A minister transition can be difficult. An Oregon congregation seeks to make it work.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

CORVALLIS, Ore.

After 38 years of ministry with the Circle Church of Christ, Gregg Strawn sprinkled bits of humor, warning and reflection into his final sermon.

Sporting a tie that belonged to his late father — a former elder of this 150-member congregation in the hometown of the Oregon State Beavers — Strawn explained why he always wore suspenders when preaching.

“It’s a very complex answer,” the 66-year-old minister teased. “It has to do with physics and body shape.”

As the congregation burst into laughter, he added, “But in a simple word, I wear suspenders to hold my pants up.”

“Amen!” one church member shouted.

“Praise God!” another declared to the delight of the guffawing crowd.

The Sunday morning hilarity helped relieve the tension for Christians faced with losing the only preacher many ever had known — the one who had baptized entire families, performed wedding ceremonies for generations, spoken at countless loved ones’ funerals and rushed to so many hospital bedsides.

When Strawn decided to retire, word reached Thomas Pruett — a young minister with ties to Oregon — that the Circle church needed a new preacher. Pruett’s response was immediate and emphatic.

“No,” he recalled telling his wife, Amy. “I will not be the guy after a 38-year-tenured guy. I don’t want to be the sacrificial lamb.”

It’s true: Congregations that adore their preacher who leaves or retires often have trouble accepting the new guy, who typically quits or is forced out within a few years, experts say.

In fact, such rocky tenures occur so frequently that “interim ministry” has become a common practice. It works like this: A temporary preacher fills the pulpit while the church undergoes a six- to 18-month process of contemplation and discernment.

But in the case of the Circle church, the elders chose a different approach — one that persuaded Pruett to change his mind about following Strawn.

“There are many opinions on how to do this right,” said Casey Long, one of the congregation’s two elders. “A key for us was that we had a long-term minister who gave us a long

Best practices for dismissing a minister

Some elders find a way to grow a minister and grow a congregation through a difficult transition from employment to unemployment to new employment. In the first of a two-part series, Cheryl Mann Bacon offers five tips for church leaders. Page 30

SACRIFICIAL LAMB

See SACRIFICIAL LAMB, Page 8
In Antigua, DiscipleTrips was “takin’ it to the streets,” but what we were taking was the Gospel in one of our favorite activities—street preaching. We create a positive, friendly environment where we convey the love of Christ in a beautiful way to any and all who will listen.

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The good news is YOU CAN!

Read more about DiscipleTrips work in Antigua, sunset.bible/TakinIt.

"Take this message to my brother / You will find him everywhere
Wherever people live together / Tied in poverty’s despair"

-Takin’ It to the Streets, Michael McDonald
Can churches grow in ‘post-Christian’ era?

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. Is there a difference between “churchianity” and Christianity? Can one be a devoted church member yet not a disciple of Christ? Is traditionalism killing the church? Or is theological liberalism to blame? Or both? We live in a time of rapid decline in Churches of Christ and many other Christian groups in the United States. Congregations are shrinking and dying. Children and grandchildren are leaving the faith.

To explore what, if anything, can be done to reverse the negative trends in our so-called “post-Christian” world, more than 400 ministers and church leaders from 20-plus states came together for the fourth annual New Day Conference. The North Boulevard Church of Christ, south of Nashville, hosted the recent conference. That growing congregation averages Sunday attendance of 2,100 and offers services at four locations in three languages: English, Spanish and Chinese.

“We want to kick down the gates of hell, and we want to do it in the name of King Jesus,” North Boulevard senior minister David Young told New Day attendees, who tackled questions such as the ones posed above.

REFUGEES FROM VENEZUELA find new families of faith in Argentina. Melding two vibrant South American cultures can be a challenge, one church planter says. But the new arrivals ‘can reach people we can’t.’

‘They’re very close to God’

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina

The stories aren’t nearly as chilling as the way they’re told: “I had a revolver pointed at my face — twice,” says 18-year-old Hector Osorio.

“They took my sister and me and left us in a field,” says Mary Gómez, 26. “I was so scared. They drove off in my truck.”

“I got robbed five times,” says Gabriel Damalis, age 27.

For each of these Venezuelans — now living in Argentina’s capital city, — the words come almost nonchalantly, like they’re describing a trip to the supermarket.

That is, after all, the reality of daily life in Venezuela — a country in the midst of political turmoil and a collapsing economy. Crime rates are rising. Gangs are recruiting. And the supermarket shelves are bare.

Venezuela’s collapse: Is socialism to blame?

A Venezuelan minister who fled to Argentina shares his thoughts on faith and political systems. Page 15

Three thousand miles from their homeland, the Venezuelans gather to sing hymns and dine on tacos in the downtown Buenos Aires apartment of Jonathan Hanegan.

A Colorado native and former missionary to Venezuela, Hanegan and a multinational team of young Christians launched Iglesia de Cristo Redentor, the Redeemer Church of Christ, six years ago.

“The initial idea was to start a church focused on the neighborhood here ... not to have a church composed of mostly foreigners,” says Jairo Díaz, a native Argentine and member of the church-planting team.

Then the Venezuelans started “llegando y llegando y llegando” (“arriving and coming” in Spanish). Members of the Redeemer Church of Christ and Venezuelan visitors sing during a devo.

Church members are bikers for Christ – and recovery

BY CHELLIE ISON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

LAKE FOREST, Calif. — Where is “recovery” mentioned in the Bible?

It’s a question Mac Owen hears regularly, he told the audience at the Celebrate Recovery Summit in Southern California. In response, he held up his Bible and pointed to the third chapter of Genesis — where the serpent comes into the picture, sin enters the world and Adam and Eve get kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

“As the rest of that?” he asked, pointing to everything in his Bible after Genesis 3. “That’s the recovery part.”

As the crowd applauded, Owen equipped, “I tell ya, if Adam and Eve had been Cajuns, none of this would have happened because they would have eaten that snake instead of that fruit.”

(Owen, who serves as national director for Celebrate Recovery, is a former elder of the White’s Ferry Road Church of Christ in West Monroe, La.)

Among the 3,000 participants at the annual summit were Jacob Bentley and his mom, Liz Woodson. Dressed in leather vests, they came with a group from the Northside Church of Christ in Wichita, Kan. They’re part of Broken Chains, a ministry for believers who love the Bible and bikes.

Jacob Bentley and his mother, Liz, are part of Broken Chains motorcycle ministry.
As Young sees it, both traditionalism and theological liberalism are killing the church. What’s needed, Young contends, is a worldwide spiritual movement to introduce every person on planet Earth to Jesus.

To that end, the North Boulevard church has set a goal of planting 100,000 new congregations in the next 30 years. No, that’s not a typo. “We believe that if we cast a huge number and then say we’re not going to stop until we get there, then God will provide,” Young told me.

The conference name matches the title of Young’s 2016 book “New Day: Restoring the Revolutionary Mission of Christ’s Church.”

Among 12 steps to a revolution that the book outlines: “Recommit to the Holy Scriptures, refusing to compromise for the ideals of theological liberalism while at the same time going beyond traditionalist readings of the Bible. Read the Scriptures as the living and transformational Word of God.”

For the last four years, the North Boulevard church has organized the New Day Conference to encourage sister congregations in the mission of “making disciples of all nations.”

“We get to hear all the ‘win stories’ from churches all over the country,” said John Magnuson, North Boulevard’s executive minister. “But all those stories are rooted in discipleship. It’s people joining in the mission of Jesus.”

Christians must regain their passion for sharing Jesus with the lost, said Buddy Bell, senior minister for the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, Ala.

“We argue over worship,” Leonard said. “God is concerned about work — what we’re doing to save lost souls. “I’m no longer interested in ‘churchianity.’ I’m interested in the mission of God.”

Another speaker, Wesley Leonard, stressed that “our job as Christians really is to make other Christians.”

Leonard said the Southside Church of Christ — the Orlando, Fla., congregation that he planted — has grown to 700 members by focusing on lost people and not traditions. “We get to hear all the ‘win stories’ from churches all over the country,” said John Magnuson, North Boulevard’s executive minister.

“Nothing.”

The crowd laughed because 99 percent of us have witnessed that exact scenario.

Bell joked that he likes to tell fellow Christians, “Either you get fired up for Jesus now or you will later.”

But the real answer, he proposed, is to mirror Jesus’ passion for lost souls (see the story of the woman at the well in John 4). And not only his passion but also his vision and focus on the mission.

Trying to be the “most progressive, funky” church in town won’t resonate with most long-time members, Bell said. But telling the truth that traditional ways of doing church aren’t keeping their children and grandchildren in the fold might.

“The issue is no longer my comfort,” he said. “The issue is the mission of God.”

THREE: Moving beyond ‘churchianity’

Why planting new churches matters

New Day Conference speaker Stan Granberg explains why he’s so focused on starting new congregations. Page 21

BOBBY ROSS JR. is editor-in-chief of The Christian Chronicle. Reach him at bobby.ross@christianchronicle.org. Follow him on Twitter at @bobbyross.
FLORIDA
HIALEAH — On a recent Saturday, the Hialeah Church of Christ made sandwiches to deliver to the homeless in downtown Miami. Among the workers was Helen Frebel Kerr, just a few weeks shy of her 100th birthday.

“If there is work to be done to glorify God and spread his word, Helen is there,” church elder Morris Legg said of Kerr, who was born on Sept. 25, 1919, in New Site, Miss. Baptized in a creek after a gospel meeting when she was 13, Kerr moved with her young family to South Florida in 1951 and began attending the Hialeah church.

She later served as the church’s secretary. She remains active in attending worship services and a Tuesday morning ladies’ Bible class. She also sends out cards weekly to those who are sick or bereaved.

Read more of her life story at christianchronicle.org.

NEW JERSEY
CAMDEN — Ministers and elders of the Pitman Road Church of Christ in Sewell, N.J., prayed over the new principal of a Philadelphia-area high school that endured a series of tragedies last school year.

The principal, Rebecca Cruz-Guy, is a member of the Pitman Road church, minister Dan Cooper said. Last year, shootings claimed the lives of three people with ties to Woodrow Wilson High School. Another person was killed after being hit by a police cruiser responding to a call, WPVI reported.

NEW YORK
MINERVA — On Sundays when the weather allows travel, Ed and Joy Healy drive an hour and a half to worship with the Plattsburgh Church of Christ.

But on the Wednesday evenings, the Healys host a Bible study in their home in this small mountain town of roughly 600 souls.

“This creates the opportunity for us to reach our community with the Gospel,” said Ed Healy, who reports a consistent attendance of six. “One of our regular attendees who is limited in mobility now goes to the website of the Plattsburgh Church of Christ and listens to Douglas Kashorek’s audio sermons.”

Healy asks for prayers “that if the Father wills, we may very well see the beginning of the Lord’s church here.”

TEXAS
MIDLAND — The way to a high school student’s heart?

The stomach perhaps?

Each Monday, the Downtown Church of Christ prepares lunch for students from nearby Midland High School. Typically, 50 to 60 students come, but the number has been as high as 90, minister Greg Fleming said. “Around 15 church members, many of them retirees, prepare and serve the lunches,” Fleming said. “It is encouraging to see our older adults interacting with these teens.”

N.C. church avoids worst hit from Dorian

While preparing for Hurricane Dorian, members of the Outer Banks Church of Christ in North Carolina pray for minimum impact. The recent storm knocked out power to the church building, but members survived unscathed with few property issues, member Eddie Woodhouse said. The church frequently welcomes vacationers to worship.

RELATED: After Dorian, Churches of Christ in the Bahamas face a long, long recovery, Page 12
Jesus was homeless,” Ron Clark says.

In Luke 9:58, the Savior declares, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Clark, lead church planter for the Agape Church of Christ, works to provide shelter for this Pacific Northwest city’s homeless.

He’s a board member for the non-profit building Agape Village — 15 tiny houses on a hillside overlooking a major interstate. Nearby Central Nazarene Church owns the property.

This summer, Ron and Lori Clark organized the annual Agape Blitz, welcoming mission groups to help build Portland’s sixth village of tiny houses.

The Federal Way Church of Christ in Washington state, the Saturn Road Church of Christ in Garland, Texas, the Oregon City Church of Christ in Oregon and The Park Church of Christ in Tulsa, Okla., all sent teams. So did Columbia Christian Schools in Portland.

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors,” said Naomi Johnson, 13, part of a group from the West Main Church of Christ in Medford, Ore. “Even though some people don’t have money to buy houses or do extravagant things, we still need to love them and help them.”
Spanish-speaking church installs elders, deacons

ARLINGTON, Texas

The Hillcrest Iglesia de Cristo — a Spanish-speaking Church of Christ planted seven years ago and enlarged with a merger two years ago — has installed four elders and five deacons.

“Very few of our fellowship’s Hispanic congregations have elders or deacons, so this is quite an achievement,” said Scott Emery, director of U.S. Hispanic teams for Texas-based Great City Missions.

The elders and spouses are Juan Carlos and Hortensia Bautista, Federico and Amalia Sandatte, Carlos and Serafina Tafoya, and Martin and Mercedes Rodriguez.

The deacons and spouses are Vicente and Morena Guzmán, Carlos and Sasha Zamora, Erick Merino and Anaí Cano de Merino, Oscar Oviedo and Adriana Muñoz de Oviedo, and Jaime and Juany Regalado. The congregation shares a building with the Hillcrest Church of Christ.

Victorino Martinez prays over Juan Carlos Bautista and the other new elders.

The new elders and deacons and their wives hold hands as they stand in front of the congregation on the Sunday of their installation.
SACRIFICIAL LAMB: Church aims to make smooth transition

lead time — maybe two years or so — to think and determine how we wanted to proceed.”

The elders pondered the transition for about a year before informing the congregation of Strawn’s retirement plan. A committee of ministry leaders and their spouses was formed to search for a new preacher.

“During this time, we very much trusted and prayed that God was involved,” Long said.

Out of more than 20 applicants, three finalists were selected. Pruett, then 29 and serving as the minister for the Northern Hills Church of Christ in western South Dakota, emerged as the top candidate.

He, his wife and their four children — with a fifth on the way — moved to Corvallis about six months before Strawn’s last official day of work.

“It was our goal to have some overlap as we wanted Thomas to be mentored by Gregg, and we wanted to allow the church to ease into the transition,” said Long, a Circle member since 1981.

“Some places want time in between, sometimes a year or more,” he added. “We did not see that as the route to take. Perhaps that would have been different if Gregg’s leaving had been adversarial or forced.”

ministry, the opportunity to share Jesus with students from around the world proved a major factor in Strawn remaining with the congregation, he said. It’s the only Church of Christ in this university town of 55,000.

In retirement, Strawn and his wife, Pam, plan to remain a part of the congregation — a dynamic that experts say can create problems if the former preacher has any trouble adjusting to his new role outside the pulpit.

But after months spent preaching and serving alongside each other, both Pruett and Strawn insist they expect no issues.

“I’ve been talking to the elders for a couple of years about the transition to come,” Strawn told The Christian Chronicle. “One of the things that I told them is, ‘If we don’t do this wisely, no matter how good the next guy is, he’ll be a sacrificial lamb simply because he’s not me.’ We didn’t want that.”

WATCH YOUR WORDS

After Pruett’s arrival, intentional steps were taken “to pave the way for this congregation to love him and accept him,” Strawn said. “Every time I had the opportunity to bless him or coach him, I made the most of that opportunity. So no, I don’t think that Thomas is going to be the sacrificial lamb.

“In the future, if someone says, ‘Thomas did X, Y, Z, and I don’t know what I think about that,’ I can guarantee my response is going to be, ‘You know what? I know Thomas is a good guy, and if you go and talk to him, he’ll help you understand why he did what he did.’”

In his final sermon, Strawn’s voice raised — like a musical crescendo — as he urged the congregation to honor and appreciate Pruett as well as campus minister Joshua Stutzman and church office administrator Maria Zhang.

Strawn remembered a note taped to the main door of the church earlier in his tenure that characterized him as “terrible, rotten and inflexible” and blamed him for “every problem in the life of the church.”

“Some people feel like they can say all kinds of things to the church staff,” he told the church. “Some of those leave scars on a minister’s heart and mind. And you must not look at Thomas and Josh and Maria as people with a target on their backs. You will all watch your words and the ways that you go at these people, these servants of God.”
At a Sunday afternoon church picnic after Strawn’s last sermon, member Ashley King, 32, described herself as “super sad.”

“IT’s emotional,” said King, who has attended the Circle church all her life. “We’re grateful to have had someone like Gregg in our lives for so long. He’s so passionate about it, you can feel it.”

“He’s been there through the beginning of lives and the ending of lives,” added Jackie Parsons, King’s mother. “He’s been here since the beginning.”

But both King and Parsons said they’re excited about the next chapter. “We’re hopeful,” King said. “Thomas seems like a great preacher.”

Another longtime member, Alanna McPartlin, agreed. “It’s kind of an end of an era,” McPartlin said. “In one way, it’s sad. … But you also know it’s not the end of church or the ministry circle. It’s bittersweet.”

As a retirement gift, the congregation presented Gregg and Pam Strawn with an all-expenses-paid, two-week trip to Israel. The funds came from private donations, not the church treasury.

With a wink, elder Mark Johnson turned to Pruett.

“You have something to look forward to,” Johnson said, joking that the new minister could count on his own big gift in 2057.
RECOVERY: Being a ‘Hope Dealer’

FROM PAGE 3
Members of Broken Chains, an initiative of Celebrate Recovery, sport patches bearing phrases such as “Hope Dealer.”

For Bentley, who rides a Harley-Davidson, it’s been a fun way to connect with his mom and others. “I don’t have to go around talking to people about Celebrate Recovery,” he said. “People come up to me asking me about Broken Chains, and then I just talk to them about Celebrate Recovery.”

RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE ... AND MUCH MORE
Meeting people where they are and sharing the love of Christ is a big part of Celebrate Recovery. It’s one of the reasons Teri Odle, a member of the Eastside Church of Christ in Colorado Springs, Colo., feels drawn to the Christ-centered recovery program.

She and her husband were at the recovery summit gathering information — and inspiration — for their congregation, which is exploring the idea of starting Celebrate Recovery.

The program, which started in 1991 in California, is now in more than 35,000 churches around the world, including many Churches of Christ.

“I think CR is an opportunity for God to really change the paradigm of church,” Odle said.

She believes their congregation is ready to change that, ready to share their hurts with God and each other in hopes of finding healing.

“We have people that are broken and hurt in this world and the only way they’re going to be healed is when they let Jesus be the main in their life,” Odle said.

Despite the “Recovery” title, Odle said she loves and appreciates that Celebrate Recovery is not just for those struggling with substance abuse. Signs posted throughout the event read, “Just one in three people at CR are there for drug or alcohol addiction.”

Around the signs were the names of other issues participants face — anger, perfectionism, depression, control, eating disorders, pornography, abortion.

Odle knows that these issues exist everywhere, and she longs to share the hope inspired by Celebrate Recovery with her congregation.

“I think it is really what God calls us to do,” she said. “We’re supposed to be meeting with the hurting and the broken and showing them the love of Christ.”

THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHERS AND WIVES
As someone who grew up in church, Bentley has always known and believed in God, always known he was forgiven for his sins, but recovery helped him to find healing.

He acknowledges that he resisted attending Celebrate Recovery for quite a while.

He first became familiar with the program through his visits to his parents’ home. At the time, he lived in Nebraska and worked for York College, which is associated with Churches of Christ.

When he visited his family in Wichita, he noticed that his parents would leave on Friday nights to attend Celebrate Recovery.

“It was obviously very important to them,” Bentley said. “My parents had changed. They were on fire for God. To see your parents on fire for God, it’s different.”

Different in a really good way, he added.

Then he and his wife moved to Wichita, and she started attending Celebrate Recovery.

Bentley wasn’t sure what to do. “She was admitting all of these things,” he said. But he didn’t see his wife as someone with “those types” of problems. He only saw her as a “good person.”

“I was like, ‘Man, if she needs help, then …’ I was in denial.”

He started attending with his wife.

“We used to live scared of getting caught with my sins,” he said, “and now I don’t have anything to hide.”

WEBSITE: www.celebraterecovery.com
ALBANIA
DURRES — For a decade, Albanian Christians have gathered at the shores of the Ionian Sea to sing praises to God, fellowship and share the Gospel during weeklong camps.

“It has been proven again and again in these 10 years that this camp has been a great tool for leading people to Jesus,” said Shkelqim Kafexhiu, preacher for the Durres Church of Christ.

This year was no exception. Fourteen people were baptized during three weeks of camps, Kafexhiu said.

GREECE
ATHENS — After more than five years of serving refugees from the Middle East, the Omonia Church of Christ is shifting its outreach ministry “into an in-depth spiritual nurturing” program, said minister Alexander Melirrytos.

Through in-depth Bible study and discipleship, the church seeks to help the refugees “get a deeper understanding of their faith in Jesus, learn more about their salvation and build strong relations with God and his family.” The ministry will also help the refugees through hardships, Melirrytos said, adding that one goal of the program is to “prepare them so they can reach others and minister within their extended families.”

INDIA
MIAO — Garry Jones asks for prayers “for the Indian government and its people to become less aggressive against the work of Christ and against our work in northeast India.”

India, the world’s second-most populous country, has experienced an increase in attacks against Christians since 2015, according to Open Doors USA, a nonprofit that supports persecuted believers. In 2018, at least 12,000 Christ-followers were attacked, the group reports.

Jones works with Spiritual Sword Missions, an outreach of the Clinton Church of Christ in Tennessee. This fall he travels to northeast India for a full slate of gospel meetings, medical camps, preacher evaluations and construction of a secondary school at the Theophilus English Medium Christian School. Workers also are setting up a vocational classroom where Christians will learn carpentry and construction.

PHILIPPINES
MANDAUE — “I, as a Christian, have a duty and an obligation to share the Gospel in all my encounters and engagements because God purpose my to be there.”

That was one takeaway reported by participants in the 58th Asia Mission Forum, which brought members of Churches of Christ from across the region to the island of Cebu. Keynoters included C.L. Thomas and Tim Brumfield from Sunset International Bible Institute.
After Dorian, Bahamas relief will be ‘more of a marathon than a sprint’

BY CHELLIE ISON AND ERIK TRYGGESTAD
THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

The photos look horrific — entire towns flattened by winds in excess of 150 miles per hour. “But my brother, if you had a moment to see face-to-face how steel buildings have been shredded, brick structures and roofs caved in and windows smashed, you’d see (that the storm) had no mercy upon them.”

That’s the message minister Jason Quashie sent to The Christian Chronicle from the Abaco Islands, nearly two weeks after Hurricane Dorian slammed into the Bahamas.

“We’ve had many storms,” Quashie said, “but this one had something within it that said, ‘I’m going to move anything that is in my way.’”

The Category 5 storm destroyed or damaged most of the structures on the Abaco Islands and neighboring Grand Bahama Island. At least 50 people died, and 1,300 were still missing at press time.

No casualties were reported among the Churches of Christ on the islands, including the Marsh Harbour and South Abaco congregations on the Abacos and the Freeport church on Grand Bahama, which reports that more than 60 of its members lost everything.

Most of the church members have evacuated to the Bahamas’ capital, Nassau, or Florida, Quashie said.

Andrew Major, minister for the Central Church of Christ in Nassau, is housing 10 refugees from Dorian in his home. Housing, food and clothing are the biggest needs right now, he told the Chronicle.

“They only have the clothes on their backs,” Major said. “These people lost everything.

A LONG, LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

“It’s hard for us to understand the scope of it,” Joseph Smith said of the of Dorian’s devastation.

Smith is vice president of operations for Heating Hands International, a Nashville, Tenn.-based humanitarian aid organization associated with Churches of Christ. The ministry is working with church members in the Bahamas to assess needs and help storm victims recover.

“This is more of a marathon than a sprint,” Smith said. “It’s going to be a long, long time of helping the church members rebuild their homes and church buildings.”

The Marsh Harbour Church of Christ, a congregation with about 100 members, had roof damage, but its building was otherwise unharmed.

Repairing the building will be essential to helping the church help its community, Smith said.

But in many areas, such repairs may be simply out of the question, said David Caskey, a member of the Gulf Coast Church of Christ in Fort Myers, Fla.

“This will be a rebuilding project and will take years,” said Caskey, a longtime missionary who serves congregations in the Bahamas.

Both Caskey and workers with Heating Hands say they are prepared to be a part of the long-term rebuilding efforts.

SERVING AMONG THE RUINS

Quashie, who ministers for the South Abaco church, said his wife and daughter have evacuated so that his daughter can go to school.

Their home in Casuarina Point, in the southern part of the Abacos, wasn’t as badly damaged as others.

Jason Quashie spends his days helping his neighbors place tarps over their roofs. He also has become the point man for distributing hot meals provided by World Central Kitchen, a U.S.-based nonprofit.

Despite the pain and loss, “my job here has been very proactive,” he said, adding that he serves “in whatever way I can, whether spiritual, physical or otherwise.

“I am doing it for the cause of Christ, so that he gets the honor and glory.”

FIND LINKS to relief organizations associated with Churches of Christ at christianchronicle.org.
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worldbibleschool.net
Argentina endures its own economic recession and Recently Venezuelans have expressed fears as have moved to Europe and 290,000 are in the U.S. Buenos Aires. The highest number of refugees, 1.3 million, 130,000 living in the country, mostly in Buenos Aires. No. 4 destination for Venezuelans, with about an estimated 4 million refugees and migrants arriving and arriving (“). The congregation swelled from 15 to more than 30. That was unexpected, says Díaz, who trained for ministry at the Quito School of Biblical Studies in Ecuador. When I left Ecuador, my goal was to work with a church that was mainly Argentine,” he says, “but God put me in a place where I’m still like a foreigner.” His teammate, John Campos, acknowledges that mixing the gregarious, Caribbean culture of Venezuela with the reserved, intellectual vibe of Buenos Aires “creates a challenge as to local evangelism. For a lot of Argentines that aren’t Christians yet, it can be a barrier.” At the same time, the Venezuelans have become integral to the young church, says Campos’ wife, Sabrina Nino, who also is a member of the church-planting team. “I don’t know what we’d do without them,” she says. “They’re very close to God. I mean, they just want to do everything they can to help. They’re social. They can reach people we can’t.” Jorge Mercado and Patricia Sancalli talk about the impact of one Venezuelan on the church they serve. SHARING DESPITE ARGENTINA’S CRISIS About 66 percent of Argentina’s 44 million souls claim Catholicism as their faith. But many “have come to the point where it’s not convenient to believe in God,” says Jorge Mercado, who ministers for a Church of Christ in Pilar, a small town about an hour northwest of Buenos Aires. “If we knock doors or ask someone in the plaza if they want to talk about God, they say no,” Mercado says. “The way we draw close to people is through a distance, through the internet, or we leave Christian literature in their mailbox.” About a year ago, Mercado was speaking to the congregation about “What is the Christian community? What is the importance of helping one another?” Then Marlon Vivas arrived — with little more than the clothes on his back. In Venezuela, he had earned money by renting out small washing machines, stripping them to the back of his motorbike and delivering them from house to house. Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis) was born in Buenos Aires. Today, his predominantly Catholic homeland is increasingly secular, missionaries say. On a Buenos Aires’ subte (subway) a woman checks her phone as a street musician plays a classic Argentine tune in the hope of a few pesos. The Venezuelan Diaspora, Part 2 See christianchronicle.org for Part 1 and learn how Venezuelans are impacting Churches of Christ in Chile. See this month’s Insight, Page 34, to learn how a church is helping Venezuelans in the U.S.

CLOSE TO GOD: Cultures combine ‘like an explosion’

Argentina is the No. 4 destination for Venezuelans, with about 130,000 living in the country, mostly in Buenos Aires. The highest number of refugees, 1.3 million, have fled to neighboring Colombia. About 283,000 have moved to Europe and 290,000 are in the U.S. Recently Venezuelans have expressed fears as Argentina endures its own economic recession and inflation, Reuters reports.

“I’ve learned to be more organized, more methodical, to prepare better sermons. I thank the brothers ... for giving me the opportunity to contribute a grain of sand.”

THEOLOGY, MEET ZEAL
Not all of the experiences are as positive as the Pilar church’s. Some Venezuelans take advantage of churches’ hospitality and then disappear, “using the church to survive the crisis,” Jairo Diaz says. Others have become part of the Buenos Aires team.

Corina Diaz, a native of Mérida, Venezuela, was studying medicine there but left after multiple teacher strikes shut down her school. Now she does clerical work for a carpentry shop in Buenos Aires and teaches yoga.

As part of the Redeemer Church of Christ, she helps new arrivals from Venezuela adjust to Argentine culture, find apartments and jobs. She helps with discipleship studies for women and teaches a kids’ class. She’s training for ministry online through Texas International Bible Institute.

“It’s incredible the way God works,” she says. “Many churches around the world are growing because of Venezuelans’ movements. I think that’s awesome.

“I don’t want to sound egocéntrica (self-centered), but I think our culture is to preach and to invite people and to go to their houses. We don’t care if people are able to receive us. We just care that people listen to what God wants.”

Hanegan, the former missionary to Venezuela, believes that the combination of cultures is beneficial for church growth. In Venezuela, Churches of Christ have zealous, mostly self-taught preachers who don’t have a lot of theological education, he says. Sometimes they can be dogmatic and legalistic.

In Argentina, “we’re really good at spiritual formation,” Hanegan says, “but we really miss the evangelism.” When combined, Corina Diaz

"FOR EVERYTHING WE RECEIVE HERE, WE’VE GOTTA GIVE"
After the Wednesday night devotional in Hanegan’s home, the recent arrivals from Venezuela say they can feel the church’s love.

“I have been to several churches here. This is the one where I’m staying,” says Hector Osorio, the 18-year-old. “There’s so much unity.”

After enduring multiple robberies and the theft of his car, he now goes “bubble dancing” (his term for dish-washing) in Buenos Aires, working in multiple restaurants. A friend invited him to church.

Mary Gómez, who survived a kidnapping with her sister, found out about the church through her fiancé, Ranier López, who works as a driver for Uber.

Through an act of God’s providence, she believes, López gave a ride to Justin Simms, an intern for the church.

Gómez says she’s thankful for the help they’ve received since they came to Buenos Aires.

And she’s eager to repay the debt. “So maybe the country’s falling apart,” she says of her homeland, “but we’re here. And for everything we receive here, we’ve gotta give.”

“We have to be good people.”

RELATED VIDEOS: christianchronicle.org

Is socialism to blame? A Venezuelan reflects on politics and restoration

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Don’t preach to Gabriel Damalis about the virtues of socialism.

“Personally, I don’t like socialism,” he says, “because I lived it. But I also have learned that any plan can fail.”

Damalis and his wife, Naibelis Freitez, came to Buenos Aires two years ago to begin a new life as their home nation of Venezuela descended into chaos. The government, led by Nicolás Maduro of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, has become increasingly authoritarian as the country’s economic crisis has deepened. And crime is on the rise.

In Venezuela, Damalis served congregations including the Barquisimeto Church of Christ. Whenever he went outside, he, took the cover of an old, beat-up Bible and stuck his cell phone inside, making sure to switch it to silent mode first.

“The times we got robbed ... nobody would look at that Bible,” he says.

He remembers his wife crying in the aisle of a supermarket in Bogotá, Colombia, where she was attending a ladies’ gospel retreat in 2016. The shelves overflowed with bags of white cornmeal for making arepas — something they could no longer find at home.

Then, as they prepared to move to Argentina, a bus they were riding was nearly robbed by a gang of men with assault rifles. The driver plowed through the blockade. Damalis is almost sure he ran over people.

Despite the scarcity, despite the danger, despite “looking at everyone as a suspect,” it was hard to leave Venezuela, the minister says. For one thing, the church was growing rapidly. The insecurity and uncertainty opened avenues for the Gospel.

Just before they left, the couple met fellow Christians who committed to help the churches they had found.

“God showed us that we’re not indispensable,” Damalis said. “It’s like he was telling us, ‘Don’t feel bad; I’m in charge.’”

In Buenos Aires, the couple serves the Iglesia de Cristo de Caballito. Damalis works with fellow Venezuelan refugees. Sometimes as many as 30 worship with the church.

One Sunday, “half of the congregation was Venezuelans,” he says.

Now, as Argentina experiences its own financial crisis, Damalis sees the country’s political leaders on TV, making speeches similar to those he heard in Venezuela.

That concerns him.

He’s also concerned that Christians around the world who are watching Venezuela’s crisis, including his brethren in the U.S., will conclude that socialism alone is the problem — and that another political model alone will solve it.

It seems to him that the principles of socialism, including shared production and shared revenues, are best practiced in the home, among family members who love God and serve each other.

“How can you make something like that voluntary for the whole country?” he asks.

The problem, as he sees it, is misplaced faith.

“Whatever plan you pick, socialism or capitalism, all of them have downsides because we are in an already-damaged world,” he says. “That’s why God promises us a perfect Kingdom.

“We’re in a body that wants what we desire, not what God desires. ... His plan of restoration is perfect, and that’s what changes us.”
All candidates must be active members of the church of Christ and committed to Christian education. Initial application should include a letter of interest and curriculum vitae. To complete the application, three church references, three professional references, and a transcript of the highest degree are required. Salary and rank are determined based on credentials and experience.

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Learn more about us at: universitycitychurchofchrist.org.
GREAT FALLS, Mont.

Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Members of the Great Falls Church of Christ find new meaning in those words from the Old Testament book of Esther when they consider their new church building.

Actually, it’s not a new building, per se. The 216-member congregation, bursting at the seams of its small, green meeting place on Central Avenue, had bought land and raised money to build a new facility just a few blocks away. But unforeseen costs — and unforeseen city ordinances — skyrocketed the price. So, instead, the church bought a building across town that belonged to a declining Baptist church, and vice versa. Essentially, it was a building swap.

And it came at just the right time. Barely three months after the Great Falls Church of Christ began meeting in its newly purchased facility on 6th Street NW — and four weeks before the church’s grand opening celebration — tragedy took the life of one of its teens.

David Delcomte, 17, died in a July 27 cliff-diving accident at the Gates of the Mountains recreation area. Delcomte, who was part of the church’s youth group, was about to begin his senior year at C.M. Russell High School, where he was a starting outside linebacker for the football team.

“He’s our kid,” said Pam Alfred, whose husband, Bob, is one of the Great Falls church’s four elders.

And, thanks to the building swap, the church was now less than two blocks from the high school. The elders immediately offered to host the funeral. On the Wednesday after the accident, church members started a sign-up list to feed the hundreds of high schoolers expected to attend.

“By the end of Bible class, every slot was filled,” said Shirley Lukkason, wife of church elder Scott Lukkason.

The church brought in counselors and invited Delcomte’s teammates to the building for dinner. Matt Burleson, the church’s intern, spoke to them about their shared grief.

“David was part of your team; he also was part of our team,” Burleson told the student...
More room under a Big Sky

Jim Sullivan leads singing during the second worship service of the Great Falls Church of Christ as Patty Laird signs for the deaf. Sullivan and elder Bob Alfred trained at Acappella Ministries’ Worship Leader Institute.

PHOTOS BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD

The day before the grand opening, Joe Mulhern installs the obligatory “Bible shell” in a men’s restroom of the Great Falls Church of Christ’s new facility.

By Erik Tryggstad | The Christian Chronicle

S
ider Man, bouncy castles and games of cornhole and pickupball (a combination of badminton and table tennis) were played outside the new home of the church.

The grand opening celebration for the church’s new location followed months of meticulous preparation. Less than 24 hours before the service, church members were putting on the finishing touches – setting tables and hanging the plants and potted flowers in their expansive fellowship hall, where a simulcast of the service was set up. Ministers and coaches talked about Delcomte’s devotion to faith, family and his community.

A father leads kids to the after-church carnival in Great Falls.

PHOTOS BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD

The change of venue for the 71-year-old church could have been painful, said Jim Sullivan, a deacon and worship leader.

Moving in, the right way: Church shares its adventures in fundraising, transition

Said Sullivan, “We didn’t want the building that they had wanted. That would have cost too much. And it was across town from the place where they had met for nearly a half-century. (Not that traffic in Montana is a major hindrance.)"

Still, if the building’s previous owners “had just handed us the keys and we said, ‘OK, we’re in here. Now what do we do?’ I think it would have been a really different thing,” Sullivan said.

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The Christian Chronicle Board of Trustees is pleased to announce the creation of a special endowment to secure operation of the Chronicle until the Lord returns. Named the Lynn and Joy McMillon Endowment, the Board seeks to honor Dr. McMillon for 23 years of distinguished, visionary leadership and service.

To contribute to this special endowment online, look for the “Lynn and Joy McMillon Endowment” form at christianchronicle.org/donate. Or, mail a check to The Christian Chronicle, P.O. Box 11000, Oklahoma City, OK 73136-1100 earmarked for the McMillon Endowment. You may also call Lynda Sheehan in our office at (405) 425-5070.

Thank you,
Trustees of the Christian Chronicle Board

The Church of Christ paid $1.175 million for the larger, Baptist building. Thanks to the capital campaigns, the church was able to make the purchase without dipping into the money it received for its old building.

The congregation has invested those funds with The Solomon Foundation, a Colorado-based nonprofit that offers investments to members of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. Sullivan and his wife, Michelle, supervised the transition to the new building. As part of the church’s yearly vision meeting, members signed up for various teams. The functional space team pondered what Bible class or church function would be served best by each room in the new building. A visual space team supervised painting and decorating.

When dividing into teams, “we determined that anybody who signed up was going to be used, called or begged,” said Patty Laird, the minister’s wife. “If someone signs up, you’ve got to use them somewhere.”

Church leaders were surprised by the level of enthusiasm, said Pam Alfred, an elder’s wife. When the teams were forming, “we had visitors there who said, ‘Can I sign up for something?’” she said.

Jim Sullivan added, “The move gave everybody something to do.” And it has helped “a lot of people who felt like maybe they didn’t have a purpose in church before.”
A FORMER MISSIONARY to Kenya explains why he’s so focused on helping start new U.S. congregations.

Why planting new churches matters

BY LYNN McMILLON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Stanley E. Granberg is a church planter at heart.

Granberg and his wife, Gena, planted churches in Meru, Kenya, from 1983 to 1993. Today, he is executive director of Kairos, a church-planting ministry that helps new churches begin across the U.S.

Since Granberg organized the Kairos ministry in 2005, 40 churches and several campus ministries have been planted. Kairos is a resource to help reach people with the good news of Jesus through new churches.

Granberg and the Kairos group have focused their work on the West Coast and the northeastern U.S. — the least churched regions of the US.

The Southwest Church of Christ in Jonesboro, Ar., is the primary supporting church for Granberg and the Kairos ministry.

Granberg is also a founding board member of the Heritage 21 Foundation, which is a resource for churches struggling to make good, informed decisions about their future. For churches that close, Heritage 21 redirects their resources to fund mission-oriented activities, both domestic and foreign.

Granberg has taught at Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., the now-defunct Cascade College in Portland, Ore., and Lubbock Christian University in Texas. He is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., and earned a Ph.D. from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in England.

How did you become interested in church planting?

I was first introduced to the concept of church planting as we prepared for mission work in Meru, Kenya, in 1983. I was prepared and practiced in personal evangelism, but the idea of gathering new believers into church bodies was not a part of my training or experience. Fortunately, we had learned from missionaries like Wendell Broom, Gaston Tarbot and Gailyn VanRheenen and developed the skills to help people come to faith in groups and form new churches.

Then, at Fuller Theological Seminary, I encountered Peter Wagner and his statement that planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic strategy in history. All this prepared me for my stateside call to form KairosChurchPlanting.org in 2005.

I was prompted to begin Kairos because I saw a once vibrant, growing fellowship of Churches of Christ in the Northwest now declining in size, energy and resources. I didn’t want to see that happen, so I resigned from the faculty of then-Cascade College in order to pursue helping our fellowship learn to grow again.

Why is planting new churches important?

There are several answers:

• 1. Research demonstrates that more new people come to faith in new churches than established churches. Newness begets newness!

It’s also a survival focus. As churches age, there is a natural resource shift from all growth to serving the already gathered flock.

• 2. Every church has a lifespan to it. A church must reproduce at least once to replace itself and multiple times for God’s kingdom to grow.

• 3. Churches come in generational waves. Churches tend to serve best the generation that started them, then one or two more generations.

Our society is experiencing a dramatic, generational shift that will require the planting of a whole new generation of 21st century churches, like our movement did early in the 20th century. Few people realize that Churches of Christ planted over 10,000 churches from 1906 to 1948. Will we commit ourselves to that kind of prolific church planting over the next 40 years?

What are some key points that leaders need to consider when thinking about planting a church?

This is such a good question. I’ll answer by identifying the emotional responses I have encountered over the 15 years of my Kairos work, then give a consideration to that emotion.

The most common emotion has been fear: fear of the unknown, something different and losing members. While perfect love casts out fear, let’s remember that faithful love can overcome fear. If we commit ourselves to being faithful to God’s mission to reclaim his lost people, we have a powerful motivator.

Second is control. Church leaders tend to want to control the new church, so it looks, feels and practices just like them. But if it did so, it would be a clone, not a new church.

Why are church plants doing so well?

This is a question that needs definition to answer. Most people judge...
success by size. In the South, where we have many large, mega and super-mega churches, we tend to overestimate the size of success.

The average size church plant at four years has an attendance around 85 people. To many church leaders, that does not sound successful, so why should they invest in anything that is so mediocre?

But remember, the average size church in America is around 85! In our fellowship over 6,500 of our 12,000 U.S. congregations have an attendance less than 60 people.

What new churches bring to the success equation is that 50 percent or more of their new members come through missional conversions, while churches over 10 years old will gain over 80 percent of their new members from transfer growth.

What advice do you have for leaders thinking about planting a church?

First, don’t just think about it, plan for it! Any church can be ready to help a new church start within two years. Kairos will partner with you. You don’t have to do this all alone.

Second, know it will challenge you and your church. You’ll have to learn new skills and meet new challenges. But this new learning will stimulate you as it gives you a ringside seat to the amazing activity of God.

Third, if you want your church to grow, helping a new church start is your best path. A Ph.D. study of 624 churches found that congregations that were actively involved in planting new churches grew three times as fast as those that didn’t. These churches have a mindset more attuned to the needs, questions and desires of unchurched people, and they promote a vision for multiplication that their own members catch.

One reason for this growth is they choose to move from maintenance to missional. KairosCourses.com has instructional videos to help your church make this missional shift.

A missional church is one that adopts missionary thinking and practice in order to reach others with the Gospel.
The Christian Chronicle Crossword

By Myles Mellor | www.ilovecrosswords.com

ACROSS
1. He built the temple where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.
5. Books that lay out the Christian message.
9. Another name for the Devil.
10. Stage of sanctification by God.
11. Chaldee word for father.
17. Listens to.
19. Praise the Lord!
21. Of, in French.
23. Balaam’s carrier.
24. Think over carefully.
26. Make well again.
28. There is ___ God, the Father.
29. Jesus raised him from the dead.
30. For example, abbr.
32. Residue after a burnt offering.
33. Terah was the father of this major figure in the Old Testament.
35. Word of refusal.
37. Approves.
38. Place of burial.
39. Belonging to one of the Gospel writers.

DOWN
1. Day of rest and worship.
2. Apostle Peter told a ___ when he said he did not know Jesus.
3. Labyrinth.
5. Divine messenger.
6. Jesus gave this to a blind man in John 98.
7. Historical time period.
8. Observed.
12. Israeli city founded when Abraham and Abimelech settled their differences over a well of water.
14. Decided, as a judge (like Herod did).
15. Jesus was ___ from the dead.
18. Grave or burial site.
20. ___ and behold!
22. Terrible events that were punishment against Pharaoh and his people for holding the Jews as slaves in Egypt.
23. Making up for wrongdoing.
25. Sin, for example.
27. Bible book describing the life of the Jewish wife of king Ahasuerus who persuaded the king not to kill all the Jews in his kingdom.
31. Old Testament prophet
38. What Abraham saw when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac.
36. Either’s alternative.

ANSWERS: Page 34

Help our kids study for Lads/LTC
We want answers ... and questions! Help our youths study for next year’s Lads to Leaders and Leadership Training for Christ conventions by submitting your original questions from the Gospel of Luke and 2 Samuel. Email your questions to letters@christianchronicle.org.

BIBLE BOWLING
Getting ‘Lost?’ in Luke’s gospel

Easter weekend is a long way off, but it’s never too early to start prepping for the Lads to Leaders and Leadership Training for Christ conventions. If your kids aren’t yet involved, see christianchronicle.org for a list of locations and other resources — plus the answers to these practice questions.

The 2020 theme for Lads to Leaders is “Lost?” from Luke 15 and Bible Bowl questions come from Luke’s gospel. (All questions will be worded from the New King James Version, lest ye forget.)

Here are a few questions from Luke 1:
1. Luke writes that the “narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us” was delivered to him by what two groups? (Luke 1:2)
2. The Gospel of Luke is addressed to “most excellent _____."
3. Why, according to Luke 1:4, is Luke writing this account?
4. The priest Zacharias is of what division?
5. Who was Zacharias’ wife?
6. Zacharias’ wife was of the daughters of ______.
7. What was Zacharias doing when the angel of the Lord appeared to him?
8. What was Zacharias doing when the angel of the Lord appeared to him?
9. What was Zacharias doing when the angel of the Lord appeared to him?
10. Name the angel that spoke to Mary.
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

CHEROKEE HOME FOR CHILDREN
CEBU, Philippines — A group of seven adults and six children from the Cherokee Home for Children in Texas recently spent two weeks on this island, serving and encouraging mission workers.

The home’s first international mission trip “made a great impact on all the team members, who are eager to do it again,” said Marvin Whitt, director of development.

For more information on the trip, see www.chc4kids.org.

BIBLE CAMPS

MAYWOOD CHRISTIAN CAMP
HAMILTON, Ala. — “Lift U” brought together 120 college students from six states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas.

William Sharp, Tide 4 Christ campus minister for the Central Church of Christ in Tuscaloosa, Ala., described the recent event as “five days of spiritual transformation and fellowship that is designed to challenge, renew and empower college-age young adults.”

The goal is “growing the Kingdom of God by equipping them with knowledge and conviction,” Sharp said of Lift U.

“Lift U is not simply camp for college students,” he added, “but rather a completely unique experience to address the varying topics that you encounter in the college-age life stage.”

For more information, see maywoodchristiancamp.com/liftu.

HUMANITARIAN AID

HOPE SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL
HOUSTON — When Hao Vu, a deacon of the Vietnamese Church of Christ in Houston, read in The Christian Chronicle about Africans in two countries who are thirsty for fresh water, he knew he wanted his congregation to help.

“In Houston, Texas, we have plenty of water,” noted Vu, who fled the communists when Saigon fell in 1975.

The church sent $200 to Hope Springs International, a Gallatin, Tenn.-based nonprofit supported by Churches of Christ.

In a letter included with the donation, Vu said the congregation “would like to help these Africans by sending this check to contribute a small part to the fund ... to dig water wells for them.”

“Your effort is appreciated not only by Africans in these two countries,” Vu added, “but also by our Father God.”

SPOTLIGHT

MAASAI MARA, Kenya — K.J. Wright, a linebacker for the Seattle Seahawks, recently traveled to Kenya with Healing Hands International, which is associated with Churches of Christ.

Wright went to check on the progress of his efforts to bring clean water to the Maasai Mara region. He has donated more than $76,000 to fund the drilling and maintenance of water wells. “Thanks to Healing Hands,” he said. “Clearly, you have good energy and good blessings to make this happen.”

Students pose by the new sign at what is now Rochester University in Rochester Hills, Mich. The fall semester brought the change announced last year for the former Rochester College, which is associated with Churches of Christ. Garth Pleasant, the former basketball coach for whom Rochester’s new arena is named, noted that the institution was known as Michigan Christian Junior College when he started work as an instructor 48 years ago. It later became Michigan Christian College. “Though the names have changed, the mission has not,” he said.

New sign makes it official: This Christian college in Michigan is now Rochester University

Students pose by the new sign at what is now Rochester University in Rochester Hills, Mich. The fall semester brought the change announced last year for the former Rochester College, which is associated with Churches of Christ. Garth Pleasant, the former basketball coach for whom Rochester’s new arena is named, noted that the institution was known as Michigan Christian Junior College when he started work as an instructor 48 years ago. It later became Michigan Christian College. “Though the names have changed, the mission has not," he said.
President, preacher and globe trekker Cliff Ganus dies at 97

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

H is passport looked like a pocket-size New Testament, thick with additional, sewn-in pages filled with stamps from around the globe. “I’ve been to 115 countries. It’s wanderlust” Clifton Ganus Jr. told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in 2012.

He had just turned 90 and continued to maintain a regular schedule as chancellor of his alma mater, Harding University. He and his son had recently traveled 700 miles down the White and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, camping along the way. He also had traveled to Eastern Europe with the Harding University Chorus, and had lectured in the Caribbean, Africa and Alaska.

Ganus, who served as the third president of the Searcy, Ark., university associated with Churches of Christ, died Sept. 9.

Born in Hillsboro, Texas, Ganus enrolled at Harding College in 1939 and studied Bible and history. As soon as he arrived on campus, he met Louise Nicholas, a second-year student at Harding. It was love at first sight.

“School didn’t even start until the next day, and I already had my wife,” Clifton Ganus told a Harding publication in 2017. “That’s pretty good for a freshman. We went together the next four years.”

Ganus graduated in 1943 — and married Louise an hour and a half after he walked across the stage to receive his diploma.

He preached for a Church of Christ in Charleston, Miss., and later earned a master’s and doctorate in history from Tulane University in New Orleans.

He began teaching Bible and history at Harding in 1946 and served as vice president from 1956-65. Then he was named president, succeeding George S. Benson.

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He began teaching Bible and history at Harding in 1946 and served as vice president from 1956-65. Then he was named president, succeeding George S. Benson.

He created the President’s Development Council and Associated Women for Harding to recruit students and raise money for Harding. During his tenure, the college attained university status in 1979 and launched initiatives including a Christian Communication program for preacher training, a nursing program, a Doctor of Ministry degree through Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., a study abroad program in Italy and the Walton Scholars Program.

He oversaw Harding’s resumption of intercollegiate athletics in 1957 and was an ardent supporter of Bison athletics. When he stepped down from the presidency in 1987, Harding’s board of trustees named the physical education complex the Ganus Athletic Center.

That same year, Ganus became the university’s first chancellor.

SEE A TRIBUTE to Ganus at harding.edu/ganus.
**Milestones**

**Anniversary**

60th: John and Donna Nance, Sept. 25, Houston, Texas.

**Memorials**

**Dr. Lynn E. Mitchell, Jr. 1940 – 2019**

Dr. Lynn E. Mitchell Jr., 78, of Sulphur, La., died on July 20, 2019, in a local hospital. He was born on August 15, 1940, in La Feria, Texas, to Lynn Mitchell Sr. and Hazel Mitchell. Dr. Mitchell held the following degrees:

- Bible with minors in Greek and English, Abilene Christian University, 1961.
- Doctorate in Religious Studies, Rice University, 1979.

Dr. Mitchell was also part of the Academic Society Membership, American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, American Society of Christian Ethics, and Restoration Theological Research Fellowship. Dr. Mitchell was a Resident Scholar in Religion in A.D. Bruce Religion Center and Director of the Religious Studies Program for the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, University of Houston, 1985 – 2014.

His selected publications included:

- “Walking in the Light: How Christians Face Ethical Issues.”
- “Two Ages and Two Communities: The Implications of an Eschatological Duality for Development of a Social Ethic” Dissertation at Rice University Microfilms International.

Dr. Mitchell is survived by his wife, Carolyn Kellogg Mitchell; two children: Anne Mitchell Liscum of Sulphur, La., and Jon Colin Mitchell of Katy, Texas.

**Mabel Perry Taylor 1925 – 2019**

Mrs. Mabel Perry Taylor of Florence, Ala., age 94, passed away Thursday morning, August 8, 2019. Mabel was born April 22, 1925, in Tintern, Ontario, Canada, and left home to attend Harding College in Searcy, Ark., in 1945. There she met Richard Neal Taylor, and they married in 1948 after their graduation.

Mabel faithfully served as high school librarian for Mars Hill Bible School in Florence for 20 years. She was also known for supporting her husband, Richard, as he preached for many churches of Christ in the Florence area. She enjoyed being with family, traveling, reading, and being a hospital volunteer. Mabel loved her homeland of Canada but finally became a U.S. citizen.

Mabel was preceded in death by their son, Ronnie Ernest; parents, Ernest and Grace Perry; brothers, Donald Perry and Charles Perry; and sisters, Mary Wark and Amy Halls. She is survived by her husband of 71 years, Richard; three sons: Richard, Jr. (Janis), Henderson, Tenn., Perry (Karen), Murfreesboro, Tenn., Bruce (Debby), Marietta, Ga.; her grandchildren: Chris (Tisha) Taylor, Grant (Tonya) Taylor, Heather (Dustin) Steele, Hannah (Derek) Ratliff, Renna (Ben) Clark, Kelsey Taylor, and Joshua Taylor; and five great-grandchildren: Kyleigh, Tori, Caden, Taylor, and Nate. She is also survived by a sister, Myrna Perry, and two brothers, Eugene Perry and Ralph (Joyce) Perry, all of Ontario, Canada.

**Nancy Ferguson 1934 – 2019**

Nancy Ann Lewis Ferguson, author of “Living a Worthy Life,” “For the Love of the Lord,” and “Words to Live By” died in Abilene, Texas, July 16, age 85.

Her parents, Byrd Ray and Lucille Lewis, were active in church in Del Rio, Texas, Greensboro, N.C., and later Gastonia, N.C. Nancy was the third of five generations in her family to graduate from Abilene Christian College / University. She majored in Bible, reasoning it would be useful no matter what else she might do in life. She taught elementary school in Alvin, Texas, before marrying Everett Ferguson in 1956 and taught in Melrose, Mass., before the birth of their children. Everett praises her homemaking as a major reason he was able to accomplish so much in his career.

Nancy enjoyed practicing hospitality, welcoming students, missionaries, and many others into their home. She used her considerable cooking skills to feed hearts and souls. She worked with Song & Supper for college students and later the international student ministry at Hillcrest Church of Christ in Abilene. Nancy’s family are still members there after 57 years; and her husband and their son, Ray, have served as elders at Hillcrest.

Nancy also excelled as a Bible teacher. She wrote curriculum for primary classes and Children’s Bible Hour at Hillcrest and VBS materials for Sweet Publishing. When she reluctantly realized she had become one of the “older women” of Titus 2, she refocused her efforts to ladies Bible class and helped begin the Motherly Love program to encourage mothers of young children.

Attending professional meet-ings with Everett, Nancy did cross stitch (often incorporated into quilts, thanks to the encouragement of her beloved daughter-in-law, Star). When he travelled to teach and preach, she also taught classes for ladies in Canada, England, Germany, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Russia. She has also conducted workshops retreats in Texas, Michigan, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and taught lectureships classes at ACU, Pepperdine, Oklahoma Christian, Nigerian Christian Bible College, Freed Hardeman, and Harding. Nancy has published articles in Power for Today, 21st Century Christian, Gospel Advocate, and Church and Family.

Officiating at her funeral, son-in-law Doug Doyle from West University Church, Odessa, Texas, honored HER request to tell mother-in-law jokes! Also speaking were daughter, Ann Doyle; son-in-law, George (Pat) Luchs from Fairfield, Calif.; grandson, John Ferguson from Abilene; and honorary son, Hank Hoadley from Beaumont, Texas. She leaves behind 6 grandchildren and 1 great-grandson. Memorials may be sent to: Hillcrest Church of Christ Missions (650 E Ambler, Abilene, Texas 79601); World English Institute (1525 NW Division St., Gresham, Ore. 97030; www.worldenglishinstitute.net); or Parkinson’s Foundation (PO Box 6003, Albert Lea, Minn. 56007; www.parkinson.org).

**Marie Shipp**, 91, Aug. 2, Klenburn, Texas.

**With Appreciation**

The Christian Chronicle appreciates and acknowledges generous gifts received in honor of Dixie Bozeman and Mobby Ross Jr.; for the Lynn and Joy McMillon Endowment fund; and in memory of Sharon Hamilton, Al Pitts, and Ruth Tharp.

Submit your wedding announcements, birth announcements, memorials or tributes to milestones@christianchronicle.org. Submissions start at $25.
Brittany Tate scholarships will support historically Harding University in Searcy, Ark. The Business Scholarships awarded by as recipients of the first Botham Jean Montez with business dean Allen Frazier. Porte, Brittany Tate, Yui Kondo and Tonio Botham Jean scholarship winners Courtney Fraze Welty Cobb.

Botham Jean scholarship winners Courtney Porter, Brittany Tate, Yui Kondo and Tonio Montez with business dean Allen Frazier.

SELECTED: Yui Kondo, Tonio Montez, Brittany Tate and Courtney Porter, as recipients of the first Botham Jean Business Scholarships awarded by Harding University in Searcy, Ark. The scholarships will support historically underrepresented populations as they pursue their degrees. The program was established by Harding and PwC in honor of Botham Jean, a 2016 alumnus tragically killed Sept. 6, 2018.

HONORED: Matt Carter, with Campus for Christ’s Stephen Eckstein Award, recognizing a lifetime of achievement in campus ministry. Carter serves as director of admissions at Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn. Micah Cobb, with Campus for Christ’s Jim Brinkerhoff Award, recognizing a person who has done particularly outstanding work during the past school year. Cobb serves as campus minister at Auburn University in Alabama.

HIRED: George Welty, as discipleship minister for the Northwest Church of Christ in St. Petersburg, Fla. Lisa Fraze, as a major gifts officer for Lubbock Christian University in Texas.

Preacher/Evangelist - Soldotna, Alaska

Soldotna Church of Christ is seeking an evangelist to preach the word in sound doctrine. Instruction will include sermons from the pulpit and weekly classes. He will lead the congregation’s efforts to spread the gospel of Christ to our community and surrounding areas. He will mentor church members and potential leaders in the congregation to cultivate their spiritual gifts; he will provide Christ-centered counsel.

Send your resume, references and a link to recent sermons to:
soldotnachurchofchrist@yahoo.com

Bible-based Minister Needed - Burbank, California

Seeking a sound and mature minister to work with our current minister and 50-member congregation. Transition to full-time pulpit minister as our current minister retires. Must be solid in Scriptures, passionate for evangelism, a capable preacher and Bible class teacher. Opportunity to help a close-knit and loving congregation grow. Self-motivated person with heart of a servant who demonstrates love for people. Own building/classroom facilities in major metro/mission area. Flexible on salary and benefits; parsonage available. Willingness to do secular part-time work encouraged. To apply, email resume, audio/visual recordings of 2 sermons to:
Burbank Church of Christ, Attn: Nathan Scott, 3020 W Burbank Blvd, Burbank, CA
Or by email: burbankchuchofchrist@gmail.com

Minister Search - Garden City, Kansas

The Church of Christ is seeking a minister who defines his ministry as preaching, teaching and equipping others to serve. We are a congregation of 80+ members who seek to be Jesus by loving and serving each other and our community. We’re seeking a preacher who wants to work and minister alongside us.

We have a nice four-bedroom parsonage, salary is negotiable along with benefits and shall be commensurate with experience and education.

If you would like to be considered for this ministry, please submit your resume, a current video media of two sermons (a link is acceptable) and a concise one-page statement that characterizes your current ministry efforts and style. Also, please include a current photo and three references. You may also submit your information via our church website by going to http://www.gccchurchofchrist.com/ministerssearch.

Church of Christ, 1715 Pioneer Rd, Garden City, KS 67846
(620) 272-7645 (Pete Cedra, elder) (620) 640-9142 (Jarrod Spencer, deacon)
gccchurchofchrist.com
gccchurchofchrist@cox.net

Deadline for next two issues: October 4 and November 8

Classifieds start at $300; discounts where applicable.
Contact Tonya Patton at: tonya.pattton@christianchronicle.org.
Visit our online listings at christianchronicle.org/classifieds.

Minister Search for a northern Ohio congregation

Bellevue, Ohio, Church of Christ is seeking a minister. Must be energetic and have sense of humor. Small congregation.
stillphil01@hotmail.com

MINISTER NEEDED

The Porterville Church of Christ is in search of a full-time minister. We are a strong congregation of 125 members who are active in community service and support an active youth program (including a Bible Camp and state-wide youth rally). Please send resume with your experience and education, as well as your view of the role of the minister and visual access to a recent sermon. Salary is negotiable.

Pulpit Search Committee
1000 N Newcomb
Porterville, CA 93257
church@pvcoc.org
(512) 923-9181
Full Job Posting:

The Porterville Church of Christ is in search of a full-time minister. We are a strong congregation of 125 members who are active in community service and support an active youth program (including a Bible Camp and state-wide youth rally). Please send resume with your experience and education, as well as your view of the role of the minister and visual access to a recent sermon. Salary is negotiable.

Pulpit Search Committee
1000 N Newcomb
Porterville, CA 93257
church@pvcoc.org
(512) 923-9181
Full Job Posting:

The Weless 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@welessscoc.org
(512) 923-9181
Full-Time Minister - Austin, Texas
Despite setbacks, Texan teen perseveres

CHAPLAIN THANKS THE LORD for 18-year-old Kimbree Houston and reminders ‘that God and life are good.’

LUBBOCK, Texas

Socially marginalized and rejected by her peers, Kimbree Houston was in third grade when she began writing suicide letters to her counselor.

For Kimbree, a member of the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ in this West Texas city, life had not been easy.

Weighing just 1 pound, 15 ounces at birth, she was the size of a can of soda. She spent her first three months in a neonatal intensive care unit.

Then, when she was 1, a physical therapist noticed her legs were different lengths. X-rays revealed she had hip dysplasia, meaning her hip ball was outside of the socket and turned the wrong way.

At age 2, doctors placed a permanent feeding tube into her stomach to help her gain weight. More x-rays revealed she had severe scoliosis, a 98 percent S-shaped curve in her back.

When she was 3, doctors noticed aberrant eating habits in Kimbree. She had tubes in her mouth and throat for so long that she struggled physically and emotionally when anything would touch her mouth.

One year, Kimbree and her mom, Tori, spent the entire summer in the hospital.

Those letters she wrote in third grade led to a conference between her mom and the counselor. Because of the nature of the threat, the counselor had a responsibility to talk to Kimbree’s mom.

Kimbree struggled to understand why God allowed her conditions.

She was then held back. She’s always had modified classes and tests and is academically behind compared to those her same age. An excess of oxygen in the NICU caused some damage to her brain, making her struggle with short-term memory.

Today, at age 18, she has survived multiple surgeries and so many trips to Scottish Rite Hospital in Dallas that her mother quit counting and journaling after the 40th visit. She has had body casts, a halo brace and growing rods, which remain in her back today. Kimbree weighs just 70 pounds, is a junior in high school and is on the school golf team.

She has continued to struggle with her eating over the years, even battling anorexia and bulimia at times.

Those who know her, who have witnessed her journey, say her life demonstrates that there are many things and many people to live for, especially for believers.

Kimbree Houston, 18, of Lubbock, Texas, brushes her horse, Sunshine.

Kimbree has chosen happiness. She has excelled on the high school golf team. In fact, her doctors are astounded that she can make her body move in the ways a golf swing requires.

Not only has she overcome that obstacle, but she recently obtained her driver’s license.

Recently, Kimbree and her grandparents came to dinner at our house. I learned she has a miniature horse, which was given to her by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association when she was very young. I asked her if I could meet the horse. She agreed.

Kimbree drove her mother and me to the stables in the country to see her very beautiful horse, Sunshine.

It was a special experience. I give thanks that the Lord has shown a little girl with serious setbacks in life that it is worth persevering, that God and life are good.

BOB MIZE is a chaplain, minister and freelance writer who lives in Lubbock, Texas. He can be reached at reckmize@gmail.com.
Love ‘these servants of God’

“Y

You will all watch your words and the ways that you go at these people, these servants of God!”

Certainly, ministers are not perfect. They are human. They make mistakes. But too often, the stories we hear about how these “servants of God” are treated by elders and congregations break our hearts.

In our front-page story on a church seeking to make a smooth transition, retiring preacher Gregg Strawn insists fellow Christians not look at the church staff “as people with a target on their backs.” Amen!

Let us not forget, ministers often carry burdens the congregation knows nothing about. It’s sometimes difficult for them to find close friendships where they can share their struggles and know those interactions are safe and confidential.

Ministers need support, a place where they can be honest about their own struggles, whether it be with mental health or otherwise, without it impacting the future of their job.

Recent news of an evangelical megachurch pastor’s suicide is one reason to spotlight this need. Jarrid Wilson was known for advocating for mental health and was himself struggling with depression.

In this issue, we’ve focused on how leaders and those paid servants should interact.

Besides the Page 1 piece from Oregon, we ask you to read Cheryl Mann Bacon’s column (Page 30) on “Best Practices for Dismissing a Minister.” Next month, look for a related commentary on “What Not to Do When Firing a Minister.”

Here’s the bottom line: We in Churches of Christ need to make sure we are caring for and supporting those called to serve in ministry in a way that will continue to point them to Christ.

FROM OUR READERS

Kind words about a crossword

Thank you for adding the Bible-themed crossword to The Christian Chronicle.

I was delighted to arrive home from work yesterday to find the September 2019 issue on the counter. I opened it up and began to peruse the pages.

Several heartwarming stories caught my eye, but none matched the tears that welled up in my eyes when I turned to page 23 and viewed my 77-year-old Mother’s handwriting.

Mom had apparently flipped through the newspaper before I arrived home and stumbled upon the crossword puzzle. Apparently, she had used her Bible and memory to complete the puzzle. I was amazed as it was filled out completely.

This wouldn’t be that unusual except that my mom suffers from Alzheimer’s and stopped working the New York Times crosswords years ago because they “had just gotten too hard,” she said.

Thank you for adding the crossword puzzle. To many it’s probably just a puzzle, but to me, it was a moment that I got to see my mother enjoying a hobby that she had been unable to participate in for years.

LORIE MINOR | Mobile, Ala.

STATESIDE MISSIONARY NEEDED IN NEW ENGLAND

You don’t have to go to Antarctica to be a missionary!

Consider America’s greatest mission field: the northeastern states. One out of five Americans live in the northeast United States, but the Lord’s church is numerically weaker there than anywhere else in the nation.

Evangelist needed to plant a church in beautiful Massachusetts. This is a “start from scratch” opportunity. It will not be an easy task: most people are multi-generational Catholics or have no religious affiliation at all. Agnostics are everywhere, but so are seekers for truth. This field is ripe for harvest!

Must be experienced at conducting home Bible studies, defending faith in God, and establishing friendships. Looking for someone who will stay a few years and not be easily discouraged. Must have convictions on a cappella music and male spiritual leadership.

May need to help raise part of his financial support.

Contact: Outreach Minister, Church of Christ
PO Box 755, New Milford, Connecticut 06776
E-mail: dtarbet@swbell.net
http://berkshirecountycoc.org
Cell: 214-926-2747
Best practices for dismissing a minister

CHURCH EXPERTS AND those who have been there offer five key recommendations for leaders.

First of two parts

S

omewhere in the unwritten but badly needed handbook for elders are three rules:

1. Do hard things well.
2. Do painful things kindly.
3. If you must fire your preacher, use your head — and your heart.

Experts agree, and many ministers know from painful experience — sometimes career-ending and faith-challenging experience — that even unwritten rules can be broken, often with devastating consequences.

That’s not how it begins.

Individuals don’t accept the call to ministry planning to be ineffective or to be a bad match with a congregation. Similarly, elders may desire the position and fulfill the qualifications written in I Timothy and Titus, but they may have little experience with hiring and firing, certainly not with dismissing a member of the church they were called to shepherd.

But ministers battered and broken by employment problems share stories of financial peril, protracted searches for a new position and hurt spouses unwilling to risk going through it all again.

They didn’t begin that way. They started with prayerful intent and the excitement of a new position. But over time, ministers’ naïveté can blind them to signs of dissatisfaction, and elders’ lack of communication skills about their expectations can lead to surprises when finally trying to work through the problem.

Eddie Sharp, senior consultant with the Siburt Institute for Church Ministry at Abilene Christian University in Texas, says sometimes a minister makes an immoral mistake or may just be a poor match with a particular church.

“The end of a ministry may be legitimate, but that will never make it easy,” Sharp says.

Resource organizations, such as the Siburt Institute, provide support for churches dealing with a ministerial crisis, but many elders are unaware of these groups. Also, elders may not recognize the complexity of searching, hiring and firing a minister.

Still, some congregations do get it right. They find a way to successfully transition ministers from employment to unemployment to new employment. Effective transitions share some best practices.

1. Begin with a good hiring process.

Robert Oglesby, director of the Ministers’ Support Network, a program of the Siburt Institute, advises churches to be more discerning on the front end.

Too often, he says, search committees get desperate and don’t check references.

Doug Peters, minister and consultant for Interim Ministry Partners, which mentors leaders and guides churches, agrees.

“In one sense, every minister is an interim,” says Peters, who preaches for the Grace Crossing Church of Christ, north of Houston. “Rarely does someone spend their whole life with one church until they retire or die. I really focus on clarifying an understanding up front in writing that can be used as the basis of yearly evaluations,” he says.

Carson Reed, executive director of the Siburt Institute, advises churches to have written policies guiding hiring and termination that provide clarity for all parties, a document that says: “Here’s how we’ll behave. Here’s how this will end if it ends — the expectations on both sides.”

2. Evaluate regularly, and put it in writing.

If employment details and expectations are provided up front, then regular evaluations can help avoid surprises. These appraisals can provide time to review progress, establish new goals and address any problems.

If the makeup of an eldership changes, new elders need to be informed of these expectations so they can participate in assessing what plans going forward should be. If this doesn’t happen, ministers may be blindsided by the new, unspoken expectations.

For example, in a church setting, unlike the corporate world, ministers’ spouses may be included in the interview process, or churches may have certain expectations of spouses. That would be illegal in secular employment, but one HR lesson applies: Write it down.


Sharp recalls when he was “mentored out of a job” by elders who

Perspective

Cheryl Mann Bacon

Carson Reed, executive director of the Siburt Institute at Abilene Christian University in Texas, visits with attendees during ACU’s Summit in 2018.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

1. Do hard things well.
2. Do painful things kindly.
3. If you must fire your preacher, use your head — and your heart.

He also advises elderships to be judicious about who conveys concerns to ministers: the elder who has a strained relationship with a minister shouldn’t be the one communicating problems.

“You’re the last person who should speak to him about that. He knows you don’t like him. He can’t hear you at all.” Likewise, Oglesby says the elder closest to the minister would not be the right person to have the conversation.

If elders have done annual reviews and documented them, they will be able to refer back to them and say, “Remember all these instances we’ve tried to coach you on. That’s not a good fit. That’s not how this church works.”


Reed, like others who work regularly with ministers and elders, admits that sometimes ministers need to be dismissed, in which case honesty should be foundational.

“ Ideally, elders should frame the dismissal in ways that demonstrate helpfulness for the church and the minister,” Reed says. “It takes some art to do that. If things are not going well, it may be better for the minister to move on, and it may be clear to a group of elders that it would be better — but can we do it in a way that’s helpful for both.”

Sharp recalls when he was “mentored out of a job” by elders who
communicated honestly and clearly with him. Just out of grad school, he accepted a youth ministry position at a church in Las Vegas, Nev.

“T was really bad at it,” Sharp recalls. “About six months in, the elders say, ‘We don’t think this is what you should be doing. We have a preacher, and we’re going to keep him. So we think in about six months, you should be somewhere else preaching.’ Boy were they right. I wasn’t so much fired as mentored out.”

Honesty and transparency with the congregation are equally critical. Grady King, co-leader of Hope Network and director of church resources at Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City, says elders must take responsibility.

“The buck stops with them. They have to say honestly, ‘We asked him to resign.’ To say it’s a mutual agreement, if it’s not true — it’s a lie.”

King recalls one elder who, after an announcement was made about a minister’s departure, went to the middle of the auditorium and took the hits from anyone who didn’t like what they had heard. “I told him, ‘God bless you for that.’ ”

4. Provide adequate time, money and resources for the transition.

If a church has hired well, evaluated regularly and communicated openly, a compassionate transition should be achievable. While Oglesby says he can’t cite a standard, a three-month severance package is common. Even that time is often inadequate since it takes many ministers three, six or even 12 months to find a new position.

Corporate dismissals often come with a month of pay for each year of service, which is worth considering for ministers with extended ministry in a single location. But even ministers with shorter tenures need time and resources to relocate a family and heal from the trauma of losing a job.

5. Shepherding and redemption.

Even when a dismissal results from immorality, an addiction or financial dishonesty, experts say the goal should be redemption.

“Say the minister had an affair. In the worst of circumstances, it’s best to provide care, counseling. If it’s embezzlement, let someone pay it back,” Oglesby advises.

King agrees. “I still think the ultimate goal is redemption, counseling, therapy. Provide support, even if you let him go. Provide help for the spouse. How can we be redemptive, be helpful?”

Spouses and children often report that the most painful part of the family’s separation from the church is they have lost their church, their community, their children’s friends — not just a job and income. Thus, the delicate intersection of employer and shepherd must be traversed with care.

“An elder group has to attend to matters of employment and be aware of certain things you can and can’t do or say as an employer,” Reed says. “On the other hand, there’s the pastoral side of that. It would be a helpful exercise to be able to tend to both hats in gracious ways. It may be necessary to dismiss a minister, and you want to do that well and ethically and with integrity. But there’s still the pastoral dimension. How do we attend to this family that now has lost their employment? Can we provide care or invite others to care?”

Reed says he knows of elders who have hired therapists for ministers and their families. Elders should also enlist others to make sure families receive the care they need.

Sharp recommends, “Somebody in eldership needs to commit to walk along beside the family so they aren’t pushed out by themselves — so they’re not pariahs. The sense of isolation, loss and abuse can be huge when just put adrift in your dinghy, and the church seems so eager to just go on.”

Simply put, he says being responsible means, “Don’t be mean. How you go about it depends on personalities and situations, but at some point, sacrificial lambs need a shepherd, too.”

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. Contact her at bacon@acu.edu.
What should we make of the strange and daringly sensual Song of Songs?

Despite 2,500 years of varied interpretations, the Song of Songs remains an enigma to most in Churches of Christ. Many contemporary scholars secularize the Song, considering it a literal work between two lovers. Other writers, especially more conservative thinkers, consider the work an allegory representing a marriage hymn between Christ and his church. Members of Churches of Christ tend to adopt this view — or they simply have no opinion because they have not studied it.

Can we interpret the Song on both literal and allegorical grounds?

And does any of this matter to believers today? Ilana Pardes tackles these questions in her concise-yet-thorough “The Song of Songs: A Biography.” Pardes, professor of comparative literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, aims to “reconsider the trajectory of the Song’s exegetical history,” she writes, by exploring the many interpretations and uses of the Song — from ancient Israel to today. She deftly weaves her way through the interpretive transition from the allegorical to the literal and then shows how they are intertwined and inseparable.

Pardes’ work is erudite and academic yet highly readable. She does not attach herself to any specific agenda and does not attempt to sway the reader to any definitive conclusion. Rather, she presents the Song’s interpretations through the millennia inside a well-crafted, historical overview.

Pardes concerns herself with possibly the strangest book of the canon, a daringly sensual poem of love with no reference to God or national history. She proceeds chronologically, beginning with the Jewish rabbis of the second temple period who rendered the Song allegorically, as divine revelations given to the “beloved,” either at the Red Sea during the Exodus or at Mt. Sinai.

Early Christian writers viewed the Song allegorically as well. In the third century, Origen was the first to suggest that the Song was a marriage hymn between Jesus and his bride, a view later carried forward in 12th century France by Saint Bernard, who considered it a wedding song celebrating the spiritual union of the Bride and Bridegroom.

In chapter four, the author discusses the literalist perspective, the mainstream view held by most scholars from the Enlightenment to the present day. I found the final chapter most satisfying — a survey of how the Song emerged in the writings of a few of America’s literary giants: Herman Melville, Walt Whitman and Toni Morrison. Morrison carries forward the motif of the black experience and how the Song became a notable biblical source in slave narratives and abolitionist rhetoric. Thus, the Song of Songs was at least partly responsible for marking a new abolitionist spirit.

Today, the Song’s poetic charm does not seem to fade. It continues to resonate in academia and in the works of contemporary writers, artists and painters. It lives in worship services and weddings, Jewish Sabbath ceremonies, and even in films, such as the Cohen Brothers’ “Miller’s Crossing.” (“If I’d known we were gonna cast our feelings into words, I’d’ve memorized the Song of Solomon,” says Tom Reagan, played by Gabriel Byrne in the film.)

Ancient scholars saw an allegorical poem representing God to Israel, or Jesus to his church. Medieval scholars saw this and more, unafraid and unashamed to consider the more passionate parts of the song poetically. Moderns see an erotic, secular poem. And some Christians even consider the Song irrelevant.

Whatever the perspective of the reader, Pardes presents a fresh look at this divinely inspired work. Her interesting review is a timely reminder of the wonder of God’s word and that — at least for this part of the canon — literal and allegorical interpretations can live together in harmony.
NONFICTION


“Saints and sinners, all jumbled up together.” That’s the genius of Johnny Cash, and that’s what the gospel is ultimately all about.

Johnny Cash sang about and for people on the margins. He famously played concerts in prisons, where he sang both murder ballads and gospel tunes in the same set. It’s this juxtaposition between light and dark, writes Richard Beck, that makes Cash one of the most authentic theologians in memory.

In “Trains, Jesus, and Murder,” Beck explores the theology of Johnny Cash by investigating a dozen of Cash’s songs. In reflecting on Cash’s lyrics, and the passion with which he sang them, we gain a deeper understanding of the enduring faith of the Man in Black.

Richard Beck is professor of psychology at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, and a popular blogger, speaker and author. His published research also covers topics as diverse as the psychology of profanity and why Christian bookstore art is so bad. Beck leads a Bible study each week for inmates at a maximum-security prison.

BROKENNESS


Growing up in a hard-scrabble family that included a grandfather with a predilection for blowing up houses and members whose names sounded more like cartoon characters than real people (e.g., Carrot, Uncle Hooks, Aunt Chubb and Uncle Fat), Wardle had no idea what life could be like beyond his clan. Though sometimes hilarious and affectionate, his family also plagued him with a truckload of fear, an overwhelming sense of inadequacy, and trauma that no young boy should experience.

By the age of 40, Wardle had planted one of the fastest growing churches in the United States, become a seminary president, written several books and was speaking across the country. He was headed for the top rung of the Christian leadership ladder. But as the external pressure collided with internal turmoil, he spiraled into a debilitating breakdown that landed in a psychiatric facility. In time, God orchestrated an emotional and spiritual transformation in Wardle’s life, taking him on a journey from broken to beloved.

For readers in search of a story of hope as well as Christian counselors, spiritual directors and those longing for emotional healing, this unforgettable, must-read memoir reveals that it is only by looking back that we can begin to move forward on the healing path.

“By telling my story I hope readers will turn to Christ for the healing of their unprocessed emotional pain,” writes Wardle. “I want them to embrace their own story of brokenness and find the path to new life.” Terry is a popular author and dynamic speaker who leads seminars and retreats that equip pastors, counselors, clinicians, and spiritual directors.

RESTORATION AND PHILOSOPHY


A product of the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth century, the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement gave rise to such denominations as the Church of Christ (a cappella), the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. While scholars have examined many of the historical, ecclesial, socio-cultural, and biographical dimensions of this indigenously American religious tradition, few have singled it out for philosophical exploration and critique.

In Restoration and Philosophy, editor J. Caleb Clanton and a team of philosophers engage with the Stone-Campbell Restoration tradition to address issues related to epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, moral philosophy, aesthetics, environmentalism, and race. Along the way, the authors help to contextualize the Stone-Campbell Restoration tradition within American religious history—and within Christian philosophy more generally—and they show its continuing relevance today.

Scholars and students of philosophy and religious studies, as well as ministers and those interested in this uniquely American Christian tradition, will benefit from this carefully edited, thoroughly researched, and highly readable collection of essays by eminent philosophers and religious scholars.

J. Caleb Clanton is University Research Professor and professor of philosophy at Lipscomb University in Nashville.

CHRISTIAN WOMAN FICTION

A trip to Home Depot leads to a baptism and hope for Venezuela

FOOTNOTE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. 'Go Dawgs!'

That wasn’t a phrase I expected to hear in the heart of Tennessee Vols country. (Actually, it’s more like Commodore country now since Vanderbilt has the national title in baseball.)

Nevertheless, there was my beloved Bulldog battle cry, coming from one of my all-time favorite preachers, Steve Watson. He ministered for the Campus View Church of Christ in Athens, Ga., when I was in grad school at UGA.

I still remember the time he had a church member up in the sound booth pretend to be the voice of God and converse with him. Steve kept cutting him off. “Now, wait here, Lord!” It ended up being a real “not my will but thine” kind of sermon.

Steve and his wife, Jane, are retired now and worship with the Pegram Church of Christ, west of Nashville. I was emceeing a breakfast for Hope for Haiti’s Children at my other alma mater, Lipscomb University, and there they were.

(Y’all know I went to Lipscomb, right? That’s a joke for my fellow Georgia Christian Student Center alum Dustin Rector, who could do a spot-on Steve Watson impression.)

I told the Watsons about my recent trip to South America to report on the Venezuelan diaspora.

I was surprised by their reaction. You see, about three years ago Steve was at Home Depot looking for something. He ended up on the same aisle with a Venezuelan man named Cristian Yovera, who also was looking for something.

(Either of them could have asked one of those folks in the orange aprons for help, but guys just don’t do that in Home Depot.)

Steve did, however, ask Cristian if he could help him find what he was looking for. Lo and behold, that turned out to be the Gospel. The two men became friends, and Bible studies and baptism followed. Now Cristian and his wife, Angelica, are members of the Pegram church.

Though his burdens were lifted, Cristian felt a different burden for his home country, where a deepening economic crisis has resulted in children dying from starvation. Even aspirin is scarce.

So the Watsons and Yoveras started shipping relief supplies to Venezuela. Through their contacts, they’re able to get them to the people who most need them — no small feat.

That providential trip to Home Depot changed not only the Yoveras’ lives, but the Watsons’, too. In the midst of their retirement, “it kind of reignedited us,” Steve told me. “It’s like God knew we needed that kick.”

In these pages I’ve reported on the impact of Venezuela’s crisis on Churches of Christ in Argentina, Chile and Colombia. But this story is at our doorsteps, too. At least 290,000 Venezuelans have come to the U.S. since the crisis began.

Members of the West Broward Church of Christ in Florida and workers with Healing Hands International have sponsored relief efforts for Venezuela.

The folks at Pegram sent nearly 75 boxes of supplies to Venezuela this summer. They need funds to keep the work going. Find out how to help at christianchronicle.org.

It’s amazing how God keeps leading me to stories of immigrants and refugees. Time and again, I’ve seen the melding of cultures bring out the best in us.

That, my friends, is a real “not my will but thine” sermon. The common cause of serving others can unite Bulldogs, Vols and Commodores.

(And Bama fans, too? Eh ... let me get back to you on that.)

ERIK TRYGGESTAD is president and CEO of The Christian Chronicle. Contact erik@christianchronicle.org. Follow him on Twitter at @eriktryggestad.
Mount Dora Christian Academy and Children’s Home is hiring!

We have an immediate opening for a Development Officer / Director of Church Relations.

Qualifications: Prior experience in fundraising and/or sales and marketing. Good organizational and public speaking skills and proficiency using Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Position requires some weekend travel making presentations in churches. Must be a faithful member of the Church of Christ and pass criminal background and agency checks.

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About the Organization: Mount Dora Children’s Home has been serving children and families since 1945 and is affiliated with the churches of Christ. Our beautiful 70-acre campus is in the heart of central Florida. We invite qualified candidates to come join our successful ministry to help change young lives and give them hope for the future.

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