Brantly returning to Africa

DOCTOR WHO SURVIVED Ebola to serve as medical missionary in Zambia.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

FORT WORTH, Texas — Dr. Kent Brantly sat on his counselor’s couch and wept.

The tears came last summer as the Christian physician visited with Dottie Schulz, a missionary care volunteer with Texas-based Mission Resource Network, which is associated with Churches of Christ.

“Dottie, I think I’m ready to move forward,” confided Brantly, who made global headlines five years ago when he contracted the Ebola virus while treating patients in Liberia and nearly died.

Brantly, who earned a Bible degree from Abilene Christian University in Texas before deciding to become a doctor, always knew he wanted to return to the mission field. But while he regained his full physical strength within four to five months, other healing has taken longer.

“It’s been five years of emotional healing and spiritual healing and growth,” the doctor, 38, told The Christian Chronicle in Fort Worth, Texas.

Dr. Kent Brantly at the Southside church in Fort Worth, Texas.

See BRANTLY, Page 8

Keeping it a cappella

A WEEKLONG WORKSHOP at the historic Madison Church of Christ isn’t just a tool for song leaders, organizers say. It’s a means of reinvigorating voices-only worship.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

MADISON, Tenn.

Yes, Keith Lancaster knows about the decline of Churches of Christ in the U.S. He’s read the stories and seen the numbers. And he’s visited more than a few dying congregations.

“Too many of them on Sunday morning feel like a funeral service,” he said. “And yes, Jesus died, but there’s more to the Gospel story: 1 Corinthians 15!”

In the midst of the decline, some Churches of Christ have added instruments to their Sunday services, moving away from the fellowship’s long-held practice of a cappella worship.

But Lancaster, a worship leader, recording artist and founder of Acappella Ministries, sees voices-only worship as “a neglected part of our turnaround.”

Churches need “vibrant, meaningful — can I use the word contagious? — contagious worship that makes you want to be a part, to want to sing,” he said. “The No. 1 job of the song leader should be to draw everyone into participation.

“And if we do that and we do it well, I think our churches would not be on the decline, and I don’t think people would be considering going to the instrument as a silver bullet of church growth.”

Lancaster and a class of 90 men gathered just north of Nashville recently for intensive training on everything from breath control to Bible study.

The Worship Leader Institute, a weeklong program taught by nearly 20 worship leaders, is a “means of reinvigorating voices-only worship,” he said.

Keith Lancaster leads singing at the Worship Leader Institute.

See A CAPPELLA, Page 24
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A son reminds his father of the value of missions

ZAGREB, Croatia

To me, the young man preaching — as a brother in Christ translates his English words into Croatian — is still 8 years old.

He’s the little boy who traveled 1,100 miles in a white rental van with his home congregation — the Edmond Church of Christ in Oklahoma — to experience life in a tiny Mexican village.

That mission trip in spring 2002 was my son’s first.

“Brady is an intelligent, faithful boy devoted to God, but he’s grown up with instant messaging, microwave popcorn, handheld electronic games and 70-plus cable channels,” I wrote at the time. “I wanted him to see a different side of the world.”

Now, my firstborn child is 26 years old. He’s the youth minister for the Crestview Church of Christ in Waco, Texas. At this moment, he’s leading a team of 11 teens and six other adults (seven if you count me) who flew seven time zones around the globe to introduce Croatian children to Jesus.

Sitting here in a pew at the Kuslanova Church of Christ in a once-communist country, it’s easy to forget all the little moments that brought my little boy — Mary’s husband, 1-year-old Bennett’s father — to this point.

A post-pew congregation

MTABLES OF FELLOWSHIP play a key role in growth of church plant geared toward younger generation.

BY KALEB TURNER | FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

SEARCY, Ark.

A cappella singing and partaking of the Lord’s Supper characterize the Sunday morning service of the Living Way Church of Christ. Times of prayer and Scripture reading give the gathering a traditional feel.

At first glance, the year-old church plant simply raises the tally of this Arkansas town’s already heavy contingent of Churches of Christ. But that surface-level assumption ignores one visual piece of the Living Way’s church-plant puzzle — one distinct, perfectly round piece.

There are no pews. Instead, tables — 10 seats each — fill the space.

“One of the things we discovered is we really liked this idea of this connection and conversation that happened sitting around the table with each other,” said Craig Russell, one of the congregation’s four elders and an original member of the church planting team.

Searcy might seem like an unlikely locale for a church plant: Even before Living Way, this town of 24,000, about 50 miles northeast of Little Rock, boasted a dozen Churches of Christ with more than 4,500 men, women and children in the pews on a typical Sunday, according to a national directory published by 21st Century Christian.

‘We wanted this to be a Jesus crusade’

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

FORT WORTH, Texas — Emphasizing that Jesus loves all the little children — “red and yellow, black and white” — the 40th anniversary Crusade for Christ put a special emphasis on racial unity.

“We didn’t want this to be a black crusade,” Steve Cloer, minister for the Southside Church of Christ in Fort Worth, said in welcoming attendees to one night’s worship assembly. “We wanted this to be a Jesus crusade.”

“Amen!” responded the crowd, erupting into applause.

Every two years since 1979, hundreds of members of Churches of Christ have traveled to a different major city for the national crusade, which features a door-knocking campaign and a weeklong gospel meeting.

“Make no mistake about it,” said Victor Norris Sr., the 2019 event’s local coordinator and minister for the Richmond Avenue Church of Christ in Fort Worth. “The crusade has existed and been supported primarily by the African-American churches.”

But in Fort Worth — where congregations have come together for an areawide racial unity service the past three years — local volunteers wanted to make sure the recent crusade
For my son, a few encouraging words from Brenda Gordon, the longtime children’s ministry director at the Edmond church, made an eternal difference.

Go back a decade to when Brady served as a counselor for a summer Bible camp that Gordon helps lead. “It’s so cool to see someone come to camp as a camper and then come back as a counselor,” Gordon told him. “Before you know it, they’re a youth minister.”

A spark was lit — one that helped crystallize what my son wanted to do with his life.

Not everybody is a big fan of short-term missions. But — as Brady tells me later over dinner at a Croatian pizzeria — they’ve made a huge difference in his faith journey. “As I look back on times when I’ve felt closest to God, many of those times were on mission trips,” he says. That’s why, it seems to me, he’s so intent on providing similar opportunities for the teens in his youth group.

As we await our pepperoni pizza, Brady visits with the Crestview teens about their experiences helping with Champs Camp. It’s a Vacation Bible School-style day camp for Croatian children in Zagreb, the capital of this central European nation.

Taylor Vowels, 17, tells about a little girl who had trouble communicating in English. “So she went all the way to her backpack and pulled out her phone and started getting on Google Translate,” Taylor says. “That was just really sweet that she would put in that much effort to try and get to know me.”

Before Croatia, Evan Paltjon, 17, enjoyed past mission efforts in Guatemala, Honduras, Oklahoma City, San Antonio and San Francisco. “It’s a lot of fun to go with friends and serve other people,” Paltjon says. “It’s definitely something that God has called us to do, for sure. Just something that feels good to be able to impact people in a positive way and just be able to plant a seed for people in their faith and their well-being.”

I ask Brady if he has any advice for organizing a youth mission trip. Just a bit of his insight:

• “Choose your adults carefully.” Depending on the adult sponsors, parents may or may not allow their children to go.

• “Do criminal background checks.” Especially for an overseas trip, organizers can’t be too careful in planning and vetting.

• “Be vocal about why missions matter.” It’s helpful to emphasize the benefits both for the teens and those served.

• “Prepare the group to serve.” Pray for the team. Make sure each person is ready spiritually for the work.

As Brady wraps up his sermon, I thank God for all the faithful Christians who have blessed my son — and our entire family — and led us to this Croatian-speaking church on a picture-perfect Lord’s Day.

BOBBY ROSS JR. is editor-in-chief of The Christian Chronicle. Reach him at bobby.ross@christianchronicle.org. Follow him on Twitter at @bobbyross.
HAWAII

HONOLULU — The Pearl Harbor Church of Christ and the Honolulu Church of Christ teamed up to help the Laura’s Wish Foundation present new toys to the Kapiolani children’s hospital.

Members collected toys for several weeks before the recent delivery, Pearl Harbor minister Steven Byrne said.

At age 9 in 2017, Laura Jones of the Tusculum Church of Christ in Nashville was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer.

“What I want to do with ‘Laura’s Wish’ is to make a way for kids to get toys when they are in the hospital,” she wrote on her website, lauraswish.org. “Please help me show other kids how much they are loved. God is good. God is love. It is good to be loved!”

The Oahu congregations plan to make regular toy donations to the hospital, Byrne said.

TENNESSEE

HUNTINGDON — Each Wednesday night, about 75 children ride buses to a meal and Bible study at the Huntingdon Church of Christ.

Church leaders want to bridge the divide between those students — many poor and unchurched — and longtime members.

Rather than a rotating guest speaker series this summer, the congregation brought all the children and adults together for fellowship each Wednesday, preaching minister Tim Parish said.

Among the tools used: intergenerational conversations at round tables, short video discussion starters, a grilled ribeye-steak cookout and a service project preparing 250 “blessing bags” to be given to anyone in need.

“As a whole, this has been the most amazing thing I’ve ever been a part of in 25-plus years of preaching and ministry,” Parish said.

TEXAS

ARLINGTON — The ballgirl you see playing catch at Texas Rangers’ games with stars such as the Angels’ Mike Trout?

It could be Kaylee Roskam, 22, a member of the Merrick Drive Church of Christ in Ardmore, Okla., and a former All-State high school softball player.

Roskam, a student at Oklahoma State University, is in her second season as a Rangers’ ballgirl, said her grandmother Nelda Rhodes Norcross.

“I’m a proud grandmother,” said Norcross, who attends the Marietta Church of Christ in Oklahoma. “I just wanted to share this.”

Girls raise their hands to answer a question during Vacation Bible School at the Metro Church of Christ in Sterling Heights, Mich.

Summer means VBS

Cookies, Kool-Aid and Jesus. It’s the perfect combination, right? At many Churches of Christ, Vacation Bible School is a summer tradition.

“We had the largest crowd in the history of our 100-year-old congregation,” said Mark Reynolds, a deacon of the Hartselle Church of Christ in Alabama.

The record attendance in Hartselle: 157.

Minister Richard Price looks super at the “Faith Force: Heroes of Godly Living” VBS hosted by the North Green Church of Christ in Tupelo, Miss.

Levi Turner and Mackenzie Garrett at VBS at the Alexander City Church of Christ in Louisiana.

David’s brothers debate who will fight Goliath during a VBS skit performed by the Edmond Church of Christ in Oklahoma.
As Ken Spence walked through the charred remains of the Camden Church of Christ in New Jersey, he used Facebook to give his friends and followers a look at the damage. As he pointed the camera toward a collapsed portion of the church’s roof, the minister said, “We have a sunroof here.”

Humor, he said, has helped him and the congregation’s 50 members cope with the reality that their building was destroyed.

Fire officials told him that the blaze broke out between 4 and 5 a.m. July 8. It likely started in the kitchen, possibly due to an electrical issue.

“My first thought seeing it was, ‘Well, God, what are you about to do?’” Spence told The Christian Chronicle.

Members recently have been talking about how they can trust God more with their lives.

“The statement that kept ringing in my mind was: Great faith doesn’t come without great trial,” Spence said.

The building where the Camden Church of Christ has gathered for the past 30 years was built in the 1890s. Before housing the Camden church, it served as a Masonic lodge. But the building originally was the meeting place of a Presbyterian church.

While the inside was destroyed by the fire, Spence says the exterior walls seem to have held up well to the flames.

“The bones of the building are strong,” he said.

Unfortunately, the congregation does not have insurance for the building. Now church members are trying to figure out if they can rebuild or if they’ll need to find a new meeting place. For now, the nearby Collingswood Church of Christ, just 10 minutes down the road, has agreed to let them share their building.

The church is accepting donations at www.PayPal.me/CamdenChurchOfChrist.
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After Ebola, back to Africa

Dr. Kent Brantly sees a patient in Liberia before contracting Ebola in July 2014. He had moved to the capital of Monrovia in October 2013.

ROOTS OF FAITH: The youngest of six siblings, Dr. Kent Brantly grew up in the pews of the Southeastern Church of Christ in Indianapolis, where his father and two uncles have served as elders.

EDUCATION: Brantly earned a degree in Bible from Abilene Christian University in Texas and later studied at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

THANKFUL FOR PRAYERS: “I know that The Christian Chronicle wrote about us when I was sick and then in the aftermath of all that,” Brantly said. “And I know that was a touchpoint for a lot of people to hear about what was going on with us and to pray for us. ... I’m thankful for this opportunity for people to see, ‘Oh yeah! Remember when all of that happened? Remember, we prayed for that family! Look how God was faithful, how God answered those prayers. And now they’re going back to the mission field again. That’s awesome. That’s great! Praise God for that.”

TO HELP: To contribute financially to the missionaries, see their Christian Health Service Corps pages at www.healthservicecorps.org/author/brantly/ and www.healthservicecorps.org/author/snell/.

A MIRACULOUS DAY

From 2014 to 2016, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa claimed 11,325 lives, according to the World Health Organization.

Brantly, who woke up sick on July 23, 2014, credits prayers and antibodies for his recovery. He received one of the first doses of ZMapp, an experimental drug that seemed promising in trials involving monkeys but had not been tested on humans.

On Aug. 1, 2014, he was flown to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, where doctors were able to see that his potassium level was low and replenish it — something that could not have been done in Liberia and could have killed him, as Brantly noted at the time.

“Today is a miraculous day,” Brantly said as he was released from the hospital on Aug. 21, 2014, after nearly a month in isolation. “I’m thrilled to be alive, to be well and to be reunited with my family. ... God saved my life, a direct answer to thousands and thousands of prayers.”

After leaving the hospital, Brantly focused on using his newfound celebrity to call attention to the Ebola crisis.

He and Amber met with President Barack Obama during a visit to the Oval Office on Sept. 16, 2014.

BRANTLY: Over five years, God ‘equipped’ couple

an interview at the Southside Church of Christ in Fort Worth, his family’s home congregation. “I think we’ve grown and been equipped in ways during this five years that we were not before we went to Liberia.”

A week or two after his meeting with Schulz, Brantly got a call from Dr. Lance Plyler, director of World Medical Mission, the medical arm of the evangelical humanitarian aid organization Samaritan’s Purse.

On July 26, 2014, Plyler had stood at Brantly’s bedroom window in Liberia and confirmed the worst: “Kent, bud. We got your test results. And I’m really sorry to tell you it is positive for Ebola.”

Now, Plyler was calling to see if Brantly and his cousin Dr. Stephen Snell — who had talked and dreamed for years about their families serving as medical missionaries together — might move to Zambia.

Plyler cited a need for doctors at Mukinge Mission Hospital, a 200-bed facility in a rural area about 100 miles from the nearest supermarket. It’s about three hours from Zambia’s border with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

For the first time since Brantly overcame Ebola as the world watched, the opportunity — and the timing — seemed right.

“We’ve spent time praying and fasting and talking together about it ... and God has really opened the doors every step of the way,” said Brantly, who with his wife, Amber, a nurse, and their two children, ages 8 and 10, will make the move to the south-central African nation this fall.

Said Schulz: “I am excited for them. They are finally doing what, in their hearts, they have wanted to do for a long time.”

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After surviving Ebola, Dr. Kent Brantly and his wife, Amber, meet President Barack Obama during a visit to the Oval Office on Sept. 16, 2014.

Patients enter Mukinge Mission Hospital near Kampela, Zambia, a rural community about 100 miles from the closest supermarket. Dr. Kent Brantly and his cousin Dr. Stephen Snell will serve as medical missionaries there.

After surviving Ebola, Dr. Kent Brantly and his wife, Amber, meet President Barack Obama during a visit to the Oval Office on Sept. 16, 2014.

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He and Amber met with President Barack Obama at the White House.

His face appeared on the cover of Time as the magazine named “The Ebola Fighters” as its 2014 Person
of the Year.

“For the next few years after I recovered, we really tried to use the platform to call for help for the people of West Africa,” Brantly said, “and to share the message with all of society, but particularly with the church, of the importance of choosing compassion over fear.”

But by the end of 2017, Brantly intentionally stepped back.

He began turning down most public speaking engagements. He focused on teaching in the residency program at John Peter Smith Hospital, which serves Fort Worth’s poorest residents, and caring for low-income patients at the Stop Six Clinic on the city’s east side.

Meanwhile, the couple moved into an apartment complex full of refugees and immigrants.

Amber Brantly volunteered with World Relief, a Christian refugee resettlement organization, and Be The Bridge, which promotes racial reconciliation in the church.

“I think in the last five years God has really equipped her with some passions but also some skills that are going to be so beneficial in our work in Zambia,” Kent Brantly said of his wife of 11 years, a fellow ACU graduate whom he first met on a medical mission trip to Honduras. She declined an interview request.

WHY GOD SAVED HIM

People ask Kent Brantly if he believes God saved him for a reason.

Or if he feels compelled to make a difference because he lived while so many others died.

He struggles with the answers.

“To suggest that there was something about me that made God choose to save my life while he allowed 11,300 other people to die, I’m not really OK with that,” he told the Chronicle.

“Do I believe that God saved my life?” he added. “Do I think that God saved my life for a predetermined purpose because there was something he wanted me to do, like move to Zambia? I’m not sure I understand the work of God in the world that way.”

To suggest that there was something that made God choose to save my life while he allowed 11,300 other people to die, I’m not really OK with that.

Dr. Kent Brantly, discussing his recovery from the deadly Ebola virus

After reflecting a little more, Brantly boiled his feelings down this way: He’s grateful to God for saving his life. That gratitude inspires him to “live a life that is faithful to the calling he’s given me.”

“Right now, I think that means moving my family to Zambia to serve at a Christian mission hospital — to serve the poor and have compassion for the people in need and to participate in God’s work of making all things new and fixing the broken things in this world,” he said, not stopping to take a breath as he listed more and more reasons.

The Southside church will serve as the Brantly family’s sending congregation.

“Kent and Amber are great people, and the whole time they’ve been here, they’ve just always been trying to find ways to prepare themselves and equip themselves to engage in medical missions,” Southside preacher Steve Cloer said. “So it’s exciting to see that dream coming back around.

“I told the church, ‘The last time we sent Kent and Amber out, God did amazing things, and I have no doubt that he will do so again this time.’”

The Brantlys will partner with an organization called Christian Health Service Corps, as will Snell and his wife, Amy, who also have two young children with a third on the way. The Snells, both graduates of Harding University in Searcy, Ark., are members of The Hills Church of Christ in North Richland Hills, Texas.

Kent Brantly and Stephen Snell grew up together. In summer 2012, both worked with Brantly’s uncle, Dr. Frank Black, at Chimala Mission Hospital in Tanzania.

“It was the best month of my four years of residency,” Snell said, “just getting to be in that place with the Brantlys, facing those tough circumstances, caring for those very sick patients, being there in the trenches … with teammates and somebody with whom you could laugh and cry and just process all the different challenges and emotions.”

Joining those families in Zambia will be Madison Stone, a Southside member and Harding graduate. Stone will teach the Brantlys, facing those tough circumstances, caring for those very sick patients, being there in the trenches … with teammates and somebody with whom you could laugh and cry and just process all the different challenges and emotions.”

The team members have committed to serve at least two years at Mukiinge Mission Hospital in an area where most locals speak Kaonde, a Bantu language.

The Snells previously worked at Mukiinge from 2013 to 2015. The Brantlys have never visited Zambia. But they hadn’t stepped foot in Liberia either before they moved there.

“We’re trusting that God has opened the doors and he’ll pave the way,” Kent Brantly said.

With a laugh, he added, “If there’s running, heated water, we’ll be fine.”
However, the new church aims to reach younger generations — including millennials and Gen Z — who are slipping through the cracks of many congregations in Searcy and beyond.

During the school year, Living Way benefits from the draw of Harding University, about four miles from Searcy’s Willow Wind Event Center, where the church meets. Harding is associated with Churches of Christ, and 72 percent of its 964 first-time freshmen in the fall of 2018 identified with the fellowship.

A little more than a year old, the church plant averages 150 congregants each Sunday with small-group discussions and service opportunities throughout the week.

On a normal Sunday, just more than 100 of the churchgoers are between 15 and 35 years old, with 30 or so congregants more than 35 years old and 10 or so under the age of 15, church leaders said.

“We’re worshipping together. We’re praying together. We’re communing together, singing together, and there is lots and lots of connection happening,” said Russell, who works full time as Harding’s director of public safety.

**NOT ‘JUST SITTING THERE WATCHING’**

The church-planting team began its journey with a question: “How do we make a Sunday morning assembly where everyone feels connected, everyone is comfortable, and everyone is glad to come?”

The answer followed months of research and asking critical questions aimed at rediscovering and reconnecting to a younger generation of people who had left the church.

Russell and David Hall, another Living Way elder, came from the College Church of Christ, a 1,500-member Searcy congregation that meets across the street from Harding’s campus. The church-planting team’s analysis confirmed that young people who had belonged to a church in their childhood and adolescence, for whatever reason, fell away during and after young adulthood.

With data from the College church in hand and a committed team of about 30 people, the Living Way church set out to discover what it took to create a meaningful connection with young adults.

While the College church spearheaded the initial research effort, Living Way is self-supporting and independent with members volunteering in any necessary staff or ministry roles. Russell, who worked in children’s and youth ministry at the College church, said that the College church was incredibly generous with prayer, public support and monetary contributions from a special annual congregation-wide contribution outside their normal operating budget.

Hall, who is the manager of the Harding University Bookstore and Heritage Inn, said several things stuck out to the team as they interviewed others and discussed the needs of what this church might look like. They found that young adults desired a deep relationship with God and with people (including cross-generational relationships), a church that was “authentic,” a meaningful community, a congregation that valued their voice and a place where they could ask critical, below-the-surface questions.

“They weren’t satisfied with just sitting there watching,” Hall said.

Along the way, Hall, whose two children graduated from Harding, found that the things sought by the young adults weren’t far from the desires of his own heart, either.

“At the core, what people really need is connection,” Hall said, “and when I was growing up, we needed that too, but we just sat there and took it on the chin.”

**LIVING WAY: Church aims to reach younger generations**

Round tables replace the pew-after-pew standard at the Living Way Church of Christ. The tables have been one key, of many, to the church plant’s growth and success.

**FROM PAGE 3**

— The Christian Chronicle

**ACROSS THE NATION**

**AUGUST 2019**

**PHOTOS BY KALEB TURNER**
NO WAY ‘TO ESCAPE THE LOVE’

With pews not even part of the church’s equation and round tables as the centerpiece, the environment at Living Way reminds Stewart of references throughout Scripture where Jesus met around tables in fellowship with people.

“Our tables don’t have to be actual tables, but we need to facilitate ways for our church bodies to put their arms around people and cultivate relationships,” said Stewart, who participates in one of the church’s small groups with his fiancée. “The nice thing about round tables and planned discussion times, there is not really a way to escape the love.”

As Russell and Hall look to the future of the Christian church and of Living Way, they agree that connection is key for young and old people alike.

“I think most churches would admit that connection is not created sitting in the pews. That’s not how to do it,” Russell said. “From my perspective, we need to find a way to create connection that’s beyond the pews, and it’ll be different for every church. For us, it was something as simple as, ‘We don’t have pews anymore. We have tables.’”

‘I DIDN’T KNOW I WAS LOOKING FOR A CHURCH HOME’

Miranda Farthing, a recent Harding graduate, was one of the young adults whom Living Way sought to find and connect to their congregation.

For Farthing, church had become an obligation.

“I was to the point that I went out of habit,” said Farthing, who grew up in the University Church of Christ in Murray, Ky. “I actually drove four-and-a-half hours to go home. ... If I didn’t drive home for the weekend, I went wherever my friends were going that Sunday in Searcy or Little Rock. Church was difficult for me.”

After she started attending Living Way, Farthing said the connection she experienced transformed the obligation into something more meaningful. That manifested in her experiences on Sunday mornings — where the tables also benefit from a table leader who facilitates group discussion, communion and prayer — but also in the conversations and relationships she experienced as she and her housemate hosted the congregation’s young professionals devotional on Wednesday nights.

“At Living Way, I went with purpose to commune with the Lord and be with like-minded people. ... They are brave and vulnerable with each other, and they are peacemakers and encouragers,” Farthing said. “I felt like I was missing something when I missed a Sunday because I was involved in the church and in their lives. I didn’t know I was looking for a church home until I found it.”

Robert Stewart and his fiancée, Erin Fletcher, were looking for a closer congregation after making a two-hour round-trip to worship elsewhere each Sunday. Stewart is a graduate student in Harding’s communication sciences and disorders program and had served as a preaching intern at two Churches of Christ in Arkansas.

“Honestly, I was a little turned off ... at first,” Stewart said. “My thought was, ‘This town doesn’t need Christians to make another church; the town needs the church to live like Christ.’”

However, the new church’s focus won him over.

“I loved that they were trying to create an environment for people who are burned out on their church experience,” he said. “There are a lot of ‘nones’ right now. They’re not atheists, but they’re not Christians. They just don’t really believe in anything. I think those people are won back through relationships.”

Stay tuned for next month’s edition of ACROSS THE NATION.
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Matthew Bates
New Testament Scholar, Quincy University

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Cambodia

Phnom Penh — Cambodian Christian Ministries provides Bible instruction for more than 400 house church leaders who preach in villages across this Southeast Asian nation, according to a recent report by the nonprofit, which is supported by Churches of Christ.

Recently, Jeff and Karen Martin of Sikeston, Mo., traveled to Cambodia and worked with Pete and Phyllis Nuthak, teaching seminars for more than 100 men, including many house church leaders. Karen Martin and Phyllis Nuthak taught 50 ladies during Cambodian Christian Ministries’ first women’s seminar.

The ministry was launched by Sokhom Hun, who lost 16 members of his family to Cambodia’s brutal Khmer Rouge and was imprisoned by the regime before he escaped to the U.S. and converted to Christianity. He returned to Cambodia in 2009 to serve as a missionary to his people.

Kenya

Lodwar — Evangelists from the Nairobi Church of Christ Eastleigh in Kenya’s capital traveled to this city in the country’s northwest recently. They conducted a follow-up seminar for students of the World Bible School correspondence ministry.

“When a sufficient number of people in a locale have finished six Bible correspondence lessons, the church ... will send an evangelist to baptize those who are ready,” said missionary Charlotte Hackett, “and to connect them to a church or encourage them to start a new congregation.”

Lithuania

Moletai — Twenty-eight years after this Baltic nation became the first republic to declare independence from the Soviet Union, 77 youths and 35 counselors gathered at a former communist campsite to learn about Jesus.

“Jesus is my Shepherd” was the theme of the camp, which included a team from Harding University in Searcy, Ark.

“Many young people from our church served in the camp,” said Juozas Puodziukaitis, minister for a Church of Christ in Lithuania’s capital, Vilnius. “The Americans also made a great contribution. (It) was a real blessing to work together as a team.”

Togo

Kpatefi — In this slender, West African nation, members of the Lalekpe Church of Christ participated in a vigil of fasting and prayer for an upcoming gospel campaign in a nearby village. Three days of evangelism and baptisms followed, said minister Kowouvi Kossi. In recent months, multiple congregations have gathered for seminars and a preacher-training workshop.

United Kingdom

Northampton — A “real-life Mario Cart race” and other competitions were part of a youth weekend focused on spiritual fitness hosted by the Northampton Church of Christ, said minister Mark Hill.

Youths from as far north as Scotland and as far south as Bristol attended the “Maximise Your Strength” event.

“We all understand that physical training is good for us,” Hill said, “but what can we learn from that about our spiritual fitness and well-being?” Lessons focused on “encouraging one another, bearing each other’s burdens and spurring one another on.”

Correction: A story on Page 20 of the July Christian Chronicle incorrectly identified a congregation. Brad Blake, a former missionary to Nigeria, and his family worship with the Meadowbrook Church of Christ in Jackson, Miss.

BANTAYAN, Philippines — “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us ...”

A team of 20 Christians from six nations sang those words to the outgoing mayor of Bantayan, an island of about 144,000 people in the Philippines’ Central Visayas region, west of the island of Cebu.

The team traveled to Bantayan for the third March of Faith mission trip. They spent a week serving 492 families in an impoverished community. They also played games and taught Bible lessons to more than 400 children.

A Filipino-led ministry, Medical Action for Relief, Counseling and Healing (MARCH) for Christ, coordinates mission projects for the community, dubbed “MARCH Village.”

“The village kids, teens and even parents need to see examples of young Christians and experience how exactly Christ has worked in their lives,” said Minnie Lagria, a Filipino church member who works with the people of MARCH Village. “Without these examples, the kids cannot envision how they can better their lives.”

Team members represented Churches of Christ in the Philippines, United Kingdom, U.S., Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.
Agony, prayer and ‘tears of relief’ for mission workers injured in Haiti

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Christians in Haiti are thanking God and praising a U.S. congregation after a vehicle accident sent four mission team members to the hospital — and one to Florida via medevac.

“I seriously have never met people as selfless as this church congregation, particularly this team,” Stephanie Bhullar said of the Riverwood Church of Christ in Nashville, Tenn. Despite the trauma the team endured, “they did not let this derail them, and they finished what they came to do, which is to serve others.”

It was the third annual mission trip by Riverwood members to Haiti, where they worked with Children of the Promise near Cap-Haitien.

The nonprofit serves orphans and families in northern Haiti through nutrition and adoption programs and oversees Lagossette Christian School.

Bhullar and her husband, Roni, have worked with the ministry for four years. Her brother, Tim Hinton, a deacon of the Riverwood church, was the leader of a 16-member team, which included 11 children. One of them was Hinton’s son, Zach.

In the midst of cleaning, painting and serving ministries across the city, the team took a day off on July 9 to go to the beach. They traveled to the Labadie cruise port, a popular excursion point for Royal Caribbean passengers.

“The day was perfect,” Bhullar told The Christian Chronicle. “We brought coolers of sandwiches and snacks, and we ordered fresh-caught seafood that was cooked and delivered right to us on the beach.”

As they headed back, half of the group loaded into the ministry’s van. The rest took a hired “tap tap,” a modified truck with bench seating used across Haiti. The van made its way up a hilly road from the port and waited near a security tower for the tap tap to catch up.

It never arrived. About 10 minutes later, Bhullar got a call from her husband: “Hey, there’s been an accident. Tim’s OK. Zach’s OK. I’m OK. Jeremy is not OK.”

Details of the accident are unclear, but the tap tap apparently stalled on the hills, drifted backward and struck a rock, flipping onto its side. Bhullar left her phone with the group at the security tower and returned to the port, where she found cruise medics treating wounds and comforting crying children.

She also saw her brother and her husband, both covered in blood, trying to save Jeremy Hitchcock, a team member who had suffered a severe head wound.

Her brother, Tim Hinton, a physician, also was injured — so severely that he couldn’t walk. So he “crawled to Jeremy in the roadway,” Bhullar said.

Bhullar made calls from her husband’s phone, which was shattered and bloody. With help from an American nurse, a Swiss physical therapist and staffers from Children of the Promise, she made arrangements for Hitchcock, her brother and two other injured team members to be taken to a hospital in Milot, nearly two hours away.

The rest loaded into the van and returned to the Children of the Promise compound, where the ministry’s nurses and staff treated five team members for minor injuries. One required stitches. A Haitian nanny made a 40-minute journey by motorbike to assist.

At the hospital, Bhullar and Hinton spent hours making arrangements for a medevac flight for Hitchcock. They also had to keep Hitchcock awake due to concerns about brain injury. At 2:45 a.m., in the midst of their exhaustion and frustration, an American who works with Streethearts (another

She saw her brother and her husband trying to save Jeremy, a team member who had suffered a severe head wound. Her brother, a physician, also was injured — so severely that he couldn’t walk. So he ‘crawled to Jeremy in the roadway,’ she said.

The church at Lawtey cordially invites you to come and worship with them at any or all of their worship services.
nonprofit served by the mission team) arrived to help. Another volunteer came at 4:30 a.m., taking over arrangements and talking with Hitchcock’s wife in Tennessee.

After multiple attempts to find a U.S. hospital that would admit them, the group arranged a medevac flight for Hitchcock and Hinton. They endured a grueling, 30-minute ride to the airstrip in the back of a Land Rover over partially unpaved roads. Finally, nearly 18 hours after the accident, the two men were on their way to Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

“I cried tears of relief that they were finally in that airplane, packed full of more resources than all the hospitals in our area combined,” Bhullar said.

Hitchcock was treated for a broken clavicle and ribs, a fractured wrist, a small brain bleed and a torn scalp. There’s no sign of brain damage, Bhullar said.

Hinton suffered nerve damage and fractures in his sacrum bone, plus ruptured and bulging discs in his back. In Haiti, “he never complained about pain once,” Bhullar said of her brother. “He never took any pain meds. … It doesn’t seem like it was until he could finally relax on the medevac flight that he felt his own pain.”

The rest of the team, including Hinton’s son, took a day off and then went back to work, serving at the Second Mile Haiti ministry. They later spent long hours making repairs and cleaning the Children of the Promise facility before returning to Nashville.

“They are the most selfless people I know,” Bhullar said.

As for the accident, “it took a village of people to pull off that medevac and medical care in a place where it is far from easy,” she added. “Praise God for the friends and family that came together to get Jeremy to where he needed to be.”

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‘Champs’ meet Christ at Croatian camp

IN THIS ONCE-COMMUNIST nation, non-Catholic believers often face suspicion. But Churches of Christ report progress.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

ZAGREB, Croatia

For nine years, members of Churches of Christ in this central European capital have organized an annual outreach to children known as “Champs Camp.”

It’s not every year, though, that the weeklong, Christian-themed day camp mixes Vacation Bible School songs and lessons about Jesus with a venue normally reserved for dancing and drinking.

“This may be — I don’t know — the first VBS ever held in a nightclub,” quipped American missionary Steve Taliaferro, who arranged the alternate location amid rain and the threat of lightning at the normal outdoor site.

The 85 Croatian children who showed up didn’t seem to mind — or even notice — the whiskey bottles stacked high along the Aquarius Klub’s walls.

They were too focused on the Croatian and American teens — including a mission team from the Crestview Church of Christ in Waco, Texas — who led them through six stations: one for crafts, one for games, one for sports, one for skits and songs, one for snacks and one for Bible study.

“We walked in, and I saw two bars immediately,” said Grant Davis, 16, part of the Crestview youth group. “I was like, ‘What is this place?’ I found out later it’s a nightclub.”

He decided they might as well redeem the space.

‘IF YOU’RE A CROAT, YOU’RE A CATHOLIC’

Champs Camp — named after a similar event hosted by the Round Rock Church of Christ in Texas — introduces children to Jesus in this Catholic nation that once was a part of communist Yugoslavia.

A quarter-century ago, Croatia gained its independence after a four-year war between Croat and Serb forces that claimed an estimated 20,000 lives.

The crescent-shaped Balkan nation — about the size of West Virginia — has a population of 4.1 million, but that number keeps falling. Hundreds of thousands of Croatians have left to seek better opportunities in richer European Union countries.

As a democracy, Croatia allows religious freedom. But for many, national identity is tied closely to religious heritage — even if one doesn’t actually practice that faith.

“So if you’re a Croat, you’re a Catholic. Period,” said Jurica Lazar, managing director of Croatia for Christ, a television and print evangelism ministry. “If you’re Serbian, then you’re Orthodox.”

Lazar, who was raised Catholic, played bass clarinet for 23 years in the Croatian Armed Forces Band.

His search for deeper spiritual meaning began in the early 2000s after an infection killed one of his twin sons, who was five days old.

During Lazar’s journey of discovery,
Croatians usually averse to non-Catholics, Tinov said. “The soil is pretty hard, but things are changing. People are changing,” said Sejera Jilic, a convert whose husband, Mislar, is supported for the Kuslanova church. “There’s more knowledge about our churches. People are not so superstitious, and we have a positive vision with this camp,” added the mother of two, whose entire family helped with Champs donations. “The parents bring their kids and leave them. They trust us.”

The first year, organizers printed and distributed 6,000 brochures inviting children to attend, said Lana Ilic, right, daughter of minister Mislav Ilic, who was the missionary to Croatia. “We were out in city parks and neighborhoods and all kinds of places for two months … talking to parents about two months … talking to parents and inviting (their children) and that is how we put children’s Bibles in their homes,” Ilic said. “It’s not only that we put children’s Bibles into children’s hands in the public schools,” Tinov said for Croatia for Christ leaders in the Zagreb Bible church, which is very influential here, they start to look at us with different eyes. Again, I don’t believe in coincidences.”

PEOPLE ARE CHANGING
Lana Jilic, right, daughter of minister Mislav Jilic and his wife, Sljajana, helps load a skit during Champs Camp.

Champs Camp started at Zagreb’s Lake Jarun, a major recreational area in this city of 800,000. Most of the campers live in multi-story apartment buildings in the city’s heavily popu- lated southwest quadrant. Roughly 60 percent of the children are repeat campers from the previous year, which Taliaferro takes as a positive sign. With the success of the original camp, leaders added a second location — the Kuslanova church building — that serves about 20 children in a more central part of Zagreb. Some of the children who start as campers but grow too old to attend become “junior volunteers.” They work alongside Croatian and American church members to make Champs Camp happen.

“I guess part of what keeps me going is seeing all the teenagers that have come out of other camps and want to stay involved with Champs Camp,” Taliaferro said. “I just can’t believe that they teach children about it.” What would it take for her to become a true believer?"
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- **Job Requirements:**  
  - Master’s degree in Social Work or relevant field preferred  
  - Bachelor’s degree in Social Work or relevant field required  
  - Experience with out-of-home placed children  
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  - Faithful member of a Church of Christ

- **Salary/Benefits:** Competitive salary, health, retirement, on-campus housing

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AFTER 22 YEARS IN AFRICA, a missionary family shares life lessons, wisdom and their thoughts on the future.

From church planting to disciple making

BY LYNN Mc MILLON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

There’s no such thing as a “mission to Africa.” Just ask Marty and Louise Koonce.

The continent of 54 countries is home to more than 1.2 billion souls and more than 2,000 languages.

The Koonces, 1990 graduates of Harding University in Searcy, Ark., spent a combined 22 years serving as missionaries in two African nations — each with its distinct people, languages, culture and customs.

In 1997 they joined the church-planting Togo Evangelistic Mission team in the slender West African nation east of Ghana.

In 2008, they moved to the East African nation of Rwanda, where a 1994 genocide claimed more than 800,000 lives. They served as part of the Africa Transformation Network, focusing on discipleship.

This June they began another difficult transition — to life back “home” in the U.S.

The Warrenton Church of Christ in Virginia has dutifully supported their work from the beginning. The Glenwood Church of Christ in Tyler, Texas, became a co-sponsor in 2008, and churches in Delaware, Illinois, Colorado, Arkansas, Mississippi and Oklahoma have helped along the way.

The Koonces have four sons: Tucker, Taylor, Tanner and Trevor. After graduating from high school, each moved to the U.S.

Marty Koonce spoke with The Christian Chronicle about his family’s years in Africa and their transition to the U.S.

What attracted you to mission work?

We were attracted to missions by the stories from great missionaries. To hear from them of God impacting entire people groups as well as the deep individual changes brought about through becoming a disciple of Jesus was very compelling.

It was also a blessing for both of us to do short-term missions and experience some of the goodness of service abroad.

How did you first select Togo and then Rwanda?

We were fairly comfortable in our lives in Virginia but through a series of prayerful encounters were encouraged to seek missions in Africa.

The Togolese team was seeking to expand in 1996 and had prayed for us since 1993. After three more months of prayer, we took the next step and joined their team and a year later we were on the field in Togo with a seven-year commitment.

Concerning Rwanda, we decided to prayerfully seek other opportunities to serve as our work in Togo was coming to a close. We surveyed Rwanda in 2005, which was 11 years after the genocide that left a million people dead and decimated the nation. After the survey, we were overwhelmed with the need in Rwanda and began discussing the opportunity with our supporters. With their support we moved from Togo to Rwanda in 2008.

Describe some of the challenges your family faced.

One of the greatest difficulties was leaving our families behind in the U.S. and having them all grow up or grow old without us. Even that, though, has been mitigated by the advancements in communication and travel in the last two decades.

Living daily in different cultures and languages has been challenging. The sicknesses and spiritual darkness we faced in Togo were overwhelming. We would not have survived without a great team, and it was a truly great team of missionaries.

In Rwanda, the greatest difficulty was leaving off the church-planting paradigm for disciple-making, which moved us into a service role. This was difficult on our pride — a good thing, as we could no longer trace the spiritual fruit back to us personally. Ironically, the fruit has been much more bountiful.

In truth, every challenge and sacrifice has been met with blessings from God that really outweighed the difficulties.

Describe the churches you leave behind.

The Rwandans, before the genocide, were considered the most Christian nation in Africa.

In Togo, our focus was church planting and leadership development. In Rwanda our focus was discipleship groups since we were not allowed to work there as we had in Togo.

In Togo we witnessed the failings and fall of voodoo among the Watchi people. The work was slower and more difficult. In Rwanda, we were able to see the impact of Christian discipleship change people into those who truly love each other.

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transition, first from Togo to Rwanda and now from Rwanda back to the U.S. The churches in Togo have now persisted since our departure and have withstood the challenges of the last 11 years without missionaries. They have taken ownership of their faith. Some have disappeared, and some that we thought would surely die have found their faith again and are growing. There have been new churches as well.

In Rwanda, the growth has been greater, but less obvious. As we were not allowed to plant churches as we had in Togo, the form of house churches or smaller families of Christ took root and has grown beyond our ability to count, even spreading into the surrounding countries of Congo, Uganda and Burundi.

What are your plans now?
Our churches have helped us to have a year of transition. The first six months back will operate as a normal furlough, being filled with church visits and reporting as we formally close out the work and encourage them to continue in missions. The six months following will be filled with the search for new employment and trying to settle in to life in America after two decades in Africa.

We look forward to reconnecting with our families. We will also attend some reentry transitional training in Oklahoma City and Colorado during the first six months. We were encouraged to retool and prepare in advance for the transition. Since Marty has worked in sports development and leadership for Rwanda and is finishing an MBA and sports management masters, he will look for employment as a university athletic director or a position in professional sports management.

What do Christians in the U.S. need to know about mission work?
Missions in the world is changing, and that means that Christians in the U.S. need to prepare to support those changes. There has been a wonderful shift of understanding of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the differences between making disciples and planting churches. This should be seen as more of a restorative shift to the focus on relationships leading people to Jesus and becoming his disciples. Those relationships are built through service. We were forced by Rwanda to display objectively measurable socio-economic impact in order for our visas to be granted. In retrospect, we see that Rwanda didn’t want more churches since many churches were involved in the genocide itself. What they needed and wanted was discipleship to Jesus and families of believers (churches) that make more disciples.
MID-SOUTH YOUTH CAMP
HENDERSON, Tenn. — Mid-South Youth Camp, operated by Freed-Hardeman University, has raised $1 million to build a new dining hall on the campgrounds off U.S. Highway 45.
The goal: $1.65 million.
The dining hall that has served the camp since 1963 was converted from its original purpose as a nightclub and dance hall.
Plans for the new, 8,000-square-foot structure call for a commercial kitchen, dining space for nearly 300, directors’ quarters, a nurse’s station, a conference room for counselors, a camp store, restrooms, an office and a laundry room.

HIGHER EDUCATION
LUBBOCK CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
LUBBOCK, Texas — Lubbock Christian University’s board of trustees has appointed an interim leadership team after the departure of President Tim Perrin, who left to become senior vice president of Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif.
The team consists of Al Roberts, president of the LCU Foundation and a former LCU board member; Foy Mills, provost and chief academic officer; and Brian Starr, executive vice president.
The three will work closely together to manage daily operations until a new president is appointed.
“President Perrin has a talented, seasoned team in place that is very capable of keeping the momentum going as we search for the next individual God has in mind to lead LCU,” board Chairman Terry Creech said.

MEDICAL MINISTRY
IHCF/AFRICAN CHRISTIAN HOSPITALS
KUMASI, Ghana — Prisoners in this West African city received medical care and words of encouragement from members of Churches of Christ.
The medical mission inside the Manhyia Local Prison, which holds about 250 inmates, was a partnership between Searcy, Ark.-based International Health Care Foundation/African Christian Hospitals, which oversees the Church of Christ Mission Clinic in Kumasi, and the Bomso Church of Christ.
“We were able to bless these inmates with malaria treatment medicine, antibiotic needs, wound care, deworming medicines,” the ministry reported in a recent newsletter. “We thought this was an especially good match since the Bomso church has an ongoing prison ministry in this facility.”

PREACHER TRAINING
MALAWI INT. BIBLE INSTITUTE
DEDZA, Malawi — Two instructors at this southern African institute, which is associated with Churches of Christ, received their bachelor’s degrees from Sunset International Bible Institute in Lubbock, Texas. They are Solomon Wellos and Herbert Phuka.
“This opens the door to MIBI being a fully accredited school,” said Mike Ferris, president of the school’s board of trustees. That means that the institute “will be able to offer full bachelor’s and preaching degrees to students from around the world.”
During a visit to Malawi, Ferris worshiped with the Salima-Kapezi Church of Christ, where MIBI students and staff had recently completed a preaching campaign. The campaign resulted in 21 baptisms.
CHIMALA SCHOOL OF PREACHING
CHIMALA, Tanzania — In this East African nation, 21 men are in their second year of training at the school, which is associated with Churches of Christ. Thirteen are in a Swahili-language degree program, and eight are pursuing their degrees in English.
“The students are in class during the week, and on the weekends they are out doing evangelistic work with the area congregations,” said administrator Menard Swilla. This summer they began working with the Gospel Chariot ministry.
The school is “completely dependent upon funds for support from America,” Swilla said, “but we are hoping to change some of that through a farming project.”

Caribbean Lectureship pays tribute to Botham Shem Jean
Loved ones of Botham Shem Jean, a native of the island of St. Lucia, enjoy a moving moment at the recent 49th annual Caribbean Lectureship in Southampton, Bermuda.
Above, the Jean family poses for a photo with Ken Dye, the lectureship’s founder. At left, Brandt Jean, Botham’s younger brother, leads two songs in his brother’s memory.
Botham Jean, 26, was shot to death in his own apartment by an off-duty Dallas police officer last year. He was a member of the Dallas West Church of Christ and a graduate of Harding University in Searcy, Ark. “He was a great song leader and a big part of the Caribbean Lectures,” Dye said after Botham Jean’s death.
A CAPPELLA: Singing is ‘as important as anything we do’

FROM PAGE 1

a dozen musicians and theologians and even a speech pathologist, seeks to give the students what Lancaster called a “comprehensive a cappella worship education.”

Or, as Bryant Malone put it, boot camp for song leaders.

“We had 12 hours of classes per day!” said the music minister for the Southside Church of Christ in Rogersville, Ala. But the long days were rewarding, he added, as was the camaraderie he built with his fellow ministers, who gave each other honest feedback.

“You’re not really going to get that at home,” Malone said.

‘SOMETHIN’ ‘BOUT SUNDAY MORNING’

The workshop took place just off Ira North Memorial Boulevard, a recently renamed swath of Gallatin Pike, in the meeting place of the Madison Church of Christ.

In its early 1980s heyday, when the dynamic, red-jacket-wearing North preached for the church, its membership topped 5,100 souls.

Nearly four decades later — after years of neighborhood gentrification, a church plant or two and a few disagreements — about 800 worship with the 85-year-old congregation.

But the auditorium’s lower level was packed on the Sunday when the Worship Leader Institute was in town. Lancaster’s son, Anthony, the Madison church’s worship minister, led a contemporary hymn, “Behold Our God.” Church members poured from the pews, responding to the invitation. Ministers and elders knelt with them in prayer.

Then the institute’s teachers and students gathered on stage as Malone led the soulful “Somethin’ ‘Bout Sunday Morning,” written by his brother, Jerome.

After worship, the students were in classes by 1 p.m. In the church’s small chapel, some reviewed hard-to-lead spots in new hymns. Others listened to Carlus Gupton, a ministry professor from Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., as he taught about the DISC profile system to help identify their behavioral differences and strengths.

MORE THAN JUST WAVING HANDS

In the church’s foyer, a broad circle of students counted off “one, two, three, four” as Gyula Cseszkó discussed song-leading technique.

There’s more to it than just waving your hand, said Cseszkó, conductor of the Ballarat Symphony Orchestra in Australia. The movements must be precise, and different time signatures require different patterns.

Cseszkó, known as “Jules,” worships with the Southeast Church of Christ in Melbourne. He attended his first Worship Leader Institute about 10 years ago, when there was a smaller group of students, and said the experience was life-changing.

“Now, this thing is a juggernaut,” he said, “and I feel blessed to be a part of the effort to revive the culture of a cappella singing in our brotherhood.”

‘A TOOLBOX OF SKILLS’

During the afternoon, small groups of students met with Keith Lancaster and his wife, Sharon, to get to know each other and share dreams for their congregations.

“I’ve seen such growth and change in these men,” Sharon Lancaster said. “They accumulate all these tools to use that they really didn’t have before ... a toolbox of skills.

“It really means a lot to me when we go to their congregations, and we see that it’s changed them.”

She keeps a list of the students and prays for them by name.

“I tell them, ‘You don’t get off my list until you pass away,’” she said.

WORSHIP PLANNING AND FLASH MOBS

The classes continued throughout the week. Students learned about voice care from Melissa Kirby, a speech-language pathologist who sings with the a cappella Zoe Group. They worked with music professors including Mike Rogers of Abilene Christian University and appeared in videos filmed by the Lancasters’ daughter, Melissa, of Durant Studios.

They also participated in a “flash mob” at the Rivergate Chick-fil-A, an annual tradition in which they disperse throughout the restaurant before collectively breaking into song. This year’s selection was “Lean on Me.”

Malone, who is used to leading singing for predominantly black congregations, said he enjoyed swapping notes with his brethren from predominantly white churches.

He appreciated the focus on detailed worship planning and shared his thoughts on spontaneous, emotion-driven worship. One takeaway from the institute, he said, is a desire to integrate the worship styles — and the worshipers.
Worship Leader Institute students and surprised customers sing Bill Withers’ “Lean on Me” during a flash mob at the Rivergate Chick-fil-A in Madison.

If song leaders “do what God really wants us to do, we connect with them, help them make it through their struggles, help them through their faith,” Malone said. “We sing to have a connection with God and a connection with each other.”

‘A FULLER THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP’

The students left with homework. Every year, Keith Lancaster encourages the students to commit to a yearlong service project. Some choose to initiate cross-cultural, multietnic (and sometimes multilingual) worship services, bringing black, white and Latino believers together to join their voices and share their lives.

Other students commit to spread their love of a cappella to the next generation, launching Sunday school classes for children and teaching them to read music using “shape notes,” a method many Churches of Christ haven’t used since the mid-1900s.

The institute’s students range in age from teenage to golden years. One of this year’s participants was John Lim, a junior at Harding University in Searcy, Ark., who grew up in the Pasir Panjang Church of Christ in Singapore.

The workshop was a lot more than “How to Lead Songs on Sunday 101,” Lim said. In addition to technique, he learned to appreciate “a fuller theology of worship” and “a fuller theology of worship leading.”

“Often I hear that the reason we sing is because Scripture commands it; it’s a rule we need to keep,” Lim said. “If that’s as far as our worship theology goes, then, of course, our churches seem lifeless and our song leaders unenthusiastic. Of course Christians come to Sunday assemblies lethargic and leave relieved that it’s over.

“That’s why the ‘worship wars’ happened — and are still happening — because we believe that worship is a set of dos and don’ts.”

Worship isn't merely a rule, Lim said. Instead, it is “entering the sacred presence of the Lord and falling flat on our faces before him when we behold his surpassing magnificence.”

That’s a lesson Keith Lancaster hopes more song leaders will learn. Universities associated with Churches of Christ, including Harding, offer multiple degrees in Bible and ministry. Many churches require their preachers to earn such a degree.

“But we don’t do nearly enough to encourage our song leaders, those who plan and lead worship, to attain professional training,” he said. And worship “is as important as anything we do. Of course, it’s an everlasting blessing that we’re going to get to worship forever — and sing.”

SEE VIDEOS from the Worship Leader Institute (and the Chick-fil-A flash mob) at christianchronicle.org.

**Milestones**

Showcasing the moments of your life and the lives of loved ones.

### Remembering

**Evangelist**

Arnelious Crenshaw Jr.

Arnelious Crenshaw Jr.
Oct. 27, 1949 — Aug. 28, 2017

**Little Did We Know**

Little did we know that morning God was going to call your name. In life we loved you dearly; in death we do the same. It broke our hearts to lose you, but you did not go alone, for part of us went with you the day God called you home. Glandora (Momma) our first and best teacher, our schoolmaster! Thank you for giving us Arnelious, our brother, friend, godfather who continued to bring to life God’s Word. As we approach the second anniversary of your passing, dear brother, we remember how our heavenly Father blessed you with the ability to transform the minds of your listeners back into the ancient world in order to introduce us to Biblical principles. Then you would return us back to present time with the challenge of applying God’s Word. You left us precious memories; your love is still our guide; and though we cannot see you, you’re always by our side.

See Psalm 27:13 (KJV)

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**Birthdays**

Odessa Hull

100 years

Odessa Hicks Hull of Ventura, Calif., celebrated her 100th birthday on June 14.

She was born in Sulphur, Okla., the eighth daughter of Jason and Alice Hicks. Her father was an elder while the family lived in Clovis, N.M., and Riverside, Calif.

Odessa has tirelessly supported the church all her life. In her teens, she worked at her local Vacation Bible School and taught Bible classes. As an adult, she has been a fundraiser for Associated Women of Pepperdine, helping many Christian children attend Pepperdine. She has also raised funds for missionaries. At 90 years of age she won a teaching award.

Odessa married Mel Hull in 1939. He died in 2008. Mel was an elder while they lived in Riverside and later in Ventura.

Odessa has been a real estate agent. Among her earliest recollections of working was thinking she had “died and gone to heaven,” because she had a coffee and ice cream during her coffee break.

She and Mel had three children. One son, Dave, has passed away. Richard and Dan, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren are the joys of her life.

Odessa’s words of wisdom: Do everything you see to do, and be the best Christian you can be!

(continued on page 27)
involved all of God's children.

“God has blessed us here in the city of Fort Worth that we have already established some great relationships between the African-American churches, the Caucasian churches and some of the Hispanic churches as well,” Norris said.

Those churches rallied to support the crusade and host “foot soldiers” who fanned into neighborhoods to invite residents to worship.

The predominantly black Forest Hill Church of Christ hosted a community job fair, while the majority-white Southside Church of Christ coordinated a health fair.

“We believe that the kingdom, the church, is not just for one group of people,” Norris said. “The Bible teaches us clearly that Christ died for all. ... The main theme of the crusade year in and year out is, ‘That we all be one.'”

For the first time since Jimmy Allen spoke at the 1991 crusade in Detroit, a white Christian delivered one of the nightly sermons.

Monte Cox, dean of the College of Bible and Ministry at Harding University, preaches at the crusade.

Cox, part of a keynote lineup that included Ervin Seamster Jr., Orpheus J. Heyward, Jerry Houston, Randall F. Tucker Sr. and Terry Wallace. Cox preaches for the Downtown Church of Christ in Searcy, Ark. He serves as dean of the College of Bible and Ministry at Harding University.

“In a few minutes, when I put the microphone down, I hope you’re not saying, ‘We should wait another 30 years’” to invite a white speaker, Cox joked as he began a sermon in which he asserted that “truth without grace isn’t the whole truth, and grace without truth isn’t true grace.”

In the past, a single main speaker has preached all week. For many years, that was Jack Evans, former longtime president of Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, the only historically black college associated with Churches of Christ.

But now, at age 79, Harrison is stepping aside to devote attention to his wife, Frances, who is battling cancer.

“She’s my Everything,” said Harrison. “She’s my Everything.”

The first crusade four decades ago brought 3,000 people to a convention center in Chicago, recalls Daniel Harrison, longtime minister for the Chatham Avalon Church of Christ in Chicago.

The 2019 crusade, held at the Fort Worth Sheraton, where vendors set up booths and afternoon workshop sessions were presented.

At the Southside church, a racially diverse group of church members — some from Fort Worth, others from out of town — held hands as they prayed after the final morning of door knocking.

“I just love the unity,” Pat Slaughter, a member of the Pembroke Park Church of Christ in West Park, Fla., told her fellow Christians. “I really, really do.”

From keynoting the last few crusades.

In the past, a single main speaker has preached all week. For many years, that was Jack Evans, former longtime president of Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, the only historically black college associated with Churches of Christ.

But now, at age 79, Harrison is stepping aside to devote attention to his wife, Frances, who is battling cancer.

“God has blessed me all these years to help lead this,” he said. “Now, a younger man — Leonardo Gilbert — will be the one to carry it on.”

Gilbert, longtime minister for the Sheldon Heights Church of Christ in Chicago, said he’s excited about the crusade’s future.

“Can we come together, whether you are liberal or conservative or whatever?” said Gilbert, who previously served as the crusade’s outreach director. “I think that’s what I’m excited about: galvanizing people over something we can agree on. There’s many things we can disagree on. But can we come together just to save a soul?”

Another key transition is John Dansby’s decision to give up his role as the crusade’s staff and finance director after 30 years.

Dansby, longtime minister for the Russell Road Church of Christ in Shreveport, La., has served since the 1989 crusade in New Orleans.

But at age 81, he believes it’s time to focus on his church duties and respon-
**Memorials**

**Joanne Wilson**

**1930-2019**

Joanne Goulden Wilson of Edmond, Okla., passed on Mother’s Day, May 12, 2019. She was born on May 15, 1930 (the day after Mother’s Day). Last Christmas Eve she celebrated 70 years of marriage to Reagon Wilson Sr.

Born and reared in Marshall, Texas, Joanne left to marry the young airman she would follow around the world. For the next 23 years they lived from coast to coast, north to south, and on three continents.

Joanne served in many roles in many churches, notably as a deacon’s wife in Victorville, Calif.; as a “single mom” at the Airline Drive Church in Bossier City, La., while Reagon was in Vietnam; as a preacher’s wife in Tachikawa, Japan, Bitburg, Germany, San Rafael, Calif., Plain Dealing and Crowley, La.; and as an elder’s wife and women’s teacher at the Edmond Church of Christ.

After all their moves, she spent half her life in Edmond. In 1974, with an empty nest, they moved to serve at Oklahoma Christian University. Joanne mothered a generation of students in a variety of roles at OC.

She is survived by Reagon; three children: Vonda of Amber, Okla., Reagon Jr. of Tinton Falls, N.J., and Ward of St. Louis, Mo.; 9 grandchildren; 19 greats-grands; and four great-great-grands.

**Sherly Kurien Scott**

**1968-2019**

Sherly Kurien Scott, 51, of Pearland, Texas, now of Edmond, Okla., passed on Mother’s Day, May 12, 2019. She was born on August 3, 1919, in Houston.

Sherly’s heart was big, and her interests for God’s kingdom were even bigger. Over the years she worked tirelessly in her church family, giving to various Christian charities and loving her neighbors, all the while being a wonderful wife and mother, homeschooling nine children, and showing the rest of us what being a Proverbs 31 woman looks like in the 21st century. She taught many lessons through her actions, responses, and everyday living.

When Sherly’s mission field moved to cancer treatment facilities, her drive to spread the Gospel message and love of Christ only increased. Knowing God had chosen her for this mission, she did her best to bring glory to Him with every conversation and contact she encountered.

Not wanting her battle to be in vain, Sherly’s charge to those of us who knew her consists of our glorifying God with every opportunity granted (regardless of the mission field God chooses for us), honoring those around us by loving unconditionally, living a life above reproach according to scripture, and genuinely dying to ourselves.

Sherly is survived by her husband Cris; children: Hannah, Stephen, Daniel, John, James, Caleb, Paul, Peter and Rebekah; her parents: Baby and Mary Kurien of Pearland, Texas; her siblings: Lovely (Shaji), John of Denton, Texas, and Binoy (Leena) Kurien of Pearland, Texas; six nieces and two nephews; and many aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends.

For those who knew Sherly, she truly was far more precious than rubies.
Billy G. Skillman
1921-2019

Billy G. Skillman died July 1, 2019, at the age of 97.
Skillman served the Lord in missions in the northern United States and abroad. He
preached for the Tujunga (Calif.) Church of Christ, was associate minister of the Jack’s
Creek (Tenn.) Church of Christ, and was the first singles minister for the
Green Lawn Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas.
Skillman, along with his wife Eupha, were best known for serving Christian colleges. With 10 college
degrees, he was able to serve in many areas. Skillman taught speech and drama at Harding University,
was director of the Speech and Hearing Clinic at Pepperdine University, taught psychology and communications at Freed-Hardeman College,
was chairman of the speech department at Lubbock Christian University, and retired while serving as
chairman of the psychology department of Faulkner University.
He is buried next to his wife, Eupha, in the City of Lubbock Cemetery, Lubbock, Texas, and is
survived by his three children, seven grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren.

Robert David
“Bob” Spainhower
1933-2019

Bob Spainhower, 86, of Tallahassee, Florida, passed away Tuesday, May 28, as he prepared to travel
after a family wedding in Campbellsville, Ky. He died peacefully
from heart failure with his wife, Joan, at his side. Bob, the youngest of Thomas R. and Marie Tumlinson
Spainhower’s three children was born in Dos Palos, Calif on Jan. 18, 1933, and grew up in Antioch, Calif. He attended Abilene Christian
College (now University). As a U.S. Navy Petty Officer First Class (E6), Bob served as a radar navigator during
the Korean conflict. He then began a career as an engineer, earned a B.S. and M.Ed. from the University of California at Pomona and became a schoolteacher in Florida. His
defense engineering career lasted through retirement.
Bob’s sparkling blue eyes and ready smile encouraged people to feel better, to sing enthusiastically,
and to be hopeful. Bob served the Church of Christ in California and Florida as a song-leader with fervor for 70 years. He taught numerous
Bible class topics in many churches. Frequently called a “Bible scholar,”
he thought of himself only as a lifelong student of the scriptures.
He commented recently to family and friends that he had completed his “Bucket List.” He wanted his family reunited once before he
died, which occurred in January 2018, when he and Joan celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in Florida. Secondly, he wanted to see
his granddaughter, Phaedra, marry her love, Carl, which she did just prior to his death.
Bob is remembered with love by his wife, Joan; daughter, Debra Isaac of Stow, Mass.;
granddaughter, Phaedra (Carl) Yung of Long Beach, Calif;
granddaughter, Nichelle (Josh) Isaac-Orvis and great-grandsons,
Benjamin and Nicholas Orvis, all of Silver Spring, Md. ; daughter, Lori (Bill) Dixon of Campbellsville, Ky;
daughter, Rebecca Spainhower (Scott Darley) and granddaughter, Lila Darley, all of Hollis, N.H.; daughter
Joy Spainhower (Kris Takasumi) of Seattle, Wash.; sister-in-law, Ruth L. Shaddinger of Lake City, Fl.; niece,
Michele (Bruce) Amssild of Dania Beach, Fl.; and numerous relatives and friends.
Bob is predeceased by his parents; brother, Thomas H. Spainhower of Antioch, Calif., a former church el-d-
sister, Eleanor S. Grasham (Dr. William W. Grasham) of Carrollton and Abilene, Texas; niece, Suzanne
Spainhower of Antioch, Calif.; and
great-niece, Rachel Blasingame of Mesquite, Texas.
A Celebration of Life service is scheduled in late summer.

Dr. Gerald Kendrick
1930-2019

Dr. William Gerald Kendrick, 88, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2019.
He is survived by
his wife of 64 years, Marjorie Jane Kendrick, his son, William Les Kendrick.
his wife, Donna,
and their daugh-
ter, Jessica Ross. He is preceded in
death by his parents, W.L. Kendrick and Musette Kendrick, and daughter, Karen Sue Kendrick. He had a
lifelong commitment to teaching and
was highly regarded by many former students and others who appreciated
his insights and approach to biblical interpretation.
Gerald was born October 19,
1930, to W. L. Kendrick and Musette
Ware Kendrick in Minden, La. He
grew up in Magnolia, Ark., and
Shreveport, La., where he graduated
from high school. He went to Har-ding College in Searcy, Ark, where
he received a B.S. in chemistry and
an M.A. in Christian Education. He
did his master’s work at Texas Tech in history and German and later received a Ph.D. in New Testament from Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

He taught Bible at Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, and Christian College of the
Southwest in Mesquite, Texas. He was one of the founding faculty at Lubbock Christian University, where
he taught Bible and Greek for 10
years. Later, he served as an adjunct professor in Religious Studies at the University of New Mexico for 15 years. He held pulpit ministries in
Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas and New
Mexico.
In the final stage of his career he
served as a translation consultant for
United Bible Societies, working with
native translators in Navajo in New
Mexico, Upik in Alaska, and Huong
Lau, and Vietnamese in the U.S., as well
as in American Sign Language. While working with translations, he
travelled throughout the U.S. and was able
travel to numerous countries, including Canada, Thailand, Ger-
many, and England. He served on
the board for Vietnamese Bible, Inc.,
after he retired from UBS.
In retirement, he loved reading, photography, traveling, and teaching
Bible classes at church.
If desired, friends may make
memorial contributions to the Gerald
and Marjorie Kendrick Bible Scholar-
ship at Lubbock Christian Uni-
versity or to Vietnamese Bible, Inc.,
Midland, Texas.

With Appreciation

The Christian Chronicle appreci-
ates and acknowledges generous gifts
received in honor of Dixie Bozman and
the Lynn and Joy McMillon Endow-
ment fund and in memory of Irma
Perkins Barns and Virgil Bentley.

Submit your wedding announcements, birth announcements, memorials or tributes to milestones@christianchronicle.org. Submissions start at $25.

Deadline for next two issues: August 9 and September 6

Contact Tonya Patton at: tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org.

NAMED: Harold Shank, as distinguished visiting professor of Bible, Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City. Shank, former president of Ohio Valley University in Vienna, W.Va., serves an an elder of the Memorial Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City. John Weaver, as academic dean of Florida College in Temple Terrace, Fla. Weaver previously served as dean of library services and educational technology at Abilene Christian University in Texas. He preached for the South 14th and Oak Church of Christ, a non-institutional congregation in Abilene.

Lantz and Jessica Howard and their four daughters are off on a new adventure — to serve with the Park Avenue church.

Full-Time Minister
The Church of Christ in Cortez, Colo., is accepting resumes for a full-time minister. If interested, send your resume to:

cortezcofc@live.com

Church of Christ
Attn: Minister Search
PO Box 145
Cortez, CO 81321

Full-Time Preacher - Winnsboro, Texas
Winnsboro Church of Christ is seeking a full-time pulpit minister with at least five years preaching/ministry experience (preferred) with Church of Christ congregations. This person must be deeply dedicated to the truth of the Scriptures and be able to show the relevance of its message. We prefer a family man with the ability to lovingly connect with saints of all ages. An individual with a Bible degree from a Christian university and mission trip experience is a plus. We are searching for a minister who will nurture, uplift, and spur our members to an ever-present love of the Lord and consistent spiritual growth. We seek a preacher who defines his ministry as preaching, teaching, and equipping others to serve — all focused on spreading the Gospel and changing lives in our community and abroad. The ideal candidate is an enthusiastic and highly motivated self-starter with a focus not only on developing strong interpersonal relationships within the membership, but also possessing an evangelical attitude with a desire to reach out to the community in order to grow the church in our area.

You will serve alongside five shepherds, five deacons and a youth minister. We have elder-centered leadership; we believe in a literal interpretation of the Scriptures and hold to the basic principles that are essential to salvation. We offer a parsonage and a competitive salary commensurate with experience and education. If you feel you satisfy the above requirements and might like to serve with us, please send your resume, personal and professional references (three) as well as a digital copy of one of your sermons. Send to toertwig@peoplescom.net (video preferred) by August 20, 2019. If selected from a telephone interview, you, and your wife, will be invited to visit us in Winnsboro, Texas. During this visit, the selection group will conduct a face-to-face interview and you will be asked to present two sermons (morning and evening) and teach a Sunday morning auditorium adult class.

Note: If selected for an interview a background check will be conducted on you and your spouse.

Winnsboro Church of Christ, Search Committee
601 East Coke Street, Winnsboro, Texas 75494
toertwig@peoplescom.net

Minister
We are seeking a minister to work with our pulpit minister with the intention of transitioning to our full-time pulpit minister position. He will work with our ministerial staff and elders to serve the West Olive Church of Christ by providing a balanced ministry of preaching, teaching and assisting the elders in implementing our vision to help the congregation grow to its full potential in membership and spiritual growth in Christ. We are a congregation of 450 members in a growing community west of Phoenix, Ariz. (www.WestOlive.com)

General Requirements: The ideal candidate should be a married, middle-aged man with at least 10 years of experience. He should be of strong personal faith and be doctrinally sound and well grounded in the Scriptures. He should have an evangelistic heart to share the Gospel with those who are lost.

Principal Responsibilities: Responsibilities of this position include preaching, teaching, participation in the life of our church family and other duties requested by the elders.

How to Apply: Those interested in applying should mail/email a copy of their resume with picture, links to recent sermons, and at least three references to:

West Olive Church of Christ
Attn: Elders
10935 W Olive Ave
Peoria, AZ 85345

Send emails to:
WOElders@westolive.com

FAMILY-LIFE MINISTER
Southwest Church of Christ in Pueblo, Colorado, is seeking a full-time family-life minister. Qualified individuals should possess an eagerness to serve, a Bible degree, as well as strong communication skills, interpersonal skills, and organizational skills. Our ideal candidate will demonstrate Biblical soundness, spiritual maturity, and an obvious love for adults, teens, and children. For more information contact Gary Aragon at:
southwestcofc1@gmail.com

Youth Minister
The Plymouth Church of Christ in Plymouth, Michigan, is looking for a full-time Youth Minister. The Youth Minister will work to coordinate spiritual and social activities that encourage, empower and equip the students (K-12) as they strive to live as people of God. If interested, please send cover letter, resume, references and any questions to:

Search Committee
bulletin9301@plymouthcoc.net

Full Job Posting:
plymouthcoc.net/ymsearch


**A woman, a baby, a plane and a lesson**

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:16, New International Version

When I fly, I often take a moment to observe the other passengers. It’s a favorite pastime of mine. One flight, though, stands out.

A few years ago, on a stormy Friday night in the Newark, N.J., airport, I stood at my gate surrounded by tired business people in rumpled suits, all focused on getting home. Shortly before boarding, I heard a baby crying in the distance. Soon the mother, dressed in a worn denim jacket and pants, and her wailing child approached our gate.

The group dynamic abruptly changed. The body language and facial expressions of my fellow passengers seemed to declare, “Please don’t sit anywhere near me.” I was not overly concerned. It was a large plane. The odds of this woman and child sitting near me? Slim, I thought. I boarded and found my customary aisle seat. I settled in for what was expected to be a turbulent flight. The seats filled up quickly, with no sign of the young mother.

Finally, she came down the aisle. She stopped in front of me. She glanced at the middle seat then back at me with a smile. My countenance sank as I stood to allow her to sit down.

I’ll admit: I was thankful that I was not the poor guy stuck in the window seat. At least I could lean into the aisle for some relief. I again noticed the looks from the people around me.

“Better you than me,” they said without speaking. I did my best to ignore the situation. Then the crying stopped. I looked over and noticed the man in the window seat. He was holding the baby and talking to the young mother.

My conscience pricked, I decided to introduce myself. Come to find out, this was the woman’s first flight. She was taking the child to Birmingham, Ala., to visit her grandparents.

I tried to help with the baby throughout the rest of the rough flight. When we arrived in Atlanta, I walked her to her connecting gate. She thanked me, and we said goodbye.

As I drove home, I remembered some of the words of Paul. In Romans 12:13, he writes, “Contribute to the needs of the saints, and seek to show hospitality.” The word “hospitality” suggests the idea of “love to strangers.”

Whether in our homes or on an airplane, we can make a choice to be hospitable, to show love.

In his book “Mere Christianity,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “Do not waste time wondering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did.” As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets.

“When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him,” Lewis said.

Could it be that the number of members in the church continues to decline each year, at least in part, because we are not proactively carrying out God’s will toward those less fortunate than ourselves? Love is a demonstrable emotion. It is a choice we make. Jesus chose to love us, and we have an obligation to pay it forward.

Even today, I still fly at least once a month and am reminded of that night on an airplane long ago and my Christian responsibility to seek opportunities to help others.

**JIM WHITMIRE** is a former church elder and serves on the national board of Lads to Leaders. He and his wife, Rosalinda, attend the Buford Church of Christ in Georgia.

**In the Word**

Jim Whitmire
Aging, declining church chooses hospitality

A NON-SUNDAY SCHOOL congregation in West Texas welcomes two other groups to use its building.

ABILENE, Texas

The tan stucco building doesn’t look like much — not a lot of grass or landscaping outside. Just a handful of cars dot the asphalt parking lot at any of the three worship services conducted each Sunday at the Northwest Church of Christ building.

Perspective

Cheryl Mann Bacon

The fellowship hall is large, but there are no classrooms — the Northwest church began as a merger of two other non-Sunday School congregations back in the 1980s.

“None of us believe that anymore, but the building doesn’t have any classrooms, and we’re too old to start over so here we are,” preaching minister Pat Andrews said. The auditorium could seat maybe 200. However, the only time that happens these days is when the funeral home next door borrows the space for a memorial too large for its own cramped chapel.

Northwest and the other two church groups it welcomes on Sunday each seek in their own way to personify the Christian spirit of hospitality.

Thirty were present for Northwest’s 10:30 a.m. assembly on a recent Lord’s Day, including a young brother and sister who read Scripture and showed off their sign language skills during a mini-lesson about Jesus.

On a good Sunday, the congregation might draw 40, Andrews said. “These days we’re in the graveyard a lot,” he added. “We were there yesterday.”

A SHARED WORSHIP SPACE

Andrews started preaching for this congregation in 1993 and jokes that he preached it into the ground. A quarter-century later, he has to preach sitting on a stool with his cane propped nearby. He makes no pretense about the small body’s ability to attract or retain new members. But they do church really well, practicing hospitality, perhaps entertaining some angels unaware.

Instead of a Sunday evening assembly, Northwest members take communion to residents of a nursing home. Once a month, they have a potluck after church. Everyone stays.

On the first Wednesday night of the month, they have a potluck with The Refuge, a progressive congregation that shares their building and meets there at 5 p.m. on Sundays.

Last year, Northwest ladies gave a baby shower for the wife of Albert Kubura, the minister who serves the third church that uses the building.

It’s a Pentecostal church composed almost entirely of Burundi refugees who set up for worship in the Northwest auditorium every Sunday afternoon. About 30 people attend that service, too, many of them women in brightly colored headaddresses. Young people sing on microphones in their native Kirundi language, leading a spirited and energetic worship that often lasts all afternoon.

Members of the Northwest church and the international group greet each other in the foyer and in the parking lot. The young children run to hug the elderly friends they’ve made coming and going each week.

One of the boys had a birthday in July and insisted on inviting the children from all three congregations to his party so that no one would be left out.

The international group approached the Northwest church to see if they could use the auditorium. Providentially, perhaps, the first person they contacted was Ian Shelburne, who grew up in Malawi and had worked in Africa for many years as a missionary. He spoke their language and urged Northwest’s elders to welcome them.

Andrews said Northwest’s leaders looked at the statement of faith describing what the group believed. Except for one item about the tribulation, it was all consistent with what he preached every Sunday.

And so the Pentecostals came, and over time friendships have developed. One of the young boys sneaks in the back to sit with an older friend in the Northwest worship assembly if his family arrives early.

SMALL TOWN, WIDE VARIETY OF CHURCHES

Abilene, a West Texas town of about 120,000, is the home of Abilene Christian University, which is associated with Churches of Christ. In all, Abilene counts roughly 30 Churches of Christ, according to a national directory published by 21st Century Christian.

Those congregations span the breadth of the fellowship, from extremely conservative to very progressive with many mainstream in between. The town has more than one Spanish-speaking congregation, one that is primarily African-American and another that is multicultural but mostly African-American and Hispanic.

And it has one with an “NCp” designation by its name in the “Churches of Christ in the United States” directory, meaning that it is “Non-Class, but either uses or does not oppose the use of a located preacher.” That would be the Northwest church.

Most of the Northwest members are at least 60. Many of them, including Andrews, are past 80. They struggle to meet expenses, the budget supplemented by modest contributions from the funeral home each time it borrows the auditorium.

And The Refuge makes a gift each month to Northwest to help cover utilities, though that wasn’t something the host church expected when it welcomed that congregation to its building.

See HOSPITALITY, Page 32
Pulpit Minister Search - Greenville, Texas

Creekside Church of Christ is seeking a pulpit minister to work with our congregation of 300+ in a growing community near Dallas. Our minister of 22 years recently passed away, and we are looking for an enthusiastic preacher to join our youth and family minister, part-time Spanish outreach minister, and administrative staff. Our congregation has been serving the Lord for over 100 years and is looking for a minister to help us be a light in our community for many years to come. Please provide a copy of your resume and an audio file or link to recent sermons to creeksidecofc@gmail.com. For more information about our church family, please visit: creeksidechurchofchrist.org.

Creekside Church of Christ
6113 Jack Finney Blvd, Greenville, Texas 75402

HOUSEPARENTS NEEDED

Tipton Children’s Home
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Competitive pay, three weeks on / one week off, 401k, health insurance paid, dental and vision available. Our cottages have the capacity of up to eight children at a time. We are a Level B facility.

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Joe Waugh
(580) 667-5221 - office
(580) 335-6442 - cell
tiptonchildrenshome@yahoo.com

PO Box 370
TIPTON, OKLAHOMA 73570

Full-Time Minister - Otisville, Michigan

The Otisville Church of Christ (OCC) is seeking a full-time minister. We are a mostly rural congregation located approximately 25 minutes northeast of Flint, Michigan. We have been in existence for over 50 years and have an average attendance of 125 members. We are looking for a self-starter with good people skills and a strong desire to study and preach God’s word. Responsibilities include preaching sermons on Sunday morning and night, teaching Bible classes, engaging and encouraging young families, mentoring, visitation, and evangelism, all in collaboration with our four elders.

Strong Bible background and preaching skills are essential. The ability to work with members of all ages is very important. A bachelor’s degree in Bible is preferred but not necessary if the candidate has excellent qualifications and the right experience.

OCC provides the minister with a home and a competitive salary package. If interested, please send a resume, cover letter and sample sermons to Otisville Church of Christ, 13471 North State Road, Otisville, MI 48463, or via email to tedjuly@gmail.com.

HOSPITALITY: Three churches, one building

FROM PAGE 31

A CHURCH FOR ‘MARGINALIZED PEOPLE’

Congregants of The Refuge bear little resemblance to the morning worshipers. Minister Damon Parker and his wife, Melody, have been part of several church plants in Abilene over the past decade, each different but all focused on being a place for people who don’t have a place in another church, Parker explained.

“Marginalized people, mentally ill people, LGBTQ people — about 20 percent fall into those categories,” Parker said. “We don’t view that as doing outreach to people who are mentally ill or struggling. They’re just part of our church.”

The other 80 percent include several families with young children, and some middle-aged and older couples and singles. Until two years ago, most of The Refuge members were part of the Hope Church of Christ, a storefront church that was started by members of the Hillcrest Church of Christ as an outreach but later dissolved.

Members parted ways over several issues Parker knows to be controversial — instrumental worship, women’s participation in worship and hospitality to LGBTQ individuals.

The Parkers have eight children, ages 2-18. Their oldest son, a freshman at Abilene Christian University, plays the guitar and regularly leads worship. On a recent Sunday, the communion thought was brought by Julie Neill, who shared her story of a divorce after 37 years of marriage.

Nervous and soft spoken, Neill said, “God has been so faithful. He has shown himself over and over in big ways and small ways — in the smallest details of my life.”

The Refuge is as different from the African church and the Northwest congregation as the other two are from each other. But it shares the spirit of hospitality that made it possible for them to meet there.

Members eat together each week and make it a point to plan other activities that help people feel a part of the church family.

Parker said a member had recently observed, “We don’t do formal very well, but we do informal amazing.” He agrees.

“Our goal is for everyone to be consistently in everyone’s life,” he said. So instead of a Wednesday night service, The Refuge has created a calendar of weekly events: visiting shut-ins, planning a cook-out and a movie for a recent holiday, attending a house concert together. And everyone participates, Parker said.

“We want people who feel outside in life to feel inside,” he said. “Having everyone at church on a Sunday night doesn’t accomplish that. These other things do.”

‘THEY MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING’

Doug Foster, professor of church history at Abilene Christian University, said the non-Sunday school thread within Churches of Christ has long included congregations he described as very open and accepting.

“Certainly, some are not, but from the earliest days there has been a strain of that group that is more open, more inclusive, less sectarian,” Foster said.

The Refuge leadership met with the elders at Northwest before they began meeting at their building. Parker said he wanted them to understand the inclusive nature of their worship and the welcome they extended to folks who might not be welcomed elsewhere.

“They asked us if we were preaching Jesus, and we said, ‘Yes,’” Parker said. “They said, ‘Come on.’”

Andrews recalled the same meeting with a smile, and the words of Jesus in Mark 9: “Whoever is not against us is for us.”

It was much like the conversation they had when welcoming the Burundi group.

“Who knows?” Andrews told other Northwest members. “They might learn something by being here. We are sure learning from them.”

CHERYL MANN BACON served for 20 years as chair of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Abilene Christian University. In retirement, she is enjoying freelance writing and consulting, especially with churches.
Speaking truth in love to same-sex debate

Lipscomb Bible Faculty member offers resources for churches and Christian schools navigating uncertain times.

Same-sex attraction continues to be a prominent and controversial issue in our fellowship, and often I’m asked for recommendations on resources for those seeking a Christian response.

The best book I know, by one of my favorite and most trusted authors, the late John R.W. Stott, was titled “Why Homosexual Partnerships Are Not A Christian Option” but later renamed “Same Sex Partnerships?” (Revell, 1998). Stott starts in Genesis with creation and then the institution of marriage. He helps us see what God has prescribed and then what God has not prescribed.

He deals with the Greek words for homosexuality and all the major texts. It is a solid piece of biblical work grounded in a deep love and longing to be a blessing to those struggling with same-sex attraction. It’s less than 100 pages, so it’s very accessible to busy elders and deacons.

Mark Yarhouse, a leading evangelical psychologist, authored a revolutionary white paper in 2010 titled “A Christian Perspective on Sexual Identity.” (Find a link to it at christianchronicle.org.) It details the ages at which different stages of embracing a homosexual orientation occur in a typical young person. There is a stage of same-sex feelings, but a later date of same-sex identification. The further process of same-sex public identification comes even later and often is not settled until a person is in their 30s. This means that the church and Christian universities play a vital role in the development of male/female identity.

In a world where it seems to be politically incorrect to have a vibrant men’s ministry, the need is greatest, and young men often without male role models need to be affirmed in their manhood as they would be at age 12 or 13 in Israel through a bar-mitzvah-type experience. Females need the bat-mitzvah-type experience affirming their feminine design by God. This paper helped me see the breadth and complexity of the issue and that easy answers on either side often are not justified by the data.

Yarhouse’s book, “Listening to Sexual Minorities: A Study of Faith and Sexual Identity on Christian College Campuses,” encourages schools to have clarity at a macro-level around their stance on homosexuality so that everyone on campus can show love, compassion and community at a micro-level.

Students with same-sex feelings are at various stages when they arrive on a college campus, Yarhouse writes. They also have different desires and goals while attending. They are not a uniform group. Please also note that folks struggling with same-sex attraction generally score higher in spiritual identity than other students and need the local church and deep friendships in a faith community.

Love and community are needed as students sort through feelings. Keep praying for our congregations and our Christian high schools and colleges as we navigate grace and truth and strive to speak truth in love as we all grow more into the image of our beloved Jesus Christ.

Scott Sager is vice president for church services and a ministry faculty at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn. He offers a seminar, “A Jesus Response to the Challenges of Homosexuality,” for churches. Contact scott.sager@lipscomb.edu.

Author shares humor, hurts and healing when facing life’s disappointments

Lisa TerKeurst is a significant voice in Christian literature. She’s president of Proverbs 31 Ministries, a popular speaker and the author of more than 20 books on faith.

She takes a deeply personal turn in “It’s Not Supposed to Be This Way: Finding Unexpected Strength When Disappointments Leave You Shattered,” revealing her deepest hurts — particularly her unstable marriage and her fight against breast cancer. She teaches readers how to endure life’s most disappointing moments by trusting in God’s promises.

TerKeurst articulates common thoughts and feelings of doubt and disillusionment with a refreshingly bold and honest voice and offers pointed guidance rooted in scripture to challenge readers to consider their disappointments as a way of encountering God’s goodness.

Her strength lies in her transparency. She discusses the moment she learned of her husband’s affair and the following years of heartbeat and uncertainty with compelling sincerity. She doesn’t shy away from painting a real picture of her life for the reader, no matter how ugly or sad.

Despite the serious nature of this book, TerKeurst knows how to employ humor at just the right time. Readers will enjoy anecdotes like waking up during a colonoscopy or getting severely stuck in a shirt while trying clothes on at the store.

TerKeurst does not dwell on her story; she merely uses her experiences as a gateway to explaining God’s truths and offers practical advice applicable to every reader.

Each chapter closes with a section called “Going to the Well” that outlines key concepts, related scripture, reflective questions, and a prayer. TerKeurst continually points to scripture to back up her claims.

Perhaps the most effective example of this appears in the 10th chapter, which offers a dozen pages of first-person declarative truths that are designed for readers to speak to weaken the Enemy’s lies and attacks. Interspersed throughout are related scriptures that support each statement.

A study guide and a six-session video series are available to accompany the book, making this a great option for small-group study or for individuals seeking a more extensive personal study.

For anyone currently navigating through a devastating season of life, “It’s Not Supposed to Be This Way” is a hopeful place to start.

Mandy Nevius worships with the Park Church of Christ in Tulsa, Okla.

Full-time Pulpit Minister - CrosbyChurchofChrist.com - Crosby, Texas

The Crosby Church of Christ is accepting applications for a full-time pulpit minister. We are a loving and active church family of about 165. We are situated east of Houston, Texas, in a rapidly growing area.

We are blessed to have a seasoned youth minister with 14 years experience working with our youth at the present time.

We are looking for an enthusiastic, motivated and faithful gospel preacher, preferably married, to work with us in Crosby. You will be preaching sermons and teaching Bible classes while helping to evangelize our community and strengthen our faith. Must have a positive outlook, great communication, and interpersonal skills with the ability to connect with all ages, visit the sick (both physical and spiritual) and conduct Bible studies.

Offering $70,000, two weeks vacation, housing allowance, lectureships or continuing education to be negotiated. Please submit resume and, if possible, a link to audio/video sermons to:

preacherresumes@crosbychurchofchrist.com

Securing the Faithful: Preventing and Addressing Crime in Places of Worship. Rick Arrington, CPS, NCPS II.


“Securing the Faithful” addresses a distressing reality in our culture today—violent attacks against those in places of worship. Rick Arrington is an elder in his congregation in Virginia. He also has over 30 years of professional law enforcement experience and is a nationally certified specialist in crime prevention and security assessment. He has worked with numerous churches, non-profits, schools and agencies to help them better prepare against crime and violence. Mr. Arrington regularly conducts workshops and provides professional consultation services for organizations.

His book provides a concise, well-organized and comprehensive introduction to help church leaders protect their members and property. Some of the topics covered include: understanding the motivations of attackers, defusing dangerous situations, and recognizing potential threats.

He provides explanations and examples of organizational security policies, security teams, training, checklists of do’s and don’ts, building changes and event protection.

He explains the importance of good interaction with law enforcement and the news media. Pre-planning for emergency medical services also needs to be in place.

Arrington gives insight on dealing with trespassers, con artists, weapons, property vandalism, theft, and also community benevolence. In his appendix he lists laws in various states relevant to religious institutions.

“Securing the Faithful” is a great first step for helping every congregation be prepared for possible terrible events.

Reviewer: Richard Cravy, Technology Specialist and Faculty Member at Sunset International Bible Institute.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY submissions are paid advertisements. For prices: tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org.

Seeing the Lights of Paris

PARIS

Returning from Africa is a surreal experience. You say goodbye to brothers and sisters of the humblest means, the kindest people in the world, and board a plane as the sun sets.

One sleepless night later, you’re in Europe, groggily walking through a palatial duty-free shop to reach your connecting flight. The shelves are stocked with opulence—diamond watches, Prada handbags and, of course, those giant Toblerones.

A lot of us who do Africa trips fly back to the U.S. from Europe. But after my recent visit to Chad with Hope Springs International, I arranged a short layover in Paris. So did a few of my teammates, and I met up with them in the afternoon at their Airbnb rental.

Unfortunately, they had been treated rudely by several people as they made their way from Charles de Gaulle Airport to the apartment, bearing their luggage and the dental equipment they had used to clean teeth and fill cavities in Chad. (It was heavy. I put one of the cases into an overhead bin on the plane. Pretty sure I pulled something.)

Here, in the plentiful City of Lights, they longed for the kindness they had experienced in a dusty land of want.

I had a different experience when I visited the Eglise du Christ Paris Sud, the South Paris Church of Christ that meets on rue Moulin-Vert. I was late for Sunday worship (I got in the wrong line to buy train tickets at the airport), but they welcomed me warmly.

I had met minister Robert Limb and his wife, Evelyne, at the European Vision Workshop in Slovakia last year. Robert Limb is “English by chance, French by choice” and “Christian by conviction,” he says. At the workshop, he gave an incredible sermon on “post-Christian” Europe. In Paris, he translated for me when the church asked me to talk about our brethren in Chad.

An amazing potluck followed (complete with a selection of fine cheeses). Thankfully, brother Limb pulled me away just at the right time to hear a vocal group of young Christians rehearse. The Ré-Unis-sons sounded amazing as they practiced a French song, Unité, and a familiar tune, “Magnifique Est Ton Saint Nom” (known to us as “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High”).

The whole church sounded amazing, by the way, especially for a group of only about 25 — some from France, some from Haiti. After lunch, as I grabbed my bag and headed for the Eiffel Tower, they sang me on my way with a French rendition of “The Lord Bless You and Keep You.”

As you travel, whether in Africa, Europe or just two towns over, I pray that you’ll make the effort to spend time with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let them bless you.

To my Parisian hosts, merci. You are the true Lights of your city.

ERIK TRYGGESTAD is president and CEO of The Christian Chronicle. Contact erik@christianchronicle.org to find out how you can support this ministry.
CALENDAR

Aug. 17  Church Celebration / Reunion. Palo Alto Church of Christ, California. Contact Howard Peters (650) 447-3027. Email peter4pa@sbcglobal.net.
Aug. 25  Great Falls Church of Christ Grand Opening. Great Falls, Mont. RSVP Email office@greatfallscoc.org.
Sept. 13-15  Annual “LOCO in COCOA” College and Young Adults Retreat. University Church of Christ Campus Ministry. Cocoa Beach, Fla. (251) 284-3793. Email xybatt@gmail.com.

FULL CALENDAR: www.christianchronicle.org. To include your event for $25, contact tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org.

AMEN Ministry
The 40-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.ministry@comcast.net P.O. Box 353 Hebron, CT 06248 (860) 372-7051

Children and Family Minister
Woodland West Church of Christ in Arlington, Texas, is looking for someone to help us take a thriving Children and Family Ministry to the next level — to help children and their families know and grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus and go serve Christ in our community. For the job description and qualifications contact us at: jobs@wwcoc.org

We’re looking for Podcasts, Blogs or YouTube channels associated with Churches of Christ to share with our readers.
To have yours considered, please send name(s) of host(s), the church you attend and a brief description of the content to: tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org

Full-Time Minister - Austin, Texas
The Wheless Lane Church of Christ seeks a minister. He should be married to a wife who will engage in the up-building of the church family. The responsibilities include preaching and teaching sound doctrine and participating in the life of our church family. The candidate should deliver relevant messages to reach young generations and minister to seasoned saints, through God’s Word.

elders@whelesscoc.org
(512) 923-9181

Full-Time Pulpit Minister
Pike Road Church of Christ in Pantego, N.C., is looking for a full-time minister. Minister must be grounded in the scriptures, sound and conservative. We are a congregation of around 90 members; we have a 3 bedroom/2 bath house next to the church house. Please contact:

G.R. Fletcher
(252) 935-5338
fletchers@gotricounty.com

Full-Time Family and Youth Minister - Gainesville, Florida!
Come be a part of the Lord’s work! University City Church of Christ is looking for a full-time family and youth minister to join our dynamic ministry team, including our full-time evangelism minister, college minister, and recovery minister. We are an established congregation of 325+ members located right in the heart of north central Florida. We are seeking a family and youth minister who will inspire our families to love and serve the Lord, engage with other ministries led by our members, and reach outward into the community to bring others to Christ. The ideal candidate will have strong marriage and parenting skills with experience in youth and family counseling. This ministry will focus on building Christ-centered marriages, strong unified families and a dynamic youth program. Having a gift of energy and love towards our middle and high school students is a high priority as they grow in faith and love through this turbulent time of life. The family and youth minister will have the support of the youth, L2L and children’s ministry deacons who will serve in an advisory role in the growth of our youth and children’s ministry programs. The candidate will have a minimum of 7-10 years of ministry experience and a wife who is actively involved with and supportive of his ministry. Please send resume and cover letter to: familyandyouthministerssearch@gmail.com. Learn more about us at: universitycitychurchofchrist.org.

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