**

"I see God working by the way he is including me in a family that gives me courage to keep going ... to face the loneliness that comes from my husband's passing."



— **Alice Walsh**, *Anchor Point Church of Christ in Alaska*
(She is a native Alaskan who was baptized in 2013.)

ARIZONA

Churches of Christ: **131**
Adherents: **12,943**

"I see God moving in our campus ministry. Recently, our group has really found its footing, and we are seeing a group of young people who are supporting one another, loving one another and building each other up. More importantly, they are reaching out to the students around them. It is such a blessing."



— **Jessica Knapp**, *Mountain Avenue Church of Christ in Tucson, Ariz.*

ARKANSAS

Churches of Christ: **706**
Adherents: **83,377**

"God is working at Levy through our ministries. He continues to raise up servants committed to serving him, our church and our community as their gifts lead them. This creates an atmosphere of growth and creativity which is proving to be contagious."



— **Danny Dodd**, *Levy Church of Christ in North Little Rock, Ark.*

CALIFORNIA

Churches of Christ: **609**
Adherents: **68,955**

"We believe God is working through the Culver Palms Church of Christ in Los Angeles through our ministry to the homeless. Serving God by serving others where they are opens the door for people who wouldn't come to church otherwise."



— **Keith Brisco**, *Culver Palms Church of Christ in Los Angeles*

COLORADO

Churches of Christ: **141**
Adherents: **14,652**

"God's spirit is alive and well in Colorado. His hand is mighty. We are seeing numerical growth. Moreover, we are experiencing individual spiritual growth. We are taking more time to celebrate being his children and appreciating our fellowship. This is prompting us to reach out into our communities and serve their basic needs."



— **John Rakestraw**, *Northwest Church of Christ in Westminster, Colo.*

CONNECTICUT

Churches of Christ: **22**
Adherents: **2,574**

"God is working in our congregation through our new Sunday evening small group ministry, where we are building stronger relationships with each other. God is also working in our congregation through our Sunday morning small group Bible studies, where adult classes are studying how each member can reach out."



— **Mary Brown**, *Manchester Church of Christ in Connecticut*

DELAWARE

Churches of Christ: **11**
Adherents: **1,151**

"God has injected new life into our body through our 2-year-old food pantry, serving hundreds of precious people weekly that we might not otherwise encounter and connecting an eclectic group of members who weren't previously well acquainted. The result: hope for our clients, hope for us."



— **Mariann Snyder**, *Cedars Church of Christ in Wilmington, Del.*

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Churches of Christ: **4**
Adherents: **620**

"God is always at work in all his creation and, of course, in his church. The blessing he has sent us in the recent past is new members with talents we very much need. He has also blessed us with a minister, Ed Wilson, who has served us faithfully for 24 years."



— **Donnis Crump**, *16th and Decatur Church of Christ in Washington, D.C.*

FLORIDA

Churches of Christ: **498**
Adherents: **67,991**

"God is opening doors in some amazing ways right now. For one, a director with the Habitat for Humanity has recently started worshiping with us. He has asked us to partner with them by serving a neighborhood. Also, we have begun a partnership with the Homeless Family Center in town. God is good!"



— **Tracy Moore**, *Vero Beach Church of Christ in Florida*

GEORGIA

Churches of Christ: **412**
Adherents: **53,135**

"Corners Church of Christ is seeing God work daily while hosting college students from Harding, Troy and Ole Miss. Responding to the needs of others can be seen daily as we try to meet people where they are. Also, the North Atlanta Church of Christ has adopted the work of the Corners Outreach trailer park ministry."



— **Terry Davis**, *Corners Church of Christ in Peachtree Corners, Ga.*

HAWAII

Churches of Christ: **14**
Adherents: **945**

"God is working in our congregation by putting the right people in the right places. From our elders to our youth, each has a place and a purpose in our congregation. God works through each of us to be better servants for him."



— **Mindy Bailey**, *Pearl Harbor Church of Christ in Hawaii*

From housing homeless to mending brokenhearted, God’s at work

IDAHO

Churches of Christ: 41

Adherents: 3,108

“God is working in our congregation by bringing in younger people. We have many people who have been attending for years, but we also have many younger people who are involved in all aspects of Christian growth. It seems to me that God is caring for us all and is showing us how to deal with people of all ages.”

— Barbara Thorson, Caldwell Church of Christ in Idaho



MAINE

Churches of Christ: 22

Adherents: 937

“I see God working in our congregation through simple things such as work being done on our building inside and out. We have people who excel in the grace of giving. God has blessed them, and others have followed their leading. God is also at work in our men who meet for leadership studies.”

— Charlie Harrison, Brunswick Church of Christ in Maine



MONTANA

Churches of Christ: 40

Adherents: 2,687

“It’s powerful to see God use his message and his people to take individuals from the world, bring them into his Kingdom and transform them to look more and more like him every day. I’ve seen him do this year after year through the church in Great Falls.”

— Christopher Crooks, Great Falls Church of Christ in Montana



ILLINOIS

Churches of Christ: 266

Adherents: 24,994

“God is working and alive as we continue to feel his amor and cuidado (love and care). Our focus on teaching love and unity continues to let us see growth and blessings from him. As the families leave services, everyone is talking about the same topic since all of them received the same message at their level during classes.”

— Ricardo Barrera, Elgin Iglesia de Cristo (Church of Christ) in Illinois



MARYLAND

Churches of Christ: 48

Adherents: 7,211

“God is working through our congregation in our Life Groups. Life Groups are what have really held our congregation together over the past year as we have gone through difficult losses. They provide opportunities to form closer bonds with fellow Christians.”

— Elizabeth Ray, Laurel Church of Christ in Maryland



NEBRASKA

Churches of Christ: 49

Adherents: 4,064

“How I see God working is that we have developed more family togetherness. We have a stronger bond through him. Because of that, we are able to help others in need. They know that they can talk to us because they feel comfortable. We’re growing and reaching more people.”

— Ana Osborne, Lifewalk Church of Christ in York, Neb.



INDIANA

Churches of Christ: 315

Adherents: 32,702

“God is working through our involvement with a congregation in Baja, Mexico. We support the preacher and have made annual mission trips to Vicente Guerrero, conducting medical clinics, Vacation Bible Schools and various construction projects. Adults and teens return spiritually recharged. Praise God!”

— Ron Huffman, Newburgh Church of Christ in Indiana



MASSACHUSETTS

Churches of Christ: 28

Adherents: 2,250

“God is working through our brothers and sisters’ lives as our worship services and Bible class attendance have vastly improved. The Christians here are involved in numerous committees and ministries that enhance our spiritual growth. There is a spirit of family connectedness as soon as you enter the door.”

— Janette Briceno, Milton Church of Christ in Massachusetts



NEVADA

Churches of Christ: 29

Adherents: 2,925

“God is working on the lives of Christians in Las Vegas. I see it most in the lives of our youth. Our teen group is growing up to be amazing Christians. We have wonderful leadership and a loving congregation that supports this program, and it is evident in the kids’ lives. They always rise to the occasion.”

— Laurie Thomas, Bright Angel Church of Christ in Las Vegas



IOWA

Churches of Christ: 62

Adherents: 3,706

“God is working through our young men who started two unique classes. One is a Monday evening men’s class that enjoys the attendance of non-member families and friends from work. A second Wednesday night class was started to ‘learn by leading,’ a discussion-based class on faith and purpose.”

— Tom Collier, Grandview Church of Christ in Des Moines, Iowa



MICHIGAN

Churches of Christ: 183

Adherents: 25,700

“We have been praying and growing. We praise God for growth. We have a great food ministry at Metro and are feeding a lot of people. God is in control, and his church will prosper as he wills. We have not grown a lot, but we are trending upward.”

— Doug Edwards, Metro Church of Christ in Sterling Heights, Mich.



NEW HAMPSHIRE

Churches of Christ: 13

Adherents: 845

“I see God planting seeds through our congregation’s pantry outreach. David Skerry, our deacon in charge of benevolence, gives to each family that comes to our pantry not just a box of food but also a warm reception, a sincere invitation to come worship or study with us and spiritual brochures to read.”

— Park Linscomb, Manchester Church of Christ in New Hampshire



KANSAS

Churches of Christ: 159

Adherents: 16,228

“God works through Northside in many ways. Over 1,200 women will attend our Women Walking with God conference in April. In June, our Wichita Workcamp will send out 250-plus teens to paint houses. And for 28 years, we’ve aired a TV program called ‘Know Your Bible.’”

— Mark Yeakley, Northside Church of Christ in Wichita, Kan.



MINNESOTA

Churches of Christ: 39

Adherents: 2,437

“God is working through the Hands of Compassion ministry of this small, loving church family. People come from all over the world to get answers for their health challenges at Mayo Clinic. Our Houses of Compassion host up to 30 visitors free of charge. We encourage our visitors spiritually and help connect them.”

— Patti Sikes, Rochester Church of Christ in Minnesota



NEW JERSEY

Churches of Christ: 37

Adherents: 3,926

“God is working through our partnership with Family Promise to serve homeless families. Five times a year for a week at a time, we turn our Bible classrooms into bedrooms and our church building into a homeless shelter. We are seeing homeless families served and lives rebuilt through the love of Christ.”

— Rachel Dowling, Monmouth Church of Christ in New Jersey



NEW MEXICO

Churches of Christ: 144

Adherents: 14,745

“God is working through the Gallup church to provide loving and stable homes and Christian-based schooling to children from the Navajo and Zuni nations, a work we have done for 60 years. We seek to share Jesus in a community faced with challenges of poverty, substance abuse and family dysfunction.”

— Jeff Foster, Gallup Church of Christ in New Mexico



NEW YORK

Churches of Christ: 100

Adherents: 9,860

“God is working through our growth group members to reach the unchurched and provide an accessible pathway from their first visit right into assimilation with existing Christians. We have been blessed to experience a number of baptisms. May God always be glorified through our work.”

— Cynthia Harris, Lawson Road Church of Christ in Rochester, N.Y.



NORTH CAROLINA

Churches of Christ: 198

Adherents: 24,500

“I see God working in our congregation in the wonderful quotidian details of average lives, not necessarily in people or programs worthy of headlines but behind the scenes in hopeful prayers answered and promises kept faithfully for ‘the least of these.’”

— Lisa De Maio Brewer, Wilkesboro Church of Christ in North Carolina



NORTH DAKOTA

Churches of Christ: 7

Adherents: 578

“God is working through our members to help reach out to troubled teens. Our preacher, Walter Clark, and his son Cory work as chaplains at the local youth correction center. Our membership is donating a Bible to each teen, and at Christmas, we pass out baskets with homemade goodies to each cottage.”

— Shelby Bohl, Bismarck Church of Christ in North Dakota



LOUISIANA

Churches of Christ: 220

Adherents: 23,335

“God is working through the lives of our dynamic, active young adults. They give communion meditations, lead worship, teach classes and tutor after school. They’re the leadership of our Celebrate Recovery. They are salt and light in the community, too, mentoring and feeding the homeless with dignity.”

— Jenny Garrison, Carrollton Avenue Church of Christ in New Orleans



MISSISSIPPI

Churches of Christ: 363

Adherents: 41,126

“God is working through our grief recovery ministry. Linda Woods lost her daughter Jenny and is the reason we started this ministry. Margie Butcher’s husband, Russ, a beloved elder, died, leaving her struggling. Both now find new focus and purpose helping others.”

— Bill Denton, Rodenberg Church of Christ in Biloxi, Miss.



MISSOURI

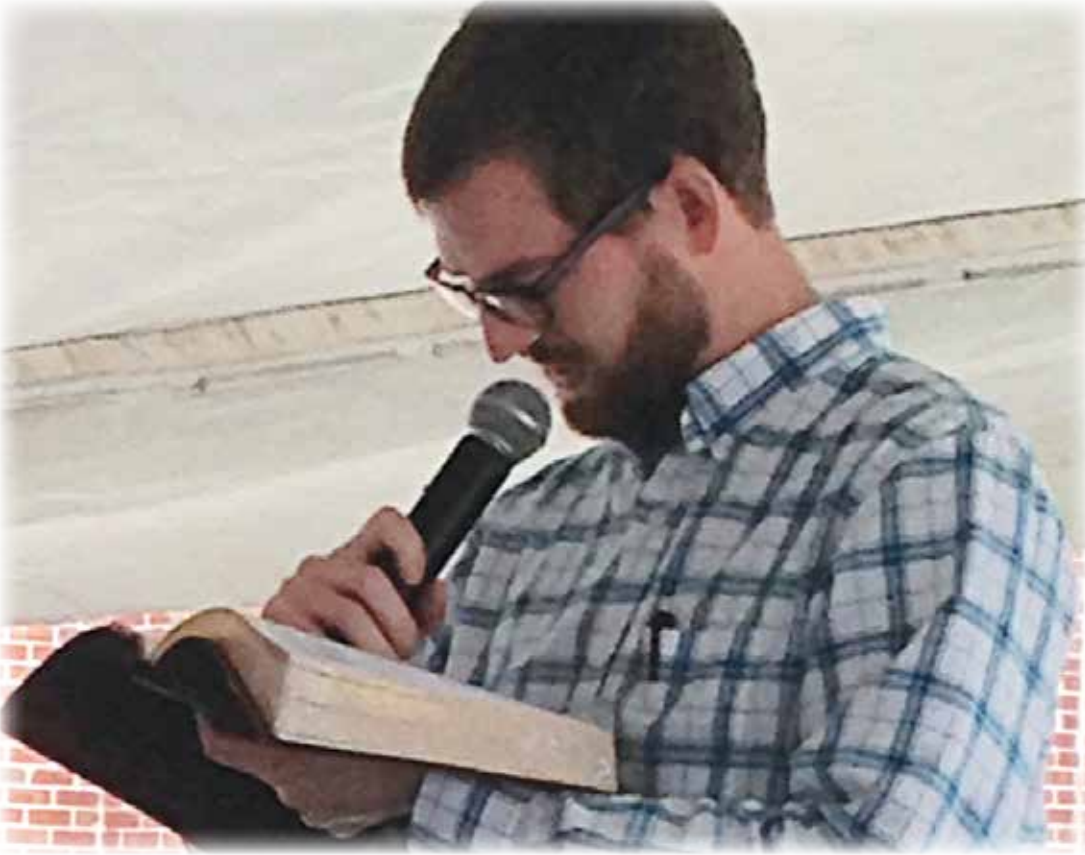
Churches of Christ: 427

Adherents: 40,802

“God is working through many of our members as we strive to live a missional life. Along with yearly short-term mission trips to Honduras and local areas, some members are also active in focused missions to Africa and Cambodia.”

— Whitney deSambourg, Lafayette Church of Christ in Ballwin, Mo.





BOBBY ROSS JR.

“I see the hand of God at work, and I have to give him the credit.”

— Dr. Kent Brantly, Ebola survivor and member of the Southside Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas

God at work: opening hearts, changing lives

OKLAHOMA

Churches of Christ: **566**
Adherents: **74,208**

"God has been working through our leaders' encouragement to step outside the comfort of our own church walls — to reach out into the community, to seek the hurt and the lost and the marginalized, to actively build relationships with those who may otherwise not walk through our church doors."
— **Anisa Jackson**, *Park Plaza Church of Christ in Tulsa, Okla.*



OREGON

Churches of Christ: **108**
Adherents: **10,234**

"We're focused on helping the poor and those recovering from addictions. We see Christ in the forward progress folks make as they rebuild their lives. God works even through the ebb and flow of our growth pains, and we've deepened as a community and learned to love God and each other better over the years."
— **Nathan Rix**, *Agape Church of Christ in Portland, Ore.*



PENNSYLVANIA

Churches of Christ: **137**
Adherents: **10,139**

"God is always at work, and we are trying to follow him. He works in our pantry as we help many families. He works through our finances as we support many ministries. He is at work throughout collective worship as we seek to praise him and listen to his voice. We are trying to see more of what God is doing and work in his vineyard."
— **Jeffrey Dillinger**, *Whitehall Church of Christ in Pittsburgh*



RHODE ISLAND

Churches of Christ: **7**
Adherents: **629**

"God is helping us build a community that engages with our neighbors on the west side of Providence with people who do more than just go to church on Sunday and leave but who also take their faith to other people around them."
— **Anna Borchers**, *The Feast Church of Christ in Providence, R.I.*



SOUTH CAROLINA

Churches of Christ: **134**
Adherents: **14,715**

"God is working through our church family as we each share a chapter of our story. In our worship center, there are booklets for each member with a quick word about what is going on in our lives. Anyone can pick up a story, read about a person's blessings and struggles and sign their name to let that person know they've been prayed over."
— **Charlie Sells**, *Holland Park Church of Christ in Simpsonville, S.C.*



SOUTH DAKOTA

Churches of Christ: **24**
Adherents: **1,064**

"God is working in our congregation through our amazing and aspiring youth groups. Our young people are spiritually motivated and committed to serving the Lord. I know God is at work in building strong hearts and minds for the future Lord's church in Sioux Falls, S.D."
— **Cheryl Ingalls**, *41st Street Church of Christ in Sioux Falls, S.D.*



TENNESSEE

Churches of Christ: **1,422**
Adherents: **207,286**

"God is working in Memphis in many ways. His hand guides us in adopting and working with a diverse elementary school, in our Spanish-speaking congregation and ministry, and in planning an outreach summer program asking Memphians: 'If you had one question, what would you ask God?'"
— **John Irby**, *Great Oaks Church of Christ in Memphis, Tenn.*



TEXAS

Churches of Christ: **1,978**
Adherents: **338,580**

"First, God is challenging the traditions and 'American' mindset of our congregation with his raw truth. Second, God is working through our congregation to provide for the physical needs of its members as well as the local and global community. He is also using our congregation to share his love with singles."
— **Jennifer Parsons**, *Shiloh Road Church of Christ in Tyler, Texas*



UTAH

Churches of Christ: **19**
Adherents: **1,164**

"In the past year and a half, we have seen over 100,000 people fed through our food pantry. We have had Bible studies in locations that don't normally allow Bible studies. We have been blessed in many ways and are excited to see what God does next."
— **Mike Wiist**, *Murray Park Church of Christ in Utah*



VERMONT

Churches of Christ: **10**
Adherents: **496**

"We see God working through our congregation as we strive to become like Jesus in all our efforts. We are committed to help feed and nurture our sister congregations in Vermont. We continue to serve the needs of Springfield, and we attempt to behave like Christ in our fellowship with one another."
— **Jay Huntley**, *Springfield Church of Christ in Vermont*



VIRGINIA

Churches of Christ: **165**
Adherents: **15,782**

"God keeps sending people our way through our international ESL/FriendSpeak who are open to God and want to learn about Christ. We both help them with their English as well as study the Bible with them using the story of redemption. This has resulted in conversions of many people from around the world — even Muslims!"
— **Jerri Harrington**, *Fairfax Church of Christ in Virginia*



WASHINGTON

Churches of Christ: **129**
Adherents: **12,441**

"God is working in our congregation here at Tukwila Church of Christ. We're growing together as Christians, and our youth love being a part of service. The support from the brothers and sisters is very truthful and nurturing. We are family at Tukwila Church of Christ, filled with the love of God."
— **Reggie Carr**, *Tukwila Church of Christ in Washington*



WEST VIRGINIA

Churches of Christ: **270**
Adherents: **20,315**

"God is working through our congregation to share the Good News with the lost around us, to strengthen one another through the ministry of the Word, prayer and fellowship and to serve those in our community who are hurting and in need."
— **Joseph Pauley**, *Belle Church of Christ in West Virginia*



WISCONSIN

Churches of Christ: **68**
Adherents: **5,815**

"God is working in our congregation by challenging our apathy and lack of focus on Jesus as the 'author and perfecter of our faith.' Through God's word and prayer, we're seeking the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit to fan embers that were allowed to grow dangerously dim. He is opening our eyes."
— **Evan Bane**, *Northtown Church of Christ in Milwaukee*



WYOMING

Churches of Christ: **32**
Adherents: **1,850**

"God is working and alive in the congregation in Lander. We are growing closer together and, in turn, growing into the community. Our theme for 2015 is 'Becoming a Contagious Christian.' We are focusing on relationships and growing relationships within the body as well as within the community."
— **Dustin Campbell**, *Lander Church of Christ in Wyoming*



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Adult Third Culture Kid Retreat*

June 19-20, 2015
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After a bit of confusion and asking around, he found the location. But as we walked toward the building in broad daylight, I said, "I think I've been here." Beni assured me that neither of us had. But then I recognized the one room apartment. It was true—he hadn't been there before.

But I had been there—three nights ago! They were ecstatic to see me, and I them. All nine new Christians were there, yet as our greetings continued, more and more came for this new congregation's first worship.

By the time I began preaching, the little room seated twenty three souls on the floor, with another half-dozen sitting in the outdoor hallway. This church, newly planted, was already reaching the Hindu neighbors for Jesus!

We showed them how to partake of the communion and the other parts of worship. We encouraged them. They encouraged us. A wonderful day!

It's great to make a difference. Jesus called us to just this!

David "Tud" Nance
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NEWSMAKERS

AWARDED: Bob and Michele Bentley, the Farrar Award for Service in Medical Missions, and Carl and Frankie Mitchell, the Boyd Award for International Christian Service at IHCF (International Health Care Foundation), African Christian Hospitals' annual Medical Missions Seminar in Fort Worth, Texas. **Susan Blessingame**, the 2015 Frances Hernandez Scholar-Teacher Award at the meeting of the Conference of College Teachers of English. Blessingame is dean of the Hancock College of Liberal Arts and Education at Lubbock Christian University in Texas.



Blessingame

NAMED: Darlene Denton, 2014 Citizen of the Year by the Burnet Chamber of Commerce in Texas. Denton is a member of the Vanderveer Street Church of Christ in Burnet. **Betty L. Smith**, 2014 Citizen of the Year by the Seminole Chamber of Commerce in Oklahoma. Smith attends the Seminole Church of Christ. **David Ramsey**, 2014 Reviewer of the Year by the International Journal of Management and Commerce. Ramsey preaches for the Seventh and Camp Church of Christ in New Orleans.

NEW MINISTERS: Marty Baker, youth minister for the Eastside Church of Christ in Colorado Springs, Colo. **Matt Haynes**, minister of the word for the Providence Road Church of Christ in Cordell, Okla. **Chris Perrey**, minister for the 4th & College Church of Christ in Cordell, Okla. **Brian Poe**, minister for the Bad Axe Church of Christ in Michigan. **Christopher Quinn**, preaching minister for the Johnson Avenue Church of Christ in El Cajon, Calif. **Drew Ritchie**, youth minister for the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ in Houston.



Haynes

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Gordon and Bert
Rampy



On the occasion of our parents’ 60th anniversary, we want them to know their life together has been an example we always carry with us. How blessed we are to have daily witnessed in ways large and small the totality of their commitment to each other. We have heard each describe the other as a tower of strength. Likewise, they together have been ours.

We appreciate the ease with which they have always – always – shown affection to each other. It was easy to look past all the hugging and kissing we saw as youngsters because that’s just how things were. Now, as older men and husbands, we know such behavior to be evidence of a healthy, happy marriage. What a good feeling we have been privileged to see, and in such abundance!

We have also observed and been profoundly influenced by the bedrock principle around which they’ve ordered their lives: their unwavering commitment to God and his Son. They have shown it and continue to do so through their productive faithfulness. Joined by and to the Lord, theirs is a cord of three strands that has long held fast.

Our parents have chosen every day for longer than we have been alive to honor God with every aspect

of their lives. Consider the familiar lines we have taken liberty to paraphrase: “Hear, O friends – The Lord our God, the Lord is one. We honor our parents who have loved the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength. The commandments He has given they have kept on their hearts. They impressed them on us during our younger days, and they have never ceased to do so even through the many years we’ve spent apart.”

It is with great pride and humility that we acknowledge our parents to be the finest examples of Christ and his Father’s love that we know. This is their greatest gift to us, and we are forever grateful.

— Jeff, Bruce, Grant and Wyatt
Rampy, April 2015

Phil and Amy
Carter



To My Princess,

On April 24, 1995, we were married. Like any couple, we dreamed of times we would share and places we would travel. We dreamed of our children and how we would raise them. We dreamed of our home and how it would look. We even dreamed of our pets and what we would name them.

We dreamed of so many things as we gazed into our future. I can still remember looking into your eyes

so many times back then and seeing everything I ever imagined in a wife and so much more than I ever expected to find. I knew then that I did not deserve this blessing from God. I asked you then to write your dreams down, and I promised you I would spend my life making them come true. Together we set out into this great big world to conquer them all.

We have spent most of our days inseparable along the way. Our every thought has been of each other. Our every motivation has been strengthened by our love. Every day I am thankful for you. And still I find myself looking into your eyes.

We have come to the close of our first 20 years together. We have traveled the world in service to God as missionaries. We have lived in the wilds of the African plains. We have set foot on the soil of more countries than we have fingers to count. We have been blessed with three beautiful children. And we have made a loving home in every country and state where God has sent us.

In all of this, I still look into your eyes the same way I did back then, and I remember that I did not deserve you so long ago. I pray I have been a worthy Christian husband and a Christian father. I pray that our relationship has glorified God and made Him proud. I pray that you have always been happy in your decision to say “Yes” that day near the lake when I knelt before you shaking like a leaf in a storm.

Today, 20 years later, I am reminded that I promised to make all your dreams come true. I am also reminded that I made your father a promise to always take care of you and keep you safe. Year after year I still read over your list of dreams in my heart, and I recall my words to your father. And I ask myself, “Am I deserving of this wonderful, beautiful, godly woman?” I hope that I am.

My promise to you for these next 20 years is that I will never grow weary in making all your dreams come true.

I promise to always love, honor, and cherish you all the days of my life. I

promise to put you first, above myself. I promise to spend my days seeking to make your life happy by being a worthy husband and dedicated father. I promise to give all I have and all that I am to you and our family.

I promise to fulfill my vows to God and to your father by taking care of you and keeping you safe. I promise to always strive to be the man you are proud of and the servant of God who is deserving of His wonderful gift entrusted to me.

I promise to always treat you like a Princess.

You are forever my Princess. Happy Anniversary.

Your Adoring and Hopelessly-
in-Love-with-You Husband,
--Phil

Burl and Jamettie Deaver,
63rd
Lubbock, Texas

Leo and Frances Creel, 60th
Hanceville, Ala.

Bill and Joan Knox, 54th
Amarillo, Texas

Larry and Sheila Davis, 50th
Fort Worth, Texas

Gary and Linda Shaw, 50th
Blanchard, Okla.

Birthdays

Joanna Sutton, 97th
Brandon, Fla.

Bill Futrell, 93rd
Midland, Texas

Betty Trotter, 90th
Kansas City, Mo.

Bernice Whiteside, 90th
Houston, Texas

Virginia Worten, 87th
Lubbock, Texas

Milestones *continued.*

Memorials

Donnie Cleo Barnes



Donnie Cleo Barnes graduated from this life early Wednesday morning, Feb. 25, 2015. He was 96 years old. A longtime resident of Dallas, Don was born on May 5, 1918, in Bonham, Texas. His amazing wife, Glenna, predeceased him on March 5, 2001. Don lovingly cared for her as she fought a debilitating disease over the course of the final seven years of their 56-year marriage.

They raised five godly children, all of whom married godly spouses. Don also leaves behind 16 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. He was introduced to one of his great-grandbabies just hours before his passing.

In 1967, the Northside Church of Christ elders determined there was a need to help place orphaned children in Christian homes and nurture families by establishing what became Christian Services of the Southwest, now called ChristianWorks for children.

As one of the founders, Don was a leader in this vision. He and Glenna were also foster parents themselves. Don Barnes believed that the voice of a child matters.

In 1987, the three Northside church elders (Don Barnes, Jim Cathey and Earl McGuire) determined a need for a church in the Coppell, Texas, area, so they chose to close the doors at Northside and launch a new church plant in the upper mid-cities of the

metroplex. This became Riverside Church of Christ.

Don was a quiet leader. He believed in the power of prayer. He loved people. His wry smile and slow speech won people over, especially when he handed them packages of Juicy Fruit and Super Bubble. Don was “The Gum Man.” This was his trademark.

In memory of Dad, the family invites gifts to be made in Don’s name to the ministry of ChristianWorks, 5440 Harvest Hill Road, Suit 140, Dallas, Texas, 75230 (www.christian-works.org).

Theodore Ralph Ogle

Theodore Ralph Ogle was born on March 2, 1931, in Frankfort, Ind.

He was raised on a farm in southern Indiana and graduated from Linton High School in 1948. He joined the Navy in 1951, serving in Corpus Christi, Texas and Newfoundland.



Ted was converted during this time through the outreach of a Church of Christ in Corpus Christi. He met his wife, martha, at that same church.

Ted’s career included ministering in churches in Texas, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Hawaii and Arizona.

In 1965, the Ogles joined the Van Tate family as pioneer Church of Christ missionaries in Kenya in East Africa. Ted invested 25 years of his life teaching and preaching, estab-

lishing churches and mentoring leaders in Kenya.

In 2009, Ted and Martha retired to Tucson, Ariz., where they had lived and ministered prior to going back to Kenya in 1989.

Ted was a man who loved God and loved people. He loved meeting people and trying to find some connection with them, and he had many “small world” stories of these encounters.

He had a steadfast faith in God and loved to sing His praises. He loved the Word of God and was a great teacher. His influence was world-wide and will only be truly known in heaven.

Ted went home to be with his Lord and Savior on Feb. 19, 2015.

He is survived by his wife of almost 60 years, Martha; his four children: Paul Ogle; Laura (Tom) Dailey; Carrie Young; and John (Julie) Ogle; eight grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren; siblings Mike (Maxine) and Jo Ellen of Indiana and many cousins, nieces and nephews. A memorial service will be held in Tuson on April 13th. Memorial gifts may be sent to the World English Institute.

Barry Andrew Woodhouse

Barry Andrew Woodhouse, 54, passed away suddenly early Saturday, March 7.

He was a native of Cary, N.C., and had a heart for his family and for the special needs community.

Barry lived his life with tremendous passion, humor and kindness.

Barry graduated from Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn., where he found the love of his life, Paula Beverly. Together they began a special needs ministry at Brooks Avenue Church of Christ in Raleigh, N.C., to serve their daughter, Melissa. The ministry grew and has touched many lives across the country.

Barry’s legacy will continue at the 15th annual Spring Carnival for Special Needs Children on April 11th.



Barry served as a deacon and could be found cooking in the church kitchen, dishing out hospitality and humor. For one week each summer, Barry served as head cook at Carolina Bible Camp in Mocksville, N.C.

Barry will be greatly missed by his wife of 27 years, Paula, their three beautiful daughters, Melissa, Morgan and Maggie, parents Ed and Betty Ann, brother Eddie and sister Anna, nieces, nephews, friends and his Brooks Avenue Church of Christ family.

Lucy Mae Austin, 90
Moore, Okla.

Harrel Custer Helf, 86
(passed in 2012)
Chickasha, Okla.

Danny Wheeler, 72
Lubbock, Texas

Fletcher H. (Buddy) Hall III, 62
Abilene, Texas

Jamallh Roshon Clark, 31
Lubbock, Texas

Memorial/Honor Gifts

The Christian Chronicle appreciates and acknowledges generous gifts donated in memory of Jim Kervin, George Tipps and Dorothy Jones.

Entries should be submitted to milestones@christianchronicle.org or call (405) 425-5070. Rates and guidelines are available upon request (credit card preferred).

Crash claims spring break servant

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Nicholas Smith's spring break plans didn't involve sandy beaches or snowy ski slopes.

Rather, the youth and family ministry major at Harding University in Searcy, Ark., hit the road for upstate New York.

Joined by his girlfriend Abby Owens and nine other Harding students, Smith intended to spend the week helping with a new Church of Christ being planted in Utica, N.Y.

But tragedy struck the caravan of 11 students — riding in four vehicles — when the car driven by Smith was involved in a multiple-vehicle crash early March 7.

The 21-year-old's car was crushed between



Smith

two tractor-trailers, Harding reported. The crash occurred on northbound Interstate 71 in the Louisville, Ky., area. Smith, from Buford, Ga., suffered fatal injuries.

Passenger Drew Taylor, a senior mathematics major from Whitesboro, N.Y., was airlifted to a hospital, where he underwent surgery. Passenger Owens, a sophomore early childhood major from Baldwinsville, N.Y., was treated and released.

Harding President Bruce McLarty, who flew to Louisville to support the families, said the students "left Searcy full of purpose, love, joy and hope.

"Nothing that happened on that Kentucky highway can take those things away from them," he said. "Their hope in Christ is even more real to all of us today."

EXPANDED STORY: www.christianchronicle.org

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

NEW MEXICO CHRISTIAN HOME

PORTALES, N.M. — Single-parent families will find refuge in the New Mexico Christian Children's Home's latest endeavor.

The project, Hope Haven, will offer families the opportunity to live rent- and utility-free in one of its 34 two- or three-bedroom apartments. Parents will have the opportunity to pursue a college degree or get ahead financially while working.

The project is expected to take five to eight years to complete and cost \$5 million.

HIGHER EDUCATION

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

ABILENE, Texas — ACU plans to expand its presence in the Dallas-Fort Worth area with a new campus and graduate programs.

"The Metroplex expansion is part of a strategic plan to diversify and extend ACU's reach," President Phil Schubert said. "It allows us to serve a greater number of students who are seeking online and graduate degrees, particularly those students who want a degree from a Christian perspective."

The search for a site is ongoing. Two new positions have been created: Stephen Johnson, vice president of academic affairs for ACU Dallas, will move to the Metroplex to lead the new site alongside Jay Goin, executive vice president for ACU Dallas.

Already, the university operates "ACU at CitySquare" in downtown Dallas. That program allows undergraduate and graduate students to apply their learning in real-life situations, an ACU news release said.

Students' efforts to solve problems associated with poverty in urban settings while working alongside staff for the nonprofit CitySquare organization — formerly known as Central Dallas Ministries — earned a global Design for Change award.

K-12 CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

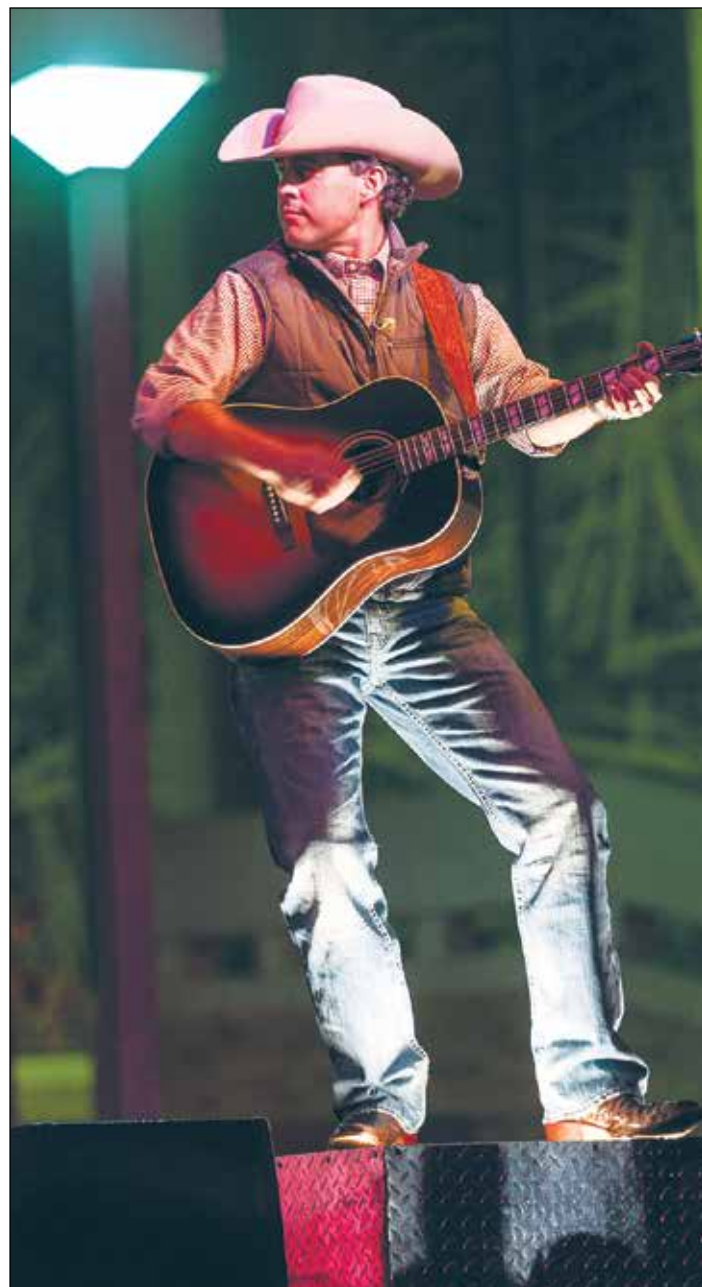
WESTBURY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

HOUSTON — The Westbury Christian Wildcats were anything but idle during their spring break.

Both the school's basketball teams advanced to the state's final four in their classification — with the boys winning their third straight championship and the girls earning state runner-up honors after a tough loss.

Immediately after returning to Houston from the state tournament, eight of the student-athletes joined 22 classmates and faculty and staff chaperones on Westbury's annual spring break mission trip to Oklahoma City.

The group hosted a Vacation Bible School-style week of activities to serve and share the love of God with inner-city children and other neighbors of the Capitol Hill Church of Christ.



PAUL WHITE

ACU alum's album hits No. 1

Aaron Watson is on top of the country world, as his alma mater Abilene Christian University in Texas described it in a recent blog post. Watson's new album "The Underdog" debuted at No. 1 on the country charts. Watson, who attends the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Abilene, also recently made his first appearance at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tenn. Watson's Twitter bio (@aaron_watson) describes him as "just a Christian artist in a Honky Tonk World." Watson, a 2000 ACU graduate, has recorded 12 albums.



PRESS PHOTO PROVIDED BY AARONWATSON.COM

Gay, transgender teens ‘matter to Jesus’

HONEST, OPEN CONVERSATIONS about sexual identity are needed everywhere – even ‘in my tribe,’ says Sally Gary, who grew up in Churches of Christ and shares her struggles with same-sex attraction.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — From “Glee” to “Modern Family,” in the past decade “we’ve watched as the media has led the conversation on sexuality,” Sally Gary said.

TV shows with gay characters are ubiquitous, she said, and many teens “don’t remember a time before Ellen (DeGeneres) came out on TV.”

Gary directs CenterPeace, a Texas-based nonprofit that provides “a safe place for men and women who experience same-sex attraction” and helps churches, schools and families have conversations about homosexuality. She details her own struggles in a memoir, “Loves God, Likes Girls.”

At the “Tough Topics of Youth Ministry” conference, she told fellow Church of Christ members that the need for open, honest conversations about sexual identity “comes home to us in my tribe.”

Recently, a Church of Christ in Ohio made national headlines after one of its teens died by suicide. The teen



ERIK TRYGGESTAD

was transgender, and posted to social media that family members didn’t understand why the teen wore dresses and went by the name Leelah. “If we think that we in Churches of Christ have escaped ... no,” Gary said.

“The whole issue of being transgender is different from being gay,” she added. “We’ve got to begin to talk about this in different ways — because Leelah matters to Jesus.”

As she counsels youths, Gary said she often has to resist the urge to “get my sermonette in.”

She remembers her own struggles with same-sex attraction. “I’m thankful that

the people I genuinely opened up to realized that I didn’t need to hear what Romans 1 says (about homosexuality), because I already knew.”

Listening is vitally important, she told the church members, urging them to keep the conversation going.

“When you’re dealing with a kid in your youth group who is struggling with this ... look as sweetly as you can into her eyes and say, ‘Tell me what this has been like for you.’”

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“When you’re dealing with a kid in your youth group who is struggling with this ... look as sweetly as you can into her eyes and say, ‘Tell me what this has been like for you.’”



ERIK TRYGGESTAD

Abuse victims: ‘Why did God let this happen to me?’

Beth Robinson, a keynoter at the “Tough Topics of Youth Ministry” conference, told youth ministers and church members that they can help change the perspective shared by many victims of sexual abuse — that God is vengeful. Robinson, assistant provost and graduate director of behavioral sciences at Lubbock Christian University in Texas, spoke on the topic of “Sexual Abuse and Spiritual Development.”

“Why did God let this happen to me?” and “Where was God when I was being hurt?” are common questions abuse victims ask, she said. To bring them back to Christ, believers must model safe, nurturing relationships, and assure victims that “you can’t be ruined because God created you,” she said.

“It’s OK to say, ‘I don’t know’ when facing tough questions, Robinson said. She urges Christians to listen to the stories of abuse victims and share with them that “it hurts me to know that happened to you.”

SEXUAL IDENTITY: Ending a culture of shame

FROM PAGE 3

congregations aren’t helping them find answers. For some participants, the conference was deeply personal.

One couple told *The Christian Chronicle* that, just weeks earlier, their son had attempted suicide. He struggles with same-sex attraction, and his friends have demonized the couple as close-minded and intolerant, they said.

That doesn’t surprise Holladay, whose ministry, Ultimate Escape, partners with churches and schools to help young people follow God’s vision for sexuality, he said.

Working together, ministers and parents can shape children’s values about sex through early, consistent conversation, he said. Too many churches “stand by while culture and media destroy” their children.

TOOLS FOR TOUGH QUESTIONS

Jesus is “no stranger to difficult questions,” said Walter Surdacki, an associate professor at Lipscomb and organizer of the conference.

It was the seventh year the university, associated with Churches of Christ, has hosted the conference, Surdacki said, with the goal of giving youth ministers tools to address pressing needs effectively.

Leonard Allen, dean of Lipscomb’s College of Bible and Ministry, told participants that the conference came “at a time when Christians are being pushed to the margins” by American society — and must respond by showing new levels of compassion to a hurting world.

Beth Robinson, graduate director of behavioral sciences at Lubbock Christian University in Texas, discussed the challenges of helping students who have been traumatized by sexual abuse.

David Rubio, director of student ministries for the Otter Creek Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tenn., discussed the culture of shame that develops in schools, homes and even churches around issues of sexual identity.

George Goldman and Mark Black, Bible professors at Lipscomb, presented an overview of “The Bible and Gay/Lesbian Issues.” From Old to New Testament, the Bible defines homosexuality as a sin, the professors said.

With regard to same-sex behavior, the Bible “is more restrictive than the original culture” when it was written, Goldman said. This “points to continued restriction of same-sex activity.”



Surdacki

'HETEROSEXUALITY DOESN'T MAKE US MORE GODLY'

Increasingly, American society views homosexuality through a different lens, said Yarhouse, author of **"Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry."**

This "diversity lens" sees same-sex attraction as natural and healthy — something to be celebrated.

Most evangelical Christians view the issue through an "integrity lens," believing that homosexuality goes against God's created order.

"You may be speaking with the integrity lens to a person with the diversity lens," Yarhouse said. "If you don't even recognize the different lenses, you're likely to be talking past each other."

Parents, counselors and ministers must give youths who experience same-sex attraction "alternative story-lines," Yarhouse said, by focusing on all aspects of their character — all of their God-given talents — instead of allowing them to define themselves only by sexual orientation.

Youths also need role models who can help answer this question: "How do I become a better steward of my sexual impulses?" Yarhouse said. "It's not that God gave them to me, but he's not surprised by them."

Counselors should give youths "realistic, biblical hope," he said. Many who seek treatment for same-sex attraction don't experience as much movement as they'd like but feel pressure to say they've changed, leading to depression and other health issues.

"Don't hold out the expectation for heterosexuality," Yarhouse said. Instead, "disciple people to know and love Christ better."

Churches must value singleness, he added, and stop treating married Christians as the "top tier" — as the goal for which those with same-sex attraction must strive.

"Heterosexuality doesn't make us more godly," he said.

Churches should be safe, welcoming places for all people, Yarhouse said.

So should their buildings. He

recalled a conversation with a transgender person who told him how thankful she was that a church she visited had a family restroom — allowing her to not have to choose between male and female facilities.

Many Christians invite those with different lifestyles to "come, *be like* us. Then we'll introduce you to Christ and serve him together," Yarhouse said.

Instead, believers should see a world full of fellow sinners and invite them to "come and *be with* us. Let us introduce you to Christ. Then we'll become more Christlike together."

A 'STATEMENT FOR OUR FAITH COMMUNITY'

After presenting pages of research and counseling tips and answering questions, Yarhouse thanked the participants for devoting time to an uncomfortable and important topic.

"The fact that you're here today," he said, "is a step in the right direction."

Lipscomb students who attended the conference, including Claire Coker and Emily Shuler, said they were impressed by the presenters' vulnerability, honesty and willingness to speak out.

"If this is something the church is serious about," Shuler said, "then we need to not whisper about it."

For Christians serving "on the front lines, it's not theory, it's not theology," Jason Pagel added. "It's very, very personal."

Pagel and his wife, Jennifer, have worked in youth ministry for 18 years and serve with the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ in Brentwood.

In addition to gaining valuable insight at the conference, "we're participating in a statement to our faith community," Jennifer Pagel said, referencing

the large turnout. "This is a conversation our churches *have* to be having."

The couple whose son was recovering from a suicide attempt agreed.

"We're only going to get better at this by learning how Christ addresses it," the boy's father said.

As for his son, "Whatever he chooses, we want to be there for him. We want to be better advocates."

RESOURCES

www.sexualidentityinstitute.org
Provides resources — including information on sexual identity therapy.

centerpeace.net
Providing safe places for men and women who experience same-sex attraction.

www.ultimatescape.org
Partnering with churches and schools to prepare young people for a lifetime of healthy sexuality.

www.drbbethrobinson.com
A site for house parents, foster parents and adoptive parents.

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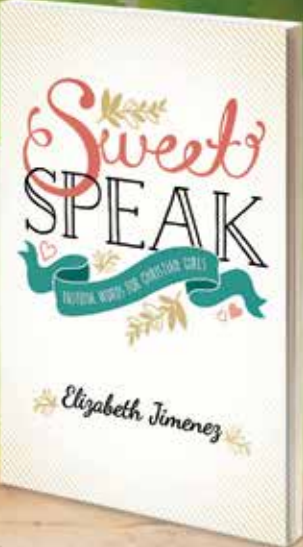
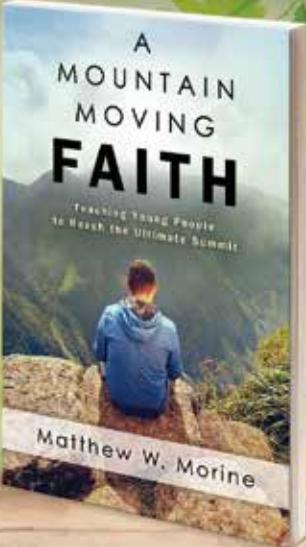
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April 5-9 71st Annual Churches of Christ National Lectureship. "Celebrating the Covenant." Chicago. www.71stnationallectureship.com.

April 9 "Developing Kingdom Leadership" with Reggie McNeal: An Equipping for Ministry Event. Abilene Christian University in Texas. www.acu.edu/siburt-institute, (325) 674-3722.

April 9 NationsUniversity April Feed the Spiritually Hungry Dinner. Harpeth Hills Church of Christ, Brentwood, Tenn. RSVP to maryo@nationsu.org.

April 9-11 Homeschool Convention. Atlanta., (864) 235-4444.

April 12-15 57th Annual OUV Lectureship Series. "Children Mean the World to God." Ohio Valley University, Vienna, W.Va. www.ovu.edu/lectureship, (304) 865-6128.

April 17-18 Women Walking with God. "Hope Anchors the Soul." Hartman Arena, Wichita, Kan. www.womenwalkingwithgod.org.

April 24-25 East Ridge Annual Lectureship. East Ridge, Tenn. www.launchsingles.wordpress.com.

April 24-26 Xperience 2015, "HIS" Youth Rally. Poteau Church of Christ in Oklahoma., (918) 647-4873, www.poteaucoc.org.

April 25-30 47th Annual Florida Lectureship. "Modern Family Matters." Miami. www.floridalectureship.com.

April 25 Women in God's Service Conference 2015. "Crown of Valor." Searcy, Ark. www.harding.edu/wings.

May 1-3 New England Lectureship. "Saved to Serve." Taunton, Mass., (617) 274-2409, www.newenglandlectureship.org.

May 3 50th Anniversary Celebration. North Brevard Church of Christ, Titusville, Fla.

May 5-8 Pepperdine Bible Lectures. "Faithworks." Malibu, Calif., (310) 506-4270.

May 7 Pepperdine Bible Lectures 100+ Voices Choir Performance. Smothers Theatre, Pepperdine University., (626) 244-4169.

May 20 Foster's Home for Children 2015 Golf Tournament. BlackHorse Golf Club, Cypress, Texas. www.fostershome.org.

FULL CALENDAR, www.christianchronicle.org

EDITORIAL

Hate speech, better speech

Just once, we thought, it would be nice to see Oklahoma featured on the news for something that wasn't a tornado. Now, of course, we take it all back.

From Norman, Okla., a racist chant by members of a University of Oklahoma fraternity, captured on video, blew across the Internet. Watching the men of Sigma Alpha Epsilon proudly declare that there will never be an African-American in their club — using words of hate — fills us with disgust.



ERIK TRYGGESTAD

Christians pray during a "United in Christ" Sunday evening service. Hear songs from the gathering at www.christianchronicle.org.

As a news service operating under the grace of God and the freedoms of the First Amendment, however, we feel that the university's decision to shut down the fraternity and expel two of its members doesn't address the total problem.

The cure for bad speech isn't censorship — it's *better* speech, prompted by better attitudes.

We saw some of that better speech among Churches of Christ, just as the news about the fraternity broke.

As social media seethed, members of predominantly black and predominantly white congregations gathered under the same roof in Oklahoma City for fellowship and praise to our Father as part of the sixth annual "United in Christ" campaign.

Addressing a combined Sunday night worship, speaker Shannon Hayes told Christians of both races that our purpose is to "show a united front to the world, to the folks on the campus of OU, to the folks in the streets."

God gives us the ability to make our own decisions — good or bad, Hayes said. And we choose to show love and mercy.

There will always be sinners — red and yellow, black and white — in the Church of Christ. All fraternity members are welcome. Come see what real brotherhood looks like.

Let us introduce you to Christ. Let's be better together.

Despite storms, the remnant survives

"For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

— 2 Kings 19:31

When God wants his people to survive, it happens. It always has.

When I reflect on 40-plus years of walking with Jesus, I have great respect for the churches where I have served and for the people that God has put in my path.

However, many today do not seem to feel the kind of joy I have experienced in my own walk with God. Many wring their hands and even panic about how Churches of Christ in the U.S. are not growing.

I will not speak of which "flavor" of Churches of Christ are better than others.

I will not bring forward the saint, nor will I name the apostate as a "proof" of the church's effectiveness or lack thereof.

I will, instead, point us to the notion that God wants his people to be successful in accomplishing his will.

And his remnant survives.

If the church is to grow, then it will not be because of practicing right doctrine or pursuing social justice.

It will not be because we do or do not have women leaders.

It will not be because we do or do not use musical instruments.

Our scholarship will not qualify us. Nor will pursuing trends of popular church culture give us real success.

All of these things are, no doubt, worthy

of our attention and conversation, but they are not concerns that ultimately will help the church to grow.

We will grow in real numbers only when those of us who represent God truly become conduits of his message of truth and life. We must project much more than the "niceness" of God.

We must avoid making "the church" the central theme of our message. We must surround people in our world with those who not only love God but who also are willing to live out that love — outwardly, boldly.

I was brought to Christ by people who loved me and became conduits of Christ's love. They cared enough to talk to me, to embrace me, to mentor me and to challenge me.

I can't remember anyone being mean, judgmental, abrasive or condescending. I can only remember that I was given great news in such a form that I wanted it for myself.

I owe my soul to Jesus and to those who cared for me with such love and concern.

We become woeful people when we dwell on our lack of numerical growth — when we focus on the storms of controversy we allow to surround us. Just at the water-walking Peter in Matthew 14, we begin to sink.

Honestly, is it so hard for us to see what the real problem is?

We have taken our eyes off Christ.

In the Word



Wyane Atkinson

WYANE ATKINSON was baptized as a teenager in Cooper, Texas. He has served in vocational ministry, working with teens, and served for 11 years as senior minister for the Northwest Church of Christ in Glendale, Ariz. He currently is outreach/connection minister for the Conroe Church of Christ in Texas.



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Disband with dignity

MINISTER RECALLS *the bittersweet act of closing a dying church*

COLUMBIA, Md.

This past January I helped close a church. As a preacher and minister, this is something I never expected to be a part of. But I was. The congregation I served, the Columbia Church of Christ, once had about 150 members but had declined to about 25. We disbanded after 30 years of existence.

Ours is not the first struggling Church of Christ to close. The 2015 edition of "Churches of Christ in the United States" shows 147 fewer congregations than the previous edition in 2012. On the average, we lose about 35 Churches of Christ per year in this country.

Churches struggle and die for a number of reasons. Aside from declining membership, there often is unresolved conflict and a loss of purpose — a vision the church owns, passionately. The church culture becomes one of anxiety, creating frustration and even polarization. Over time, this becomes a cumbersome burden resulting in spiritual exhaustion.

This certainly was true for the Columbia Church of Christ. Though we did not own our own facilities, we existed in a very transient suburb between Baltimore and Washington — where people move in and out regularly because of work.

Though we met in Howard County, members lived among several different counties. In some ways, the church was detached from its own community. In the past 10 years, the congregation suffered through a lot of conflict that resulted in families leaving to become members of other churches.

The church spent a year discerning where God was leading. During this time, the option to close became clear. In doing so, church members were released to find healthier churches where they could rest from the burden of trying to care for a dying church.

They could mourn, and then begin serving with their new church as God has gifted them.

I am not suggesting that renewal is impossible or unlikely for other churches. Our God, who raised Jesus from the dead, is the God of hope, but he also calls for repentance — change, that is.

However, not every church has the capacity for the sort of change where renewal is born without causing further harm. People comprise the church. Unfortunately, congregations also tend to become organizations with their own culture and structure. One of the critical question dying churches must ask is whether or not they are ready for the necessary change in this structure. Churches must focus on God's mission rather

than self-preservation. Perhaps the church receives a clear vision for renewal that opens a new future. Or perhaps closure is the right decision. Either way, this process of discernment must involve the entire church — praying together and listening to one another as they seek God's will.

Throughout the process, churches need someone such as a minister — though not necessarily a minister — who can remain separated from any vested interest in one particular outcome. This, of course, is easier said than done. Nonetheless, churches need someone who lovingly holds the conversation before them in a decisive, non-anxious manner that ensures the process is neither rushed nor evaded.

A lot of emotions will surface during this process, and that is OK. As the Columbia

Church of Christ sat around a table facing each other, there were some tears and some anger was vented, too. It was a grieving process as much as a discernment process. This is where a leader must speak and act with grace, so that the church remains focused on the presence and will of God.

Should a church discern that it is time to close, planning is necessary so that the closure is done with grace and dignity. The leaders of the church will have some business decisions to make in accordance with the bylaws regarding any property and monetary assets.

Once the Columbia Church of Christ discerned that closure was the right thing to do, we planned a final "celebration" Sunday worship gathering. This was a way for us to remember what God has done throughout the congregation's 30-year history. Joined by former members, we worshiped while sharing memories and a final fellowship meal.

In many ways, it was like having a memorial service for someone we loved. Additionally, the church has divided all remaining finances to help support foreign mission work, domestic church planting and two regional Christian camps.

Even though closing a church is bittersweet, there is much worth celebrating, too. God has accomplished many great things throughout the history of every church.

And there is still a future. Even as a church is scattered, the Spirit is with God's people, leading them forth to serve among other churches in the name of Jesus Christ.

K. REX BUTTS is married to Laura and is the father of three children. He is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree at Northern Seminary and holds degrees from Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., and Harding University in Searcy, Ark. He blogs at www.kingdomseeking.com.

Views



K. Rex Butts

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

The Tulsa Workshop



BOBBY ROSS JR.

Donald and Tamara Davis at the Tulsa Workshop.

TULSA, Okla. — For 40 years, the Tulsa Workshop has brought together Christians to hear thought-provoking speakers and join in uplifting worship and fellowship.

Donald Davis, an elder of the Heritage Church of Christ in Keller, Texas, has attended at least 30 of them. He and his wife, Tamara, spoke to *The Christian Chronicle* about their love of the workshop.

What do you remember about the first time you attended?

Donald: It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. ... I'd just never heard that many speakers in one place. It was truly life-changing. I was a real young preacher then — real young. It was just like, "Wow, this is the world I want to be in."

What keeps you coming back?

Donald: I love preaching. I love all the singing and music.

Tamara: I really like a lot of the music and the keynotes.

What is attendance like now compared to 1981?

Donald: It's a lot smaller. They claimed it was close to 20,000 people back in those years. Last year, when Phil Robertson was here, that was the biggest we'd seen it in many, many years.

Why? Is it the culture?

Tamara: You can catch webcasts of their services and things like that, so you don't have to drive. They don't feel like there's a need to come and visit with 20,000 of your closest brothers and sisters in Christ.

But for those of you who are committed, it's still a good thing?

Donald: I still love it and try to get people to be here every year. As long as they have it, we'll still be here.

Interview by Bobby Ross Jr.



NBC.COM

Adam Levy portrays the apostle Peter in “A.D.: The Bible Continues.” The miniseries airs in April on NBC. For more information, see www.nbc.com/ad-the-bible-continues.

‘A.D.’ incorporates political drama in its retelling of the book of Acts

Film epics based on, or around, the events of the Bible are nothing new — from “Ben Hur” and “The Ten Commandments” to the more recent “Exodus: Gods and Kings.”

But cinematic treatments of the early church are rare. “A.D.: The Bible Continues,” a 12-part miniseries airing on NBC, follows the events immediately following Christ’s crucifixion.

Producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, the husband-and-wife team known for the TV shows “Survivor” and “Touched by an Angel,” continue what they began with the 2013 miniseries “The Bible” and last year’s feature film, “Son of God.”

“A.D.” is not a visual Bible. The writers take the basic timeline from the book of Acts and add political intrigue. Burnett described it as being on par with the Netflix drama series “House of Cards.”

That’s a bit of an overstatement, perhaps, but I see what he means.

After Christ’s crucifixion, for example, we see Pilate and his wife engage in a series of encounters that become increasingly bitter. We know from the Gospel of Matthew that she asked her husband to “have nothing to do with that innocent man” — and he ignored her. Bad idea.

Another example is the handling of the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. The Gospel of Mark tells us that Joseph was a member of the council (many suggest the Sanhedrin) and a secret follower of Jesus.

Eventually, he gathered up the courage to ask Pilate for Jesus’ body and buried it in his family’s tomb.

In “A.D.,” Joseph, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas and Pilate interact in a tangled web of politics, each vying for his agenda, with Pilate ultimately awarding

the body to Joseph out of a desire to keep the Jews in a state of infighting. We don’t know what actually happened, but it’s easy to believe that there were intense political moves in play around Jesus’ death.

Being a Christian doesn’t give one permission to produce sub-par material, Burnett said at an advance screening of the first episode. As followers of Jesus, we should strive to do everything to the glory of God.

To that end, the first episode succeeds. Though made for TV, I found it to be polished and well produced.

Overall, this looks to be a wonderful series. I cannot wait for episode two.

On TV



Grant Stevens

GRANT STEVENS is a member of the Memorial Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City. He blogs at grantstevens.wordpress.com.

DEPLOYED

IN AN UNCIVIL WAR: THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

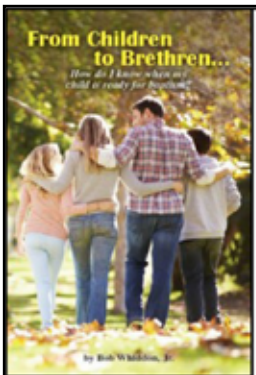
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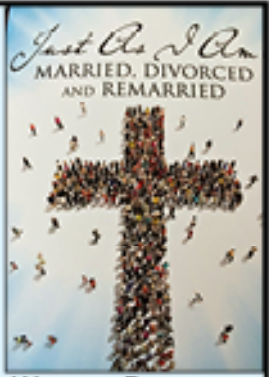
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Zambia Mission

When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us in her home.

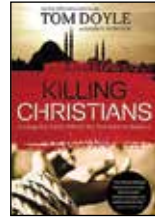
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PERSECUTION
Tom Doyle. **Killing Christians: Living the Faith Where It's Not Safe to Believe.** Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2015. 207 pages. \$15.99.



Middle East missionary Tom Doyle has ministered to Muslims and understands that torture and martyrdom are real threats to those who convert to Christianity. Here, he shares the ways the faith of these Christians has grown through their trials — often in their own words. The author's previous book is the bestselling **"Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?"**

FINANCE
Ruth Soukup. **Living Well, Spending Less: 12 Secrets of the Good Life.** Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014. 240 pages. \$15.99.



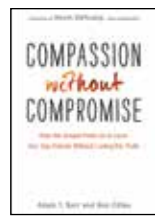
Soukup, author of one of the top personal finance blogs on the web, presents an overall guide to the simplification of home, time and money — geared toward whoever handles household matters such as housework and grocery shopping. Purpose, joy and simplicity should be the foundational approaches to possessions and time, she writes.

FOR TEENS
Sadie Robertson. **Live Original: How the Duck Commander Teen Keeps It Real and Stays True to Her Values.** New York: Howard Books, 2014. 203 pages. \$22.99.



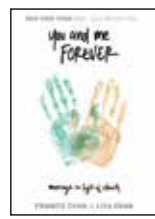
"Duck Dynasty" star Sadie Robertson, a member of the White's Ferry Road Church of Christ in West Monroe, La., writes this book with teen girls in mind. She tackles perseverance, friendship, dreams for the future and her "Papaw Phil's" favorite — happiness. Each chapter opens with a Bible verse and closes with reflection questions, space to journal and Robertson's advice. The text weaves in Scriptures throughout.

HOMOSEXUALITY
Adam T. Barr and Ron Citlau. **Compassion Without Compromise: How the Gospel Frees Us to Love Our Gay Friends Without Losing the Truth.** Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 160 pages. \$12.99.



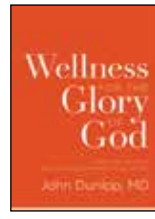
Two ministers, one of whom struggled with same-sex attraction, present a resource for Christians who want to show Christ's love to their gay friends without compromising biblical truth. The book addresses realistic scenarios, including whether or not Christians should attend a gay wedding, and gives practical advice.

MARRIAGE
Francis and Lisa Chan. **You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity.** San Francisco: Claire Love Publishing, 2014. 192 pages. \$15.99.



Renowned author and speaker Francis Chan and his wife of 20 years seek to advise Christian couples. Their goal isn't to make your marriage better but to share ways believers can honor God through their marriage — seeking his Kingdom first, before marriage and parenting. Married and single Christians will benefit from this study.

HEALTH
Dr. John Dunlop. **Wellness for the Glory of God: Living Well after 40 with Joy and Contentment in All of Life.** Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Publishers, 2014. 192 pages. \$15.99.



This holistic — and medically sound — guide to health in the second half of life addresses physical, mental, social, financial, spiritual and emotional wellness. Dunlop intersperses patient vignettes from his practice working with geriatric patients — some who have aged well and others who struggle with health issues because of their own unhealthy choices.

Women’s ministry requires loving mentors

Women need strong relationships with other women. But many of us struggle with figuring out how to go about developing them.

Joneal Kirby, founder of the Christian Counseling and Resource Center at White’s Ferry Road Church of Christ in West Monroe, La., believes that God’s command in Titus 2:3-5 for older women to teach the younger women is one of the best ways to meet that need.

“One of the great untapped treasures within our churches lies within the minds and hearts of our older women,” she contends in **“Heartfelt: A Woman’s Guide to Creating Meaningful Friendships.”**

Kirby is an expert on the subject of women’s need for meaningful friendship. In addition to the resource center, which provides services for a broad swath of northern Louisiana and southern

Arkansas, she produces the “Heart to Home” radio program that focuses on strengthening faith and families. She has also hosted the Legacy Network’s Christian talk show “Girlfriends” and has authored two books on parenting.

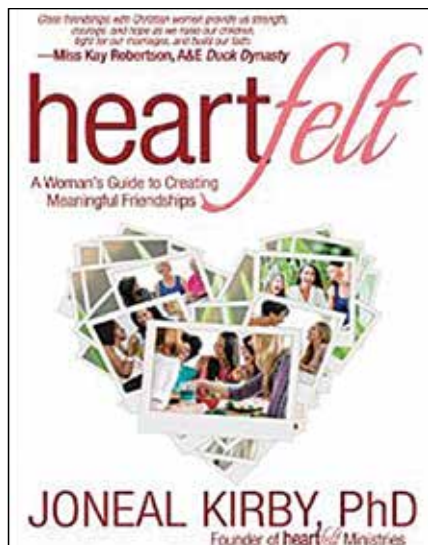
The specific method she outlines for implementing a Titus 2 ministry is neither overwhelming nor complicated, and it has already proven successful in hundreds of churches.

Instead of a formal church class for women, Kirby describes a scenario where two or three women who have already raised their children — or who are of the age to have done so — partner to welcome a group of younger women into their homes like “mothers welcoming much-loved daughters.”

The purpose of this once-a-month get-together is to create a safe and loving environment in which women’s friendships can be strength-



In Print
Serena B. Miller



★★★★☆
Joneal Kirby. **Heartfelt: A Woman’s Guide to Creating Meaningful Friendships.** Brentwood, Tenn.: Worthy Books, 2015. 224 pages. \$15.99.

ened and encouraged. Kirby’s model calls for the older women teaching the younger women by getting to know one another informally, leading

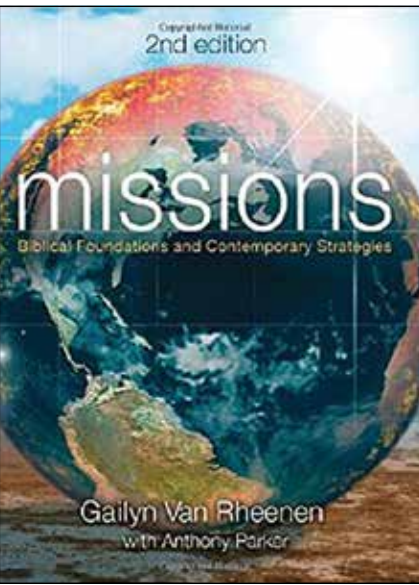
a hands-on lesson on a domestic craft, sharing a meal and having a short Bible study.

The bulk of the book is made up of testimonies of the effectiveness of this method written by women, both young and old, whose lives have been changed by becoming part of a Titus 2 ministry. Many readers will enjoy all of these personal stories, while others might find some superfluous or redundant, skipping instead to the imminently practical and encouraging last two chapters, which contain the how-to details about implementing and sustaining a Titus 2 ministry.

Either way, the simplicity and Biblical authenticity of Dr. Kirby’s plan is an achievable blueprint for creating healthy connections between Christian women while also creating stronger churches.

SERENA B. MILLER is a novelist whose most recent book is the nonfiction “More Than Happy: The Wisdom of Amish Parenting.” She attends the Sunshine Church of Christ in Minford, Ohio, where her husband, Steve, is preaching minister. For more information, see www.serenabmiller.com.

A classic missions text gets a 21st century upgrade



★★★★★
Gailyn Van Rhee and Anthony Parker. **Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies, Second Edition.** Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014. 514 pages. \$39.99.

Gailyn Van Rhee’s first edition of **“Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies”** has served as a foundational textbook in missions classes for the past 19 years.

The book’s second edition expands our understanding of missiology further, incorporating current trends in missional thinking and contemporary research.

The volume also shares personal insights and stories that draw upon Van Rhee’s own experiences among the Kipsigis of Kenya, his time as a missions professor at Abilene Christian University in Texas and his work with Mission Alive, a U.S.-based church-planting ministry.

“God was (and is) a missionary God,” he writes, and missions is simply our partnering with God in his ongoing story with the world. This is the book’s main idea.



In Print
Daniel McGraw

Van Rhee introduces missional theories using the story of Jim and Julie, a fictional married couple of college students considering missions and ministry. They represent the journey undertaken by so many of us as we discern our calling for the Kingdom. Their experiences provide a critical introduction to each new chapter.

Van Rhee incorporates a vast array of new material into the second edition. He describes the “missional helix,” a process of ministry formation that combines theological reflection, cultural analysis, historical perspective and strategy formation to bring about the desired goals of ministry.

This process of discernment, reflection, and implementation is critical to ministry, whether on the mission field or in established churches. It also engages the practitioner in a process of spiritual formation, drawing one closer to God as he or she is engaged

in the practices of ministry.

Van Rhee also includes a new chapter focused on North American church planting. He highlights the role of missional communities — incarnational groups that move outward into the world and deeper into people’s lives. He challenges us to stop simply managing a church and, instead, to focus on helping others grow into deeper disciples of God.

This new edition greatly expands upon Van Rhee’s previous work, and it serves as a reflection of contemporary missions practices and dialogues throughout the world.

Each chapter includes a series of reflection questions, making it a wonderful college textbook. It also will help missions committees as they pray, plan and participate in missions throughout the world.

DANIEL MCGRAW is minister for the West University Church of Christ in Houston. He and his wife, Megan, served as missionary apprentices with the Caballito congregation in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



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Chisholm Trail Church of Christ, Wichita. **KENTUCKY:** Adairville Church of Christ, Adairville; Broadway Church of Christ, Paducah; Lone Oak Church of Christ, Paducah; Mount Vernon Church of Christ, Park City. **LOUISIANA:** Arcadia Church of Christ, Arcadia; Jennings Church of Christ, Jennings; Church of Christ, Natchitoches; Crowder Boulevard Church of Christ, New Orleans; Pine Prairie Church of Christ, Pine Prairie; Grambling Church of Christ, Ruston; North Church of Christ, Shreveport; Maplewood Church of Christ, Sulphur. **MAINE:** Penobscot Valley Church of Christ, Hudson; Southern Maine Church of Christ, West Kennebunk. **MARYLAND:** Church of Christ of Aberdeen, Aberdeen; Westside Church of Christ, Baltimore; Salisbury Church of Christ, Salisbury; Oxon Hill Church of Christ, Temple Hills; Waldorf Church of Christ, Waldorf. **MASSACHUSETTS:** Greater Springfield Church of Christ, Chicopee; Cape Cod Church of Christ, Marstons Mills. **MICHIGAN:** 20th Street Church of Christ, Battle Creek; Brighton Church of Christ, Brighton; Burlington Church of Christ, Burlington; Redford Church of Christ, Detroit; Escanaba Church of Christ, Escanaba; Lapeer Church of Christ, Lapeer; Mount Morris Church of Christ, Mount Morris; Raytown Church of Christ, Raytown; West Eighth Avenue Church of Christ, Sault Saint Marie; Van Dyke Church of Christ, Warren. **MINNESOTA:** Wadena Church of Christ, Ottertail; Roseville Church of Christ, Roseville. **MISSISSIPPI:** Oak Ridge Church of Christ, French Camp; Hanging Moss Road Church of Christ, Jackson; Central Church of Christ, Pascagoula; Pearlington Church of Christ, Pearlington. **MISSOURI:** Arnold Church of Christ, Arnold; Bakerville Church of Christ, Bragg City; Church of Christ, California; Florissant Church of Christ, Florissant; Church of Christ, Jefferson City; Slicer Street Church of Christ, Kennett; Eastside Church of Christ, Lee's Summit; Rocketdyne Road Church of Christ, Neosho; Nevada Church of Christ, Nevada; O'Fallon Church of Christ, O'Fallon; Flat River Church of Christ, Park Hills; Church of Christ, Portageville; Raytown Church of Christ, Raytown; **MONTANA:** Church of Christ, Glendive; Church of Christ, Livingston. **NEBRASKA:** Beatrice Church of Christ, Beatrice; Hastings Church of Christ, Hastings. **NEVADA:** Victory Road Church of Christ, Henderson. **NEW HAMPSHIRE:** Manchester Church of Christ, Manchester; Seabrook Church of Christ, Seabrook. **NEW JERSEY:** Freehold Church of Christ, Freehold; Pitman Church of Christ, Pitman. **NEW MEXICO:** Cimarron Church of Christ, Cimarron;

HONOR ROLL OF CHURCHES, 2014-2015

Dora Church of Christ, Dora; Taylor Street Church of Christ, Hobbs; Third & Central Church of Christ, Lovington; Mountainair Church of Christ, Mountainair. **NEW YORK:** Linwood Church of Christ, Buffalo; Church of Christ-Hollis, Jamaica. **NORTH CAROLINA:** Church of Christ, Andrews; Biltmore Church of Christ, Asheville; Boyd Lake Road Church of Christ, Hamlet; Richlands Church of Christ, Jacksonville; Scotland Neck Church of Christ, Scotland Neck; Tryon Church of Christ, Tryon; Central Haywood Church of Christ, Waynesville. **OHIO:** North Hill Church of Christ, Akron; Beallsville Church of Christ, Beallsville; Bellevue Church of Christ, Bellevue; Perry Church of Christ, Bellville; Belpre Church of Christ, Belpre; Stop Nine Church of Christ, Byesville; Cadiz Church of Christ, Cadiz; Residence Park Church of Christ, Dayton; Church of Christ, Marietta; North Canton Church of Christ, North Canton; Church of Christ, Saint Clairsville; West Jefferson Church of Christ, West Jefferson. **OKLAHOMA:** Main Street Church of Christ, Alex; Church of Christ, Allen; Elm & Hudson Church of Christ, Altus; Tamarack Road Church of Christ, Altus; College Hill Church of Christ, Alva; Antlers Church of Christ. Antlers; Adams Boulevard Church of Christ, Bartlesville; Church of Christ, Beaver; Downtown Church of Christ, Bixby; Byars Church of Christ, Byars; Southern Oaks Church of Christ, Chickasha; Choctaw Church of Christ, Choctaw; Clayton Church of Christ, Clayton; Colcord Church of Christ, Colcord; Collinsville Church of Christ, Collinsville; Prairie Hill Church of Christ, Comanche; 4th and College Church of Christ, Cordell; Cornerstone Church of Christ, Davis; Carter Park Church of Christ, Del City; Dill City Church of Christ, Dill City; Edmond Church of Christ, Edmond; Gould Church of Christ, Gould; Granite Church of Christ, Granite; Hammon Church of Christ, Hammon; Church of Christ, Hobart; Church of Christ At Park Lane, Lawton; Church of Christ, Meeker; Church of Christ, Minco; Chandler Road Church of Christ, Muskogee; Noble Church of Christ, Noble; Church of Christ, Okemah; Grand Boulevard Church of Christ, Oklahoma City; Northwest Church of Christ, Oklahoma City; Church of Christ, Okmulgee; 7th & Jackson Church of Christ, Perry; Reydon Church of Christ, Reydon; 6th & Locust Church of Christ, Sayre; Farrall Church of Christ, Shawnee; Stillwater Church of Christ, Stillwater; Highland Church of Christ, Tecumseh; Park Plaza Church of Christ, Brookside Branch, Tulsa; Velma Church of Christ, Velma; Wetumka Church of Christ, Wetumka. **OREGON:** Astoria Church of Christ, Astoria; Circle Church of Christ, Corvallis; McMinnville Church of Christ, McMinnville; Oregon Trail Church of Christ, Pendleton. **PENNSYLVANIA:** Lower Bucks Church of Christ, Fairless Hills; Harding Church of Christ, Falls; Walnut Street Church of Christ, Mill Hall; Shillington Church of Christ, Shillington; Somerset Church of Christ, Somerset; Church of Christ at Wellsboro, Wellsboro. **SOUTH CAROLINA:** Gregg Avenue Church of Christ, Florence; Grand Strand Church of Christ, Surfside Beach. **RHODE ISLAND:** South County Church of Christ, Wakefield. **SOUTH DAKOTA:** Yankton Church of Christ, Yankton. **TENNESSEE:** Bartlett Woods Church of Christ, Arlington; Athens Church of Christ, Athens; Brighton Church of Christ, Brighton; Camden Church of Christ, Camden; Eva Road Church of Christ, Camden; New Hope Church of Christ, Celina; Centerville Church of Christ, Centerville; Church of Christ at Trenton Crossing, Clarksville; Airtake Church of Christ, Collierville; Graymere Church of Christ, Columbia; Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ, Cookeville; Smyrna Church of Christ, Culleoka; Morrison Creek Church of Christ, Gainesboro; Gallatin Church of Christ, Gallatin; Hendersonville Church of Christ, Hendersonville; Hohenwald Church of Christ, Hohenwald; Kingston Church of Christ, Kingston; Fall River Church of Christ, Leoma; Leoma Church of Christ, Leoma; Madison Church of Christ, Madison; Martin Church of Christ, Martin; Maryville Church of Christ, Maryville; Norris Road Church of Christ, Memphis; Corinth Church of Christ, Mount Juliet; 8th Avenue Church of Christ, Nashville; Acklen Avenue Church of Christ, Nashville; Radnor Church of Christ, Nashville; Carmen & Long Church of Christ, New Johnsonville; Pegram Church of Christ, Pegram; Union Hill Church of Christ, Portland; Rockvale Church of Christ, Rockvale; Fairlane Church of Christ, Shelbyville; Silver Point Church of Christ, Silver Point; Westport Church of Christ, Westport. **TEXAS:** Adrian Church of Christ, Adrian; Church of Christ, Saint Clairsville; Church of Christ at The Colonies, Amarillo; Church of Christ, Angleton; Argyle Church of Christ, Argyle; Woodland West Church of Christ, Arlington; Ridgewood Church of Christ, Beaumont; Bertram Church of Christ, Bertram; 14th & Main Church of Christ, Big Spring; Brownfield Church of Christ, Brownfield; Northside Church of Christ, Bonham; Boyd Church of Christ, Boyd; Bronte Church of Christ, Bronte; Buna Church of Christ, Buna; Central Church of Christ, Burkburnett; Canton Church of Christ, Canton; Clarendon Church of Christ, Clarendon; Columbus Church of Christ, Columbus; Copperas Cove Church of Christ, Copperas Cove; Grace Street Church of Christ, Crockett; Daingerfield Church of Christ, Daingerfield; Hawn Freeway Church of Christ, Dallas; Light of the World Church of Christ, Dallas; Decatur Church of Christ, Decatur; Greenwood Church of Christ, Decatur; Morton Street Church of Christ, Denison; Sherman Drive Church of Christ, Denton; The Grace Place, Duncanville; Eliasville Church of Christ, Eliasville; Falfurrias Church of Christ, Falfurrias; Western Hills Church of Christ, Fort Worth; Gail Church of Christ, Gail; Saturn Road Church of Christ, Garland; Loving Highway Church of Christ, Graham; Holly Lake Church of Christ, Hawkins; Hempstead Church of Christ, Hempstead; Central Church of Christ, Hereford; Hidden Valley Church of Christ, Houston; Memorial Church of Christ, Houston; West University Church of Christ, Houston; Westbury Church of Christ, Houston; Ingleside Church of Christ, Ingleside; Church of Christ, Iowa Park; Iraan Church of Christ, Iraan; Church of Christ, Iraan; Jasper Church of Christ, Jasper; College Street Church of Christ, Junction; Riverside Church of Christ, Kerrville; Chandler Street Church of Christ, Kilgore; Church of Christ, La Feria; Lake Jackson Church of Christ, Lake Jackson; 4th & Main Church of Christ, Joshua; Cold Springs Church of Christ, Lancaster; Garden Ridge Church of Christ, Lewisville; Oak Grove Church of Christ, Livingston; Travis Peak Church of Christ, Marble Falls; Matador Church of Christ, Matador; Maud Church of Christ, Maud; Meadow Church of Christ, Meadow; Menard Church of Christ, Menard; Northcrest Church of Christ, Mexia; Alton Iglesia de Cristo, Mission; 3rd & Dwight Church of Christ, Monahans; Navasota Church of Christ, Navasota; Tanglewood Church of Christ, Odessa; Church of Christ, Palacios; Lamar Avenue Church of Christ, Paris; Pearsall Church of Christ, Pearsall; 13th & Jefferson Church of Christ, Perryton; Main Street Church of Christ, Petersburg; 9th & Columbia Church of Christ, Plainview; Church of Christ in Porter, Porter; North Bay Church of Christ, Portland; Roaring Springs Church of Christ, Roaring Springs, Southside Church of Christ, Robert Lee; Salado Church of Christ, Salado; Saltillo Church of Christ, Saltillo; Antioch Church of Christ, San Augustine; San Pedro Church of Christ, San Antonio; San Saba Church of Christ, San Saba; Parkview Church of Christ, Sherman; Western Heights Church of Christ, Sherman; Smyer Church of Christ, Smyer; Sterling City Church of Christ, Sterling City; Sudan Church of Christ, Sudan; Northside Church of Christ, Temple; Walnut Church of Christ, Texarkana; Woodland Oaks Church of Christ, The Woodlands; Throckmorton Church of Christ, Throckmorton; Hufsmith Church of Christ, Tomball; Vidor Church of Christ, Vidor; Northside Church of Christ, Waco; South Main Church of Christ, Weatherford; Whitehouse Church of Christ, Whitehouse; Whitney Church of Christ, Whitney; Broadway Church of Christ, Wichita Falls; Shep Church of Christ, Wingate. **UTAH:** Church of Christ, Monticello. **VERMONT:** Castleton Church of Christ, Castleton. **VIRGINIA:** Church of Christ, Charlottesville; Church of Christ, Covington; Emporia Church of Christ, Emporia; Church of Christ in Falls Church, Falls Church; Glen Allen Church of Christ, Glen Allen. **WASHINGTON:** Ellensburg Church of Christ, Ellensburg; Olympia Church of Christ, Olympia. **WEST VIRGINIA:** Kanawha City Church of Christ, Charleston; Camden Avenue Church of Christ, Parkersburg; Ravenswood Church of Christ, Ravenswood; George Street Church of Christ, Saint Marys. **WISCONSIN:** Beaver Dam Church of Christ, Beaver Dam; Fond Du Lac Church of Christ, Fond Du Lac; Nelson Church of Christ, Nelson; Platteville Church of Christ, Platteville; Waupaca Church of Christ, Waupaca. **WYOMING:** Lander Church of Christ, Lander; Laramie Church of Christ, Laramie; Rawlins Church of Christ, Rawlins; Church of Christ, Thermopolis.



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Honest faith: Miller’s books deserve thoughtful consideration

In 2004, I learned that my PSA (Prostate-Specific Antigen) was rising — even though I had the cancerous prostate removed 12 years earlier.

Not long after I got the news, a former student came to visit and brought me a copy of **“Blue Like Jazz”** by Donald Miller. I read it as I waited for radiation treatments.

The subtitle of the book, “Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality,” fascinated me — but not nearly as much as his spiritual journey.

Miller was born in Houston and, after his father left, moved with his mother to Portland, Ore. He grew up in a church and struggled with its teachings and shortcomings.

“I associated much of Christian doctrine with children’s stories because I grew up in my church,” he writes in “Blue Like Jazz.” “My Sunday school teacher had turned Bible narrative into children’s fables.”

As he matures, he finds truth in God’s word.

He struggles with the trend of churches to be informational — always telling about Jesus but not engaging with him. He compares them to salesmen who work all week promoting a product which they never use.

What I like about Miller is that he always is completely honest about himself and his ideas. He is not a great theologian, but he is a seeker who wants to know God, Jesus and himself. He concentrates on making important changes in his behavior so that he is acceptable to Jesus — the great love of his life.

I recently finished his latest book, **“Scary Close: Dropping The Act and Finding True Intimacy.”** Here, Miller shares his struggles to be the kind of person who is worthy to be loved as he prepares to marry the woman he loves.

“Somewhere along the line,” he writes, “I think many of us buy into

that lie that we only matter if ... We only matter if we are strong or smart or attractive or whatever.”

One of his most profound ideas comes as he is preparing for his wedding. He observes, “I’m starting to wonder if that’s not the point of



Bailey McBride

life, to be thankful for it and to live in such a way others are thankful for it as well.”

“Scary Close” is Miller’s most mature thinking.

I read his books not for Christian doctrine, but for a view of Christianity

that doesn’t promote human wisdom — for a spirit of Christianity in a world filled with sin. In Miller, I see a maturing and his growing interest to nurture others.

I read Miller because he tells good stories. He always seeks to be a better person in every way. He seriously wants to know God, and he share thoughts about being Christian in unique and interesting ways. I read him like I read the



Donald Miller

church fathers, Brother Lawrence, Augustine and Bonhoeffer.

Like them, he is not always right, but he writes about a world that I have experienced throughout my life. He makes me think about the routines I go through as part of my church life, wondering if I am experiencing the deep love and relation-

ship which God intended.

I would not want any reader of Miller to accept all his ideas, but many of his ideas deserve thoughtful consideration.

In “Blue Like Jazz,” he observes: “I don’t think any church has ever been relevant to culture, to the human struggle, unless it believed in Jesus and the power of his gospel.”

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The Christian Chronicle

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God at work in U.S.

"How is God working in your congregation?"

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19-22



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