Guilty and forgiven

Botham Jean’s younger brother, Brandt Jean, hugs convicted murderer and former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger after delivering his impact statement.

Botham Jean’s brother extends grace to officer convicted of murder

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Searcy, Ark.

A stunned silence fell over the daily chapel service at Harding University, where police shooting victim Botham Shem Jean, 26, earned his accounting degree and was known for his singing voice and dedication to his faith.

Thousands of the Christian university’s students had just watched a video in which Jean’s younger brother, Brandt, 18, offered forgiveness and an emotional hug to Amber Guyger, the fired Dallas police officer convicted of murdering his loved one.

As voices outside the Texas courtroom chanted “No justice, no peace” in protest of the 10-year sentence that Guyger — who had faced up to 99 years in prison — received, Brandt Jean took the witness stand to make a victim impact statement.

“If you are truly sorry, I know I can speak for myself: I forgive you,” he told Guyger. “And I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you.”

The early October video quickly went viral around the world. Many on social media championed Brandt Jean as an example for all Christians to follow. Others raised concerns that his gesture might distract from the black community’s cries for justice in police shooting cases.

In this small Arkansas town, about 370 miles northeast of Dallas, Harding President Bruce McLarty — who

See FORGIVEN, Page 8

SURPRISE CHOICES: New presidents inaugurated at Pepperdine and Ohio Valley, universities associated with Churches of Christ. Pages 17 and 24
PREACH THE WORD EVERY

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It’s time to talk about predators in the church

SEARCY, Ark.

The predator repented. Or so he claimed. He’d done his time and confessed his sins. He was a changed man. Or so he told the elders of a congregation willing to forgive. He was welcomed into the fold. But to protect children, the leaders determined that they couldn’t be too careful. They’d require a “buddy system” where the man wouldn’t be alone at church. Someone who knew his background would be by his side at all times.

However, they’d keep the predator’s past a secret. What purpose, after all, would it serve to put a scarlet “P” on his chest? Let him worship in peace.

“He was a model citizen at church,” said Steve Black, founder of the Ezekiel 33 Project, a ministry that raises awareness of the threats posed by predators. “But that didn’t prevent him from seeing children.”

The predator identified a certain little girl who liked softball. He saw her last name on the back of her jersey when she came into the auditorium. Then he combed local ballparks. He found the field where she played. He showed up at a game. He found that her parents had two other children: an infant and a younger brother who played T-ball.

A split-second transformation

MINISTER DON BLACKWELL shares what a devastating accident has taught him about God’s mercy.

BY CHELLIE ISON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

As Don Blackwell made his way onstage at this year’s Polishing the Pulpit conference, he was nervous.

Hundreds of times before, maybe even thousands, Blackwell had preached before a crowd.

But this time was different. “It was a difficult thing to do ... because there were so many people seeing me that way,” he said.

For most of the nearly 5,000 people packed into the Sevierville Convention Center in East Tennessee, it was the first time they had seen the well-known minister and TV host in a wheelchair.

Just three months before the gathering of members of Churches of Christ from around the globe, Blackwell and his wife, Sheri, were in a life-changing accident. They crashed while riding through the Virginia countryside on an all-terrain vehicle.

“As far as I know, I was riding through the field having a great day,” Blackwell said. “Then it occurred to me I couldn’t move.”

The accident shattered his T8 thoracic vertebra, confining him to a wheelchair.

It all happened in what seemed like a split second. He doesn’t remember the accident.

He only remembers waking up in the hospital, where a doctor told him his spinal cord was severed. He likely would never walk again.

Sheri Blackwell also was injured, though not as severely. She had a cracked vertebra, requiring her to wear a back brace for several weeks.

It seemed like a dream, a really bad dream. But after a couple of days, reality began to set in.

“When I finally woke up and realized it was real, it was the most devastating thing I’d ever experienced,” he said.

“Devastating’ isn’t really a strong enough word.”

Blackwell, a minister and elder of the Southaven Church of Christ
THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

INSIDE STORY

NOVEMBER 2019

BE THEIR VOICE.

Opt4Adoption is a campaign promoting adoption instead of abortion by reaching out to all churches, encouraging them to preach a sermon on January 19, 2020 and to unite their communities on the sanctity of life.

SIGN UP AT OPT4ADOPTION.COM

Christine Fox Parker, center, recommends two books for church leaders: “Child Safeguarding” by Basyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits and “Predators” by Anna Salter.

SEX ABUSE: ‘Into the hands of a predator’

FROM PAGE 3

The predator struck up a conversation with Mom and Dad.

“Well, at the tail end of the game, the parents let their guard down because, ‘Hey, we see you at church every week, right?’” Black said.

So, as the softball game wrapped up, the father left with the son for the T-ball game. The mother headed to the restroom with the baby. And the friendly man from church? The parents asked if he’d mind watching their daughter.

No, he wouldn’t mind. Not at all.

“They just handed their daughter into the hands of a predator,” said Black, who shared that anecdote during the recent Harding University Bible Lectureship. It illustrates both the complexity of dealing with predators and the hypervigilance required to protect children.

Black, the father of a sex abuse victim, was part of a panel that I moderated at the invitation of Harding leaders. Also on the panel were Christine Fox Parker of PorchSwing Ministries, which offers a safe space for abuse survivors, and Chellie Ison of The Christian Chronicle. Besides serving as our digital news editor, Ison — with her husband, Nathan — leads the Celebrate Recovery ministry at the Memorial Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City.

The discussion — dubbed “Christian Chronicle Live” — grew out of our front-page coverage earlier this year of a former longtime Pennsylvania youth minister accused of preying on generations of boys but allowed to remain in the pews.

One session focused on responding to the needs of victims. A second highlighted best practices for preventing sexual crimes from occurring. Both sessions can be heard in their entirety at christianchronicle.org/abuse.

The two hours of expert testimony made this much clear: It’s time that we in Churches of Christ talk about this problem.

It’s time that we stop welcoming and protecting known predators (which only encourages the unknown ones). A truly repentant sexual offender won’t raise a ruckus over an alternative service away from children.

Finally, it’s time that we learn how to identify predators, take steps to educate parents, listen to victims and recognize the danger of keeping secrets about wolves lingering among the sheep.

BOBBY ROSS JR. is editor-in-chief of The Christian Chronicle. Reach him at bobby.ross@christianchronicle.org. Follow him on Twitter at @bobbyross.
ARKANSAS
BENTON — The Northside Church of Christ marked the birthday of a special member on Sept. 22.

Syble Womack, known to her grandchildren as “Memaw,” turned 100 that Sunday. Mayor Tom Farmer proclaimed it as “Syble Womack Day” in the city of 36,000. Helping her celebrate were Joyce Smith, longtime secretary and member, and Jeff Davis, 97-year-old former elder who still attends Northside faithfully.

NEW JERSEY
NEWARK — As elevated levels of lead in this city’s water supply caused a public health crisis, the Newark Church of Christ recently distributed hundreds of cases of bottled water to residents.

“Thank God for the dedicated brethren who picked up and set up this water for distribution,” minister Eugene Lawton wrote on Facebook. Newark residents were urged to use bottled water for drinking, cooking and brushing their teeth after officials said city-provided filters may not have been effectively removing lead from the tap water, the Washington Post reported.

TEXAS
ABELNE — The University Church of Christ presents each new kindergarten student with a Bible.

“Children’s minister Jennifer Welch said, “I believe it also encourages the parents to recognize this next step in their job as being the spiritual leader of their child and encouraging a relationship with the Lord.”

FORT WORTH — A new Wednesday night program of the West Freeway Church of Christ features a family-oriented time in a spiritual atmosphere, minister Britt Farmer said.

At 5:30 p.m., the church offers a meal for $10 per family, followed by a few minutes to help children with homework or just talk about the day. Children’s Bible classes start at 6:15 p.m. and end by 6:55 p.m. Parents engage in a “Table Talk” experience during the class time. “Our young family group has appreciated it the most,” Farmer said.

‘Our Journey by Grace through Faith’: N.C. church celebrates 75 years

Current and former members of the Cole Mill Road Church of Christ in Durham, N.C., gather for a photo as the congregation recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. “Our Journey by Grace through Faith” served as the theme as the church commemorated the occasion. Past and present song leaders led favorite hymns, and the keynote speakers were senior minister Ben Fike and Amanda Pittman, assistant professor of Bible at Abilene Christian University in Texas. The weekend’s events included a special celebration of the ministry of Paul and Kay Watson.

Paul Watson, who earned his Ph.D. in Old Testament from Yale University, served as the senior minister at Cole Mill Road from 1983 to 2007.

‘Church roof collapses’

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa — It could have been worse.

The entire auditorium ceiling of the McPherson Avenue Church of Christ collapsed on a recent Friday. A structural engineer identified a split 2-by-8, which caused a cascade effect.

“God’s hand of protection can be seen in so many areas, especially the fact that no one was in the building at the time of the collapse,” elder’s wife Lorna Seilstad said.

The church is meeting at a vacant store in a shopping mall during cleanup and damage assessment.

“As far as total damage, we are still not certain,” preacher Brian Deckman said. “There is no doubt we still have a large task before us, but we trust God will provide and lead us where we go from here.”

‘One who we’"
‘The world starts next door’

HUNDREDS OF CHURCHES take the Gospel to their neighbors during first Brotherhood-Wide Door Knocking Day.

BY HAMIL R. HARRIS | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Walk up to a house in your neighborhood, knock on the door, and ask whoever answers to study the Bible with you or to visit your church.

It sounds simple enough, but door knocking evangelism can be excruciating.

“I am always intimidated at the beginning,” said minister Pedro Gelabert of the Long Island Church of Christ in New York. “But once we get going, it gets easier.”

Gelabert joined about 150 people from his congregation — and about 550 Churches of Christ in 42 U.S. states and 25 countries — for the inaugural Brotherhood-Wide Door Knocking Day on Oct. 5.

“We had about 90 percent of our congregation participate,” Gelabert said. “We went to our respective neighbors’ doors, and it was great.”

Oddly enough, the decidedly low-tech venture had its origins on the internet, said Matt Wallin, a minister in Rome, Ga., and director of promotions for House to House/Heart to Heart, a direct-mail ministry sponsored by the Jacksonville Church of Christ in Alabama.

“No, we’re not delivering pizza”

Organizers partnered with numerous works associated with Churches of Christ — including Christian universities, preaching schools, camps and television and radio programs — to get the word out ahead of Door Knocking Day.

David Shannnon, president of Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tenn., appeared in a promotional video for the event. “Some of the best friends that my wife and I have are friends that we have met through door knocking,” said Shannon, a former minister for the Mt. Juliet Church of Christ in Tennessee. “One particular young lady — the only reason she answered the door was that she thought we were the pizza delivery people. Obviously we weren’t, but here we are 10 years later, and we love her like a daughter. …”

On Door Knocking Day, about 40 members of the Robertsdale Church of Christ near Gulf Shores, Ala., participated. Minister Andrew Itson said they went to about 350 homes, offering something special. “We called what we did a prayer walk,” Itson said. “I would say, ‘My name is Andrew from the Robertsdale Church of Christ, and is there anything that we can pray for you about?’”

In many cases, members would stay at a home for about 15 minutes praying with their neighbors, Itson said.

In Rockville, Md., Maurice Williams and his wife included their children in the campaign. “Door knocking is still relevant because Matthew 28:18-20 tells …”

Gelabert

Wallin

Members of the Long Island Church of Christ in New York knock on a door in their neighborhood during the first Brotherhood-Wide Door Knocking Day.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

In the West African nation of Ghana, members of the Nsawam Road Church of Christ in Accra distribute Bible studies on Door Knocking Day.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

In the West African nation of Ghana, members of the Nsawam Road Church of Christ in Accra distribute Bible studies on Door Knocking Day.
“We went to a house with the yard all grown up, and an older lady came to the door. She said she couldn’t come to church because she was caring for her invalid husband. Sunday, we were having a potluck so we carried food for their lunch, and my son-in-law, daughter and granddaughters cut the grass and cleaned up the yard. ... Ironically, this house is right behind the church building.”

— Alice Wright, Somerville Church of Christ, Tennessee

Our neighbors were kind and welcoming! Several expressed interest in attending worship services. ... We had one visitor on Sunday whose door was not knocked, but who somehow got a House to House/Heart to Heart on Saturday.”

— Howard Goodale, DeGaulle Drive Church of Christ, New Orleans

“We stopped to visit this man and his family. He was trying to change a flat tire. He was having difficulties since he just got out of the hospital. So, what do we do? We help those that are in need.”

— Wesley Garland, Central Church of Christ, Saraland, Ala.

“During one of the prayer requests, a former Baptist preacher was so moved by (a door knocker’s) prayer that he requested a Bible study. He said he’d never heard a young teenager pray so powerfully. He wants to know what we’re teaching at Suitland Road Church of Christ. We told him to come and see.”

— Eric Sykes, Suitland Road Church of Christ, Suitland, Md.

Christians to go out and tell the good news,” Williams said. “You never know the impact the Gospel is going to have on a person. We may not see the fruits of door knocking immediately, but (God’s) Word never comes back void.”

While not everyone Williams’ group encountered was friendly, he said it was worth having a few doors slammed in their faces to reach those who were open to hearing about Jesus.

“There are a few who do want to know about the Bible,” he said.

‘WE MUST CHANGE OUR TACTICS’

Wallin hoped that Door Knocking Day would “create a buzz” among Churches of Christ.

While many reports were still coming in at press time, it seems the idea was a success, he said.

In Jackson, Miss., members of the Siwell Road Church of Christ talked to 93 people and set up 31 Bible studies, said associate minister Derek Broome.

In Miami, members of the Southern Heights Church of Christ learned through door knocking that “we must change our tactics sometimes,” said assistant minister Alphonso Gill.

“We must talk to people instead of just inviting them to a meeting.”

Wallin said he loved hearing the positive stories that came out of the day.

“No matter what else happens,” he said, “it has already been a success because Christians went into the world to meet their neighbors and share the love of Jesus.”

He plans to promote another Door Knocking Day next year. He hopes that the event will give churches a renewed appreciation for the needs in their community — and the desire to continuously be a part of meeting those needs.

“One day was good, but evangelism isn’t one day or one event or one program,” Wallin said. “It’s a way of life, and the world starts next door.”

“People cannot visit a church that they do not know exists.’

David Shannon, president of Freed-Hardeman University, on the importance of door knocking.

STATESIDE MISSIONARY NEEDED IN NEW ENGLAND

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

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knew Botham Jean well — has given periodic updates in chapel and prayed for the family repeatedly since the 2016 graduate was shot to death on Sept. 6, 2018.

Guyger was off duty but still in her Dallas police uniform when she entered Botham Jean’s apartment that night, thinking it was her own. She told jurors she shot him when she mistook him for a burglar. “I ask God for forgiveness, and I hate myself,” she said during the trial.

When McLarty saw the video of Brandt Jean’s act of grace toward Guyger, he knew he wanted students to see it. During the announcement portion of the next day’s chapel, the Harding president introduced the clip and then sat down.

“When it was finished, not only could you hear a pin drop; you could hear your own heartbeat,” McLarty said. “There was no clapping or talking. We all sat there in stunned, convicted, overwhelming silence. What we had just witnessed was too incredible and moving to fully absorb.”

MOTHER SURPRISED — AND PROUD
Allison Jean didn’t see it coming. Nobody did.

Brandt Jean didn’t tell his mother or the rest of his family what he intended to say.

Botham Jean’s mother, Allison Jean, rejoices in the courtroom after fired Dallas police officer Amber Guyger was found guilty of murdering her son.

FORGIVE: Brandt Jean didn’t tell his family what he’d say

Then, his voice breaking, he asked the judge for permission to hug Guyger. The ex-officer sobbed as the two embraced for nearly a minute.

“Brandt’s act of forgiveness as well as the hug is what Brandt has learned all his life,” said Allison Jean, who raised both her sons in Churches of Christ in St. Lucia, a small island in the Caribbean.

“Growing up in a Christian environment, we always practiced forgiveness,” the mother added. “So it was a little surprising to me that he was forgiving of someone who took his brother away — a brother that he cherished. But I know that it was something that he knows is right, and that’s why he did it. He’s fully aware that if we do not forgive, then we don’t get forgiveness.”

At an assembly that night at the Dallas West Church of Christ, Botham Jean’s home congregation, Allison Jean called her son’s gesture “remarkable.” However, she stressed that there must be consequences for the shooting, and problems within the Dallas Police Department must be investigated.

In a telephone interview from St. Lucia, Allison Jean told *The Christian Chronicle* that she personally never has harbored hatred toward Guyger.

“I was hurt at what she did, and the entire experience has been quite painful,” the mother said. “But I never saw her in a way that I hated her. I, however, hated the covering up of the people who were around her and the discussion of the truth.

“So, for me, I was really more interested in getting to know the facts of exactly what had happened, what it is that my son had done to her to make her react in that way,” she added. “So, the trial showed me that Botham was innocent and did her absolutely no harm.”

In her heart, Allison Jean said, she has forgiven Guyger.

“Every time I pray, I ask God to open up my heart to forgive her,” she said. “But I have not demonstrated it in the way that Brandt did.”

Her son’s willingness to forgive in such a public manner made her proud. “The shocking thing is, the Scripture says, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it,’” Allison Jean said, referring to Proverbs 22:6. “I saw that very vividly in what he did. … And I didn’t realize that my training resonated so well in him.”

WHAT YOU DID WAS POWERFUL
Sammie Berry, minister and elder of the Dallas West church, was sitting with the Jean family when Brandt took the witness stand.

The preacher heard the protest
chants outside and couldn’t help but notice a few people crying inside the courtroom, including his daughter Jessica Berry and Botham Jean’s older sister, Allisa Findley.

He assumed they were upset with the length of the sentence.

“I think when people say ‘No justice, no peace,’” the minister said, “really what people in the black community believe is that unless you’re out there making noise and destroying property, nobody listens to our issues and our concerns about what’s been happening with the black male in our society — the mass incarceration, the police killing.

“So that’s why people react in the way that they do,” he added, “because they fundamentally and fearfully believe that if they just go and demonstrate quietly and peacefully, people will say, ‘OK, we hear you,’ and move on.”

But when Brandt Jean said what he did, it seemed to bring even those outside the courtroom “to silence and tears as well,” the preacher said.

“When he came out of that witness box and back to the family, I went and said to him, ‘Brandt, what you did was powerful,’” Sammie Berry said. “I said, ‘Man, thank you, because what you did helped so many people.’”

The preacher said he could think of only one example of forgiveness more powerful than what Brandt Jean displayed: when Jesus was nailed to the cross and said in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Both Allison Jean and Sammie Berry said they believed justice was served in Botham Jean’s case. “In the end, I think her soul is going to be saved,” Sammie Berry said of Guyger, “and ultimately, as Christians, that’s our mission in life — to convert as many people to Christ as we can.”

NEXT UP FOR BRANDT: HARDING

In January, Brandt Jean plans to follow in his brother’s footsteps by enrolling at Harding.

It’s a 4,900-student university, associated with Churches of Christ, where Botham Jean made an immediate positive impression. Even as a freshman in 2011, he became a favorite song leader at Harding, McLarty recalled.

That year, as part of an annual “Struggles in the Faith” week, McLarty said he had asked Botham Jean to lead the hymn “Master the Tempest is Raging.”

“I thought nothing more of it,” McLarty said. “What I didn’t know was that Botham didn’t know the song. … I found out on Monday, when he led the song beautifully, flawlessly, that he’d been on the phone with his grandmother in St. Lucia all that weekend, and she had been teaching him over the phone how to sing that song.”

To McLarty, that anecdote helps illustrate Jean’s character, his love for family and his devotion to praise and worship. So after the guilty verdict in Guyger’s trial, he invited the crowd at Harding’s annual Bible lectureship to sing “Master the Tempest is Raging.”

“I thought maybe tonight,” McLarty said, “it’s the perfect way for this gathering of people to remember Botham Jean and to pray for all those who were involved in this incredible tragedy.”

NOVEMBER 2019

Jeff Montgomery

Students at Harding University in Searcy, Ark., watch the video in which Brandt Jean forgives officer Amber Guyger.
in Mississippi and executive director of the Gospel Broadcasting Network, was scheduled to speak six times at Polishing the Pulpit.

After the accident, he wasn't sure he'd even be able to attend.

The event's directors visited him in the hospital and asked if he'd tell his story as a keynote speaker. After much thought and prayer, he agreed.

AN INTRIGUING SONG CHOICE

While his future seemed unsure, Blackwell knew he couldn't give up doing what he loves: preaching the Gospel.

A few weeks into his rehab in Atlanta, he was allowed to leave the hospital for a few hours on the weekends. He used that time to preach at area congregations.

He said he'll never forget that first Sunday, preaching in his wheelchair.

"The song leader led 'Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus,'” he said, laughing.

“I leaned over to my wife and said, 'That song is very offensive.'”

As he preached, he said, he began to feel like himself again. He realized he couldn't move his neck to look around at the church members. So he began to spin his wheelchair from side to side to compensate.

It felt natural and, for a moment, he almost forgot about what he calls "the situation."

After weeks of rehab, Don Blackwell was able to leave the hospital. He and his wife lived in a hotel for several weeks while their home was remodeled to accommodate his new wheelchair.

Then came August.

As he prepared to go on stage at Polishing the Pulpit, Blackwell knew it would be challenging. For many in the audience, this would be the first they had seen of him since the accident.

"Before I got up there that night, my legs were spasming, which means they were jumping around,” he said.

“So I had to get out of my chair and stretch them to try to stop that.”

It was stressful. He was nervous. But he pushed through those feelings, telling the emotional story of the accident, his recovery so far and how he saw God at work through it all.

"I actually didn't feel like it went well,” he said. “There were a few times that I lost control of my emotions and didn't feel like I was able to speak clearly what I was saying.”

But even weeks after the event, people tell him how moved they were by his words, his story.

“This accident impressed on me more than ever that really nothing matters except fearing God and keeping his commandments,” he said, “and that's what we have to press on doing.”

'I ALMOST MISSED THIS'

Life is much different now from what it was just a few months ago.

He recently received a standing wheelchair. That should help him manage his blood pressure and reduce the spasms in his legs.

Don and Sheri Blackwell had this picture taken just minutes before the crash that would leave him paralyzed.

Don Blackwell was rushed to the hospital after the wreck. Doctors say he severed his spinal cord.

Sheri Blackwell visits her husband, Don, in the hospital following the accident. She also was injured.

Don Blackwell recently received a standing wheelchair to help with issues that can develop from sitting.
Since the accident, he’s also welcomed his first grandchild. “What kept going through my mind is, ‘I almost missed this,’” he said. “I was so thankful that I was able to get to meet her and hold her.”

**GOD’S PROVIDENCE**

Blackwell is preaching often. However, his recovery is far from over. He still deals with significant pain, and he anticipates another surgery soon. “I have some days that I wake up, and I hurt so bad that I don’t want to get out of bed,” Blackwell said. “But if I do that, I’m just going to be miserable.”

So, he presses on, preaching and learning how to live life without the use of his legs. He knows things could have been worse. He thanks God for the abilities he still has. “I can still write. I can still type,” he said. “I believe it’s the providence of God that has allowed me to be able to do everything I need to do to preach.”

He acknowledges that “thank you” doesn’t seem like enough to say to the thousands who prayed for him, sent cards and donated to his family in the weeks after the accident. He appreciates the support and encourages them to continue praying. “I’m still early in this. I’m still learning,” he said. “Every day I’m facing difficult encounters.”

He’s grateful for the opportunities to preach and share his story. He hopes to continue using his story to help others come to know Christ. “More than ever, I realize you truly do not know what’s going to happen one second from now,” he said. “I was riding along having a great day, and then a second later, I was in the hospital. What if I had woken up in eternity?”

While he looks forward to heaven, he hopes to keep using the time with which God is blessing him to teach others about their Savior so they, too, can look forward to eternity.

**SEE VIDEO** of Don Blackwell’s sermon at Polishing the Pulpit at christianchronicle.org.
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FOR SEEKERS
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Finding Jesus in a resettlement camp

In the East African nation of Uganda, people in the Palabek settlement camp are learning about Jesus through World Bible School. Minister Taban James recently signed up 120 people for the correspondence program, which is associated with Churches of Christ. Many have decided “to change from the doctrine of men to the church established by Christ,” James said.

The settlement differs from refugee camps in that its refugees, who are mostly from South Sudan, live side by side with Ugandans, relief agencies report.

ZIMBABWE

MUTARE — Churches of Christ in Manicaland have developed an ambitious plan to provide foster homes and care for 250 orphans.

“Unfortunately, the local churches lack the money and other resources to support the children,” Lemons said.

The East Point church works with the Zimbabwe Orphan Project, which supports about 650 orphans across Zimbabwe. The project seeks to raise $100,000 per year to support the churches’ work in Manicaland.

See christianchronicle.org for more details.
On the same day he met with actor Tom Cruise, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy heard from Christians who have dedicated their lives to serving orphans and at-risk children.

Andrew and Jenny Kelly, who oversee Jeremiah’s Hope Inc., a ministry supported by Churches of Christ, were one of about 20 couples invited to meet with the Eastern European country’s leader on Ukraine’s National Adoption Day.

Zelenskiy asked his guests for input on how the nation can better serve children in need of a home and loving parents. During the visit, he encouraged the couples to write down their ideas and instructed the country’s Minister of Social Policy to review the submissions and formulate a response within a month, Andrew Kelly said.

“He seemed to be a genuine man,” Andrew Kelly said, “who truly desires to see change and reform in the areas pertaining to the care and rights of orphans.”

Elected in April, Zelenskiy took an unusual, somewhat-surreal route into politics. Before running for office, the Ukrainian actor, comedian and screenwriter starred in “Servant of the People,” a TV show in which he portrayed a high school history teacher who unexpectedly was elected president. In recent weeks Zelenskiy has been the focus of media attention for his now-infamous phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Andrew Kelly said of Zelenskiy, “I was impressed by his knowledge, his English and his desire to help the children of his nation.”

Ukraine, which declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, has endured tumultuous and destabilizing conflicts in the past five years. In 2014, Russia annexed the country’s Crimean Peninsula, and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine began a long and bloody conflict with the Ukrainian military. Refugees, many of them children, fled to central and western Ukraine.

Andrew Kelly, a graduate of Abilene Christian University in Texas, and fellow missionary Steve Taliaferro launched Jeremiah’s Hope in 2003 to serve orphans in eastern Ukraine. The ministry later moved to a campsite in Kolentsi, a village about an hour south of Chernobyl, site of the catastrophic Soviet Union nuclear power plant disaster in 1986.

Social ills, including alcoholism, have devastated Ukrainian families, Andrew Kelly said. The country’s social services are overworked, and children’s homes are underfunded.

In addition to helping children from broken homes, Jeremiah’s Hope has housed hundreds of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict in the east.

“They’re looking for something to hope in,” Jenny Kelly said. “If the church doesn’t step in and meet the needs, they’re going to look somewhere else.”

The Kellys were invited to meet with Zelenskiy, in part, to share experiences from their two-year fight to adopt two of the children they’ve cared for — both refugees from the eastern Ukrainian city of Luhansk.

“We are permanent residents of Ukraine, but (also) U.S. citizens,” Andrew Kelly said, “and the laws on adoption are either for Ukrainians or Americans.” There are no specific laws that address the Kellys’ status, “so we have been blazing a trail to get greater clarification and, possibly, new legislation.”

He said he was encouraged by the Ukrainian president’s concern for children — and “humbled that God allowed us this platform to advocate for the orphans.”
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From justice champion to president

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

MALIBU, Calif.

A few hours after Jim Gash’s inauguration this fall as Pepperdine University’s eighth president, First Lady Joline Gash showed up at her husband’s fourth-floor executive suite with a Ugandan medical student.

Tumusiime Henry, 26, had flown nearly 10,000 miles to help celebrate Jim Gash’s unlikely ascension to the top post at the 7,900-student university, which is associated with Churches of Christ.

Henry wore a black suit with a red plaid bow tie as he joined the Gashes in an office overlooking the Pacific Ocean — a postcard-perfect view flanked by Pepperdine’s 125-foot-high monumental cross on one side and a smaller cross atop the stained-glass Stauffer Chapel on the other.

At the inauguration festivities that morning, Henry had sat in the front row as a special honored guest among the thousands of students, dignitaries and faculty members dressed in academic regalia.

As Jim Gash, 52, will tell anyone who will listen, he never would have become president if he hadn’t met Henry.

“It’s all due to this young, brave man next to me,” Gash said of Henry — the nickname by which the aspiring ophthalmologist is known in Uganda, an East African nation that doesn’t have family surnames.

A STEP OF FAITH

Jim Gash had a life he loved in Malibu, a coastal community about 35 miles northwest of Los Angeles. When the Pepperdine law professor reluctantly joined a global justice trip to Uganda a decade ago, he had no intention of ever going back.

“I was very interested in somebody helping there, but it wasn’t going to be me,” he told The Christian Chronicle. “I went once … to show my wife and my kids and my God that I was willing to take a step of faith.”

Three years earlier, Pepperdine law students had started traveling to Uganda, an underdeveloped country recovering from decades of dictatorship and war.

Bob Goff, founder of a nonprofit organization called Restore International, now known as Love Does, had spoken at Pepperdine in 2007 and planted the seed for the trips. In 2009, Goff again touted Uganda while addressing a Christian Legal Society meeting that Gash attended in San Diego.

Finally, Gash gave in and decided he’d join those serving in Uganda. But just once.

His January 2010 trek was going to be “my one-and-done, my ‘voluntourism’ trip,” the father of three said.

But then Gash arrived at a juvenile prison called Ihungu — in the rural district of Masindi in western Uganda.

“I remember walking into that prison. It was a one-room warehouse with no electricity, no running water,” Gash said. “I just remember thinking, ‘This isn’t OK with me.’”

At the prison 130 miles northwest of the capital of Kampala, Gash met Henry, then a teenager.

The 5-foot-4, 120-pound boy was clad in sweatpants, flip-flops and a blue T-shirt. He had spent a year and a half in custody on false charges of murder. While Henry was at school, villagers had attacked a former herdsman who stole money from the boy’s family. They dumped the man’s body at the family’s home. Henry, his brother Joseph and their father, who since has died, were implicated despite no evidence against them.

While at Ihungu, Henry also had been charged with a second murder — again bogusly — when a prisoner ordered beaten by an adult taskmaster died.

Suddenly for Gash, injustice had a name and a face. “It changed my life’s trajectory,” he said. His one trip to Uganda would turn into 27 — and counting.

“I saw that there was a need that we at Pepperdine had the ability to meet,” he said. “And when you see a need, and you see people who are suffering, it’s very, very difficult to turn away, particularly when there is an individual — a young man — who is wrongly accused and who was waiting on God to deliver him.”

Gash’s extreme love and care for people are contagious, as evidenced by the relationships he has built in Uganda, said Goff, who participated in the inauguration activities.

“He’s trying to make everything
Henry remained in custody waiting for their case to be heard. For Henry, the murder charge against him was very happy to meet him. “It was really a wonderful moment for me.” At the prison, the boys were required to speak Swahili so that they couldn’t make escape plans in native tongue. Henry spoke the Bantu language of Runyoro at home and knew English from when he was very young. “I remember that I had actually fasted and prayed for somebody to come and do something, and I was just waiting,” said Henry, whose mother raised him in trust. “I was very happy to meet him... It was really a wonderful moment for me.”

In January 2012, Gash took a six-month trip to Uganda with 18 boys and three girls. “When we decided to move out there,” Gash said. “Our kids instantly fell in love with him, and his family ‘step out in faith.’”

In November 2019, the crowd gives Tumusiime Henry a warm welcome at the inauguration of Jim Gash as the eighth president of Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif. Henry, a former Ugandan boy prisoner falsely accused of murder, flew nearly 10,000 miles to attend the inauguration.

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Abilene Christian University’s commitment to student success was recognized on a national scale in September when U.S. News & World Report released its 2020 “America’s Best Colleges” rankings. A new benchmark measuring eight high-impact areas focused on student success put ACU in more categories – five – than any Texas university. ACU was in the top 11 in three categories among U.S. schools of all sizes, ranking in some areas above Duke, Stanford, Princeton, Yale, Rice and Dartmouth universities.

Pepperdine was the only other Church of Christ-affiliated school to be ranked nationally in one of the eight categories.

To create the new benchmark, U.S. News surveyed college presidents, chief academic officers and deans of admissions at public and private universities throughout the nation in the spring of 2019, asking them to nominate up to 15 institutions with stellar examples of each program. The colleges included were those with the most nominations for having especially strong programs.

“It is gratifying to receive these accolades from our peers because they reflect our strategic vision, spirit of innovation, and our collaborative living and learning environment,” said ACU president Dr. Phil Schubert. “Our focus on student success comes from our desire to offer an exceptional education deeply rooted in Christian values and reinforced by a foundation of faith.”

Specifically, ACU was recognized in these categories:
- No. 4 in Service Learning, ahead of Duke, Stanford and Boston College.
- No. 9 in First-Year Experience, ahead of Yale and Princeton.
- No. 11 in Learning Communities, ahead of Rice and Dartmouth.
- Tied for No. 35 in Study Abroad
- Tied for No. 42 in Undergraduate Research/Creative Projects

ACU also received its highest overall regional ranking ever – 12th – in the U.S. News report, a jump of nine places over 2019. The university was specifically recognized in the categories of Best Undergraduate Teaching and Best Colleges for Veterans.

Abilene Christian’s focus on student success is one of the hallmarks of the university’s 21st-Century Vision. Programs that set ACU students up for success include:
- Every first-year and transfer student attends a new student orientation before their first semester begins. Students meet their academic advisors to forge a relationship and begin setting expectations for their entire college career. They also meet faculty, residence life staff, and others who can help familiarize them with college life.
- All new students are enrolled in Cornerstone, a seminar class, with their mentor groups from Wildcat Week. Their same peer leaders serve as mentors throughout the course.
- ACU’s Study Abroad program and global service learning trips enable students to participate in multiple courses with the same cohort in an international setting.
- Other cross-cultural experiences include urban-centric programs at CitySquare in downtown Dallas; short-term, semester-long and gap-year internships through the Halbert Center for Missions and Global Service; and the Body and Soul program where pre-health majors shadow physicians and other professionals in their field of interest and experience life-changing medical mission trips around the world.
- ACU offers valuable and even unprecedented undergraduate research opportunities for students that teach key skills and open doors for graduate school and other career success.
- The Honors College offers highly motivated students travel-based experiential learning, select faculty mentors and other research experiences customized for any degree program.

ACU: The only Texas institution nationally ranked in 5 student success categories
What it really means to pastor

Let’s talk about the word “pastor.” You don’t hear it much in Churches of Christ. We believe the word better describes elders than it does preachers. But we’re more likely to call elders “shepherds.” Your thoughts?

I use the word “pastor” in part because I think Paul’s theology has been abstracted and has made him a theologian rather than a missionary pastor.

I use the word for those who pastor people, so it applies to preaching ministers — who, in my opinion, should be preaching pastoral theology. And it applies to elders and deacons and other people in churches who are doing pastoral ministry.

So I look at it as a functional term, a broader term. I know that some people in the Churches of Christ get really nervous about this term.

I’m not nervous about the term. I’m concerned that pastors in many churches today don’t even pastor at all. They’re leaders. They’re entrepreneurs. They’re visionaries.

They preach. They teach. They write books. They’re on radio. But they don’t know the people in their church. And that’s forfeiting the very task that they’re called to do.

What do you like about Churches of Christ?

My experience with Churches of Christ has been mostly positive, and what I have valued most is the emphasis on preaching, the commitment to the Bible in a way that challenges theological formulations. I’ve always felt I’ve been given a hearing. If I have something to say on the basis of what the Bible says, the Churches of Christ are willing to listen, and I like that a lot.

And I’ve appreciated a cappella singing. I wouldn’t defend it the way that Churches of Christ do. I like it. I think it’s a wonderful, embodied expression of the body of Christ, singing to the glory of God together.

You say that churches need to have a culture of ‘Christoformity’. What does that word mean?

It means to become Christlike by allowing Christ to live his life through us.

Christoformity is the vision of God, Romans 8:29. (For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.)

That’s the plan of God for all the people of God for all eternity. We will be in the image of his Son.

When we flush out who Jesus is — his life, his teaching, his actions, his death, his burial, his resurrection — all those things then get filtered into Christoformity.

Reading through your book, it seems to me that the kind of nurturing you endorse would work best in small churches. Is that accurate?

The average church in the United States, I think, is 72 (people), so I’m concerned when we use the megachurch model as what a true church is. I’m against that.

I don’t think nurturing Christoformity is designed for the small church. Christoformity can be in all-size churches, but it takes special organizational skills and theological depth to be able to penetrate some of the structures...
and policies that start happening in megachurches.

Megachurches are going to really struggle with Christoformity. They get too big. You’d have to have a really good theologian running a megachurch to keep Christoformity at the center.

You have talked about the “spectator problem” in large churches and a tendency to focus too much on an individual preacher. Do you see this in Churches of Christ?

My experience with Churches of Christ is that they’re not quite as personality-driven as, say, an independent megachurch.

Here’s a standard observation: When a significant pastor leaves, 20 percent of the congregation goes. I don’t know what it is in Churches of Christ, but I suspect it’s not that high.

And that’s where I think we make a big mistake, when we allow a personality to dominate a pulpit (which is the most public thing most churches do), and we let a personality dominate all the decisions and policies made. That’s when we’re going to run into problems with transitions. If you share the pulpit, and if you decentralize that central, charismatic figure from making decisions all over the place, you have a much better chance of a (smooth) transition.

Ideally, in Churches of Christ, the leadership is the elders and not the preaching minister. In those cases, if those elders are actively involved pastoring the congregation and are known to the congregation, then you have a much better chance of this not happening. There won’t be a personality problem.
**Bible Camp**

**Lariat Creek Christian Camp**

**Geary, Okla.** — Two Oklahoma congregations — the College Hill Church of Christ in Alva and the North Leach Church of Christ in Watonga — co-hosted an areawide men’s retreat.

The recent event at Lariat Creek Christian Camp focused on the theme “Taking Hold of the Kingdom: Lessons on Leadership from the Life of Joseph,” according to North Leach member Joe Paul Bryan and College Hill elder Kim Barker. About 31 men attended.

Layne Heitz of the Durant Church of Christ in southern Oklahoma developed these themes over four lessons. “This retreat among men of congregations in northwest Oklahoma, often times with shrinking populations, was a powerful spiritual experience to encourage leadership in our congregations,” Bryan said.

**Higher Education**

**Oklahoma Christian University**

**Oklahoma City** — Oklahoma Christian University has opened the new Dave and Shirlie Ellis Clinical Skills Lab and Simulation Center.

The 7,000-square-foot lab space is outfitted with advanced simulation equipment and healthcare supplies.

Shirlie Ellis generously donated to the lab for OC’s School of Nursing, a program both she and Dave Ellis began supporting years ago, when their daughters were college aged. In 2013, the Ellises anonymously funded a scholarship to prepare a future leader and instructor of OC’s School of Nursing. Instructor of nursing Trevy Rauch, one of the Ellises’ daughters, was the recipient.

**K-12 Christian Schools**

**Mount Dora Christian Academy**

**Mount Dora, Fla.** — Brian Mast has been appointed president of Mount Dora Christian Academy and Children’s Home, effective Dec. 1.

Mast, who previously served at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn., succeeds James Moore, who is retiring after three decades at the helm.

Mast holds a doctorate in education. He and his wife of 24 years, Lorri, have two children, Ella and Eli.

**Unrest in Haiti puts Christian ministry’s services on hold**

A boy named Jhonny works on chores in the boys’ residential house at Emmaus House, a ministry in Cap-Haitien, Haiti, that helps orphaned youths transition to independent living. Amid recent unrest in the impoverished Caribbean island nation, everyone is safe at Emmaus House, but almost all its programming and services are on hold, said Jillian Kittrell, director of operations and co-founder.

**Spotlight**

**Women, history recognized at Faulkner**

**Montgomery, Ala.** — Nikki R. Haley, former U.S. ambassador and South Carolina governor, keynoted Faulkner University’s recent annual benefit dinner.

Women and history were highlighted at the event, which coincided with the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment. That amendment, which granted women the right to vote, passed Congress on June 14, 1919. It was ratified on Aug. 18, 1920.

“Although many might want to argue that progress has been slow over the past half-century, it is absolutely undeniable that women have assumed significant roles of influence throughout American life,” Faulkner President Mike Williams said.

Faulkner recognized several alumni for their inspiring stories and accomplishments, including Judge Carole Medley, Dr. Sky Jones, teacher Joetta Kelly, Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Jessica Parker and Monica Pugh, a mother of five children and foster mother to three.
Ohio Valley University inaugurated Michael Ross as its new president Sept. 20 — an unlikely calling for an optimist. And he wasn’t looking for a job.

Ross, who spent his career in nonprofit management, actually has been at the helm of the four-year university in Vienna, W.Va., for several months. Leading OVU, which is associated with Churches of Christ, won’t be easy. Amid concerns about the school’s future, enrollment dropped from 506 students a year ago to 321 this fall — a 37 percent decline.

Three sports have been suspended. The faculty is more than 20 percent smaller, and budgets have been cut.

Still, the new president is optimistic about the future. His plan: to grow OVU’s enrollment to more than 600 in the next five years.

Ross, who has worked mostly in the healthcare sector, brings a nontraditional résumé to the role of president. It’s his first job in higher education. He holds no graduate degrees, though he’s working on a master’s and plans to pursue a doctorate.

But the university’s survival — let alone growth — will require a nontraditional approach, said Mike O’Neal, president emeritus of Oklahoma Christian University. In the spring of 2018, OVU’s board brought in O’Neal to help address the university’s pressing financial problems.

“OVU is in an area of our country that is not strong in the Churches of Christ,” O’Neal said, “and it’s going to have to reinvent itself — to not be the traditional teacher in front of 15 students in a classroom but to find other ways of delivery that are less financially challenging.”

**AN UNEXPECTED CALL**

In addition to roles with several West Virginia health and human services nonprofits, Ross for 10 years ran his own consulting company, Beyond our Boundaries, focusing on customer service, leadership and team effectiveness. In the fall of 2018, he was communicating with a former youth group member who was then on staff at OVU.

“I was trying to convince him to let me do consulting with the admissions staff, and so I sent a résumé,” Ross said.

Then, on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, Ross received a call from Charlie Morris, OVU chief of staff, asking what was his interest in the presidency.

He wasn’t, really.

“That was not my background, not my career,” Ross said.

But Morris persuaded him that the school had academic leadership in place and was looking for someone who brought skills and perspective for running a nonprofit business.

So Ross spent a day in late November interviewing with the board, administrative team and staff, after which they invited him to return for a special meeting on Dec. 19.

“I kept saying, ‘This is a fun experience, but nothing is going to come of it,’” Ross said.

He started work Jan. 1.

**PARENTING A HOUSEFUL**

Ross and his wife, Kerry, both West Virginia natives, met at Ohio Valley when they were students and when then-Ohio Valley College was still a junior college. They transferred together to Harding University in Searcy, Ark., to finish their bachelor’s degrees, and both remember wishing they could come back someday to work and help OVU.

The Ross family grew to include eight children, now ages 6 to 28. Three are their biological children, and five are adopted, including twin boys, Jeremy and Jacob, who came to them through the foster system at four months old, weighing less than 8 pounds each. The twins, now high-functioning 24-year-olds with developmental disabilities, are still at home, as are the Rosses’ two youngest daughters, Olivia, 15, and Maci, 6.

The family lives in the Charleston area, about an hour and 20 minutes from Parkersburg. Michael Ross commutes every day, leaving home before the girls are up, and is home most nights by 7, which his wife describes as “not awful.”

“It is positive, but it’s a big lifestyle
change,” she said. “It’s different having to share him.”

The family is fully committed to Christian education. One older son, Alex, 28, went to Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn. Emily, 25, and Max, 21, are at Harding University in Searcy, Ark.

Kerry Ross said she loves seeing her kids beginning to see OVU as their school. She said the kids love going to the university for games and other events.

TOUGH DECISIONS

Before Michael Ross became president, OVU’s full-time faculty of about 28 was reduced by five or six. Typical for a small school, administrators also serve as faculty, and some adjunct faculty may have full-time staff roles. In all, about a dozen positions were eliminated, a combination of faculty and staff.

Four degree programs — in sports management, environmental and sustainability studies, history, and wellness — were eliminated from the catalog for 2019-2020.

Athletics budgets have been cut, and coaches are now required to raise funds. Under Ross, OVU has suspended men’s and women’s lacrosse for 2019-2020, at least. The university also suspended the 2019-2020 women’s soccer season after the coach left but has hired a new coach.

OVU is a member of the NCAA Division II Great Midwest Athletic Conference and is the smallest school in the country in Division II sports. OVU doesn’t have football, but about 65 percent of its students compete in intercollegiate athletics.

O’Neal said he believes the cost of athletics is one of several reasons OVU is struggling financially.

He and Ross acknowledged the school has struggled financially for many years, in part due to debt and declining enrollment, which is affected by declining numbers of students from Churches of Christ.

In addition, a 2017 study by Pew Charitable Trusts revealed that West Virginia is one of only two states with a shrinking population. But OVU is located near the Ohio state line and within a 200-mile radius of larger population centers in that state. Ross believes recruiting in those areas will be important to achieving the needed growth.

A GREAT NEED IN THE NORTHEAST

Michael Ross’ predecessor, Harold Shank, served seven years as president before being appointed chancellor at the end of the 2016-2017 academic year. E. Keith Stotts, who had twice served as president before, stepped in for the 2017-2018 school year before Michael Ross’ tenure began.

O’Neal credits OVU’s survival to a long history of generous donors who continue to believe that a Christian university in the northeastern United States fills an important niche.

OVU once was one of two colleges in the region associated with Churches of Christ. The now-defunct Northeastern Christian Junior College closed its doors in 1993 and merged with Ohio Valley, which then was also a junior college.

Now OVU seeks more than $2.1 million to go specifically to student scholarships and the student experience.

“Our students are our No. 1 priority,” Michael Ross said.

The challenge, O’Neal added, will be to depend less on donor dollars to meet the annual operating budgets. Although he’s impressed by how much money OVU’s aging fundraising staff has raised, the school’s budget for too many years has depended on unrealistic fundraising goals.

Still, Michael Ross is optimistic.

Not only has the university’s staff ramped up and reimagined student recruiting. They’ve also made hard changes. They’ve sought and welcomed advice from O’Neal and Randy Lowry, president of Lipscomb University.

“In the budgeting process, we are breaking down every single line item and not just carrying it forward but asking, ‘What is absolutely necessary? And what is not?’” Michael Ross said.

The new president added that he’s requiring the school’s administration and faculty to be intentional about mission and ask regarding every financial decision, “Does it benefit student experience?” he said. “Does it benefit faculty and staff? Is it mission critical?”

“Michael has a big task ahead of him,” O’Neal said. “He’s doing the right things from all I can tell. He’s making good decisions.”

That’s why they hired him.

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Dan Coker, a ‘bigger-than-life man of God’ in Latin America, dies at 82

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Dan Coker, a longtime missionary and ministry trainer for Churches of Christ in Central and South America, died Sept. 18 in Tyler, Texas. He was 82.

Coker preached in every Spanish-speaking nation in the Americas and served as dean and executive director of the Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Bíblicos (Latin American Institute of Biblical Studies) in Toluca, Mexico. For the past three years, Coker and his wife, Elise, lived in Tyler.

He earned his bachelor's and master's from Abilene Christian University in Texas and a doctorate in intercultural comparative education from the University of Florida.

After a tour in the Armed Forces, Dan Coker and his wife moved to Guatemala as part of a mission team, said Howard Norton, a former missionary to Brazil, former editor of The Christian Chronicle and long-time friend of the Cokers.

The Cokers later moved to neighboring Honduras as self-supporting missionaries. While there, “they used their nights and weekends to establish the first congregation of our brethren in that country,” Norton said.

The Cokers lived and worked in Mexico for two different tours of duty — one in Mexico City and the other in Toluca, Norton said. Between those tours, they served as missionaries in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Dan Coker worked with Continent of Great Cities (now Great Cities Missions) and traveled throughout Latin America “preaching, teaching and encouraging missionaries and national workers,” Norton said. “He recruited teams for major cities of Latin America and often preached in large evangelistic campaigns.”

He also served as a missions professor at Abilene Christian University, where he trained missionaries to serve around the world.

For more than 30 years, he served as a director of the Pan American Lectureship, which brought members of Churches of Christ together in a different Latin American city each year. Reuel Lemmons, minister and editor of Firm Foundation, launched the event in 1963 to encourage fellowship and understanding among church members from the U.S. and Latin America.

Coker attended the first Pan American Lectureship and spoke at many of the ones that followed.

In 2018, the 53rd and final Pan American Lectureship took place aboard a cruise ship. Participants disembarked in Havana, Cuba, and shared a devotional with a Church of Christ there. Coker, who had spoken in Cuba previously, was unable to attend for health reasons.

In a 2001 interview with the Chronicle, Coker spoke about U.S. intervention in Central and South American politics over the past half-century and how Christians from the U.S. should respond when sharing the Gospel with their Latin American neighbors. He counseled against “attending to defend the policies of the U.S. State Department in Latin America.” He also warned against “the tendency to join in criticizing the United States in an attempt to show oneself as objective and fair.”

In all things, Coker said, Christians should be honest to God and honest to one another.

“By ‘honest to God,’ I mean that I will not attempt to improve God’s revelation,” he said. “By ‘honest to one another,’ I mean that I should not impose on others anything that is not an understandable and demonstrable article of faith that comes by hearing the Word.”

He urged missionaries to shed their “cultural baggage” as they serve in Latin America and to “not build a system dependent on (U.S.) financing and presence.”

Norton said, “Dr. Dan Coker was an unforgettable, bigger-than-life man of God. He was blessed with a brilliant mind, a booming voice and a heart for the lost. Churches of Christ have lost one of the most effective missionaries of modern times.”
HONORED: Ava Conley, emeritus professor of Spanish at Harding University in Searcy, Ark., with the Distinguished Christian Service Award. The award was presented during Harding’s annual Bible lecturership. Presenter Dan Williams noted that Conley has coordinated annual mission campaigns in Puerto Rico, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, Honduras, Colombia and Peru, leading to at least 16 countries in South America and the impact of his leadership is untold and unquantified. A portion of his accomplishments include:

- Serving as “C.L. Thomas, to whom Walter passed the preaching baton.
- Starting the first SIBI satellite school, the Travis Street Church of Christ in 1993. He retired recently retired from the Roosevelt-Freeport Church of Christ.
- Additionally, Furr’s leadership was Furr’s leadership of the Texas Normal Singing School, a church worship education program started by his father in 1946, which continues to operate on the campus of Abilene Christian University.
- His hobbies were learning and teaching, part of which he practiced in serving as an adjunct in the business department at Grayson County College for many years.
- Survivors include his wife, Thana Sue Norris in 1966, to Louisiana, the Dallas area, and Arkansas. In 1986, he obtained a master’s in Business Administration from Southeastern Oklahoma State University.
- Ultimately, Furr came to preach at the Travis Street Church of Christ in Sherman, Texas, in 1983, a congregation whose growing membership transformed into the Western Heights Church of Christ in 1993. He retired in 2011 after more than 28 years in ministry there. Another lifelong endeavor was Furr’s leadership of the Texas Normal Singing School, a church worship education program started by his father in 1946, which continues to operate on the campus of Abilene Christian University.
- His hobbies were learning and teaching, part of which he practiced in serving as an adjunct in the business department at Grayson County College for many years.
- Survivors include his wife, Thana Sue of Sherman, Texas, died peacefully at home on Sept. 11, 2019.
- Mr. Furr was born Sept. 15, 1939, in Brownwood, Texas, to Edgar and Leroy Smith Furr. He graduated from the University of Corpus Christi in 1961 and soon began his lifelong ministry as a preacher for the Church of Christ. This career took him from east Texas, where he married Thana Sue Norris in 1966, to Louisiana, the Dallas area, and Arkansas. In 1986, he obtained a master’s in Business Administration from Southeastern Oklahoma State University.
- Ultimately, Furr came to preach at the Travis Street Church of Christ in Sherman, Texas, in 1983, a congregation whose growing membership transformed into the Western Heights Church of Christ in 1993. He retired in 2011 after more than 28 years in ministry there. Another lifelong endeavor was Furr’s leadership of the Texas Normal Singing School, a church worship education program started by his father in 1946, which continues to operate on the campus of Abilene Christian University.
- His hobbies were learning and teaching, part of which he practiced in serving as an adjunct in the business department at Grayson County College for many years.
- Survivors include his wife, Thana Sue of Sherman, Texas, and sons Dar-
A lot of young people choose a college based on family loyalties to a university or great scholarships.

For me, neither was the case. I didn't grow up with any real allegiance, so to speak, to any university. So when it came time to enroll I decided based on one thing … my best friend.

Her family was and is “loyal and true” to Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Okla. There was never a doubt in her mind where she would go. So I went with her.

It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I wanted a new beginning. I wanted a place to call my own, a place where people didn't have any preconceived ideas of who I was based on the mistakes of others — where I could be me or, at least, try to find out who “me” was.

Ultimately, my life, my faith was changed for the better in my four years at OSU.

I grew up going to church, but I can't say I ever had a faith of my own. I was baptized there. I met new friends and my husband there. I learned to pray with others and live out my faith daily. I learned how to study my Bible. I learned how to serve others. I traveled overseas to teach about Jesus. I found out what it meant to trust God and truly turn my life over to him.

I grew in ways I never could have imagined, in ways I still struggle to put words to, but I can feel the impact deep in my soul.

My experience at a state school was made better by campus ministry.

I think often times state school campus ministries don't get the recognition they deserve. They are fighting a valiant battle, a battle in a place full of worldly temptations, a battle for souls. And many are fighting those battles on very limited resources.

The latest statistics show there were more than 25,500 students enrolled at Oklahoma State University last year. Students make up about one-third of the Stillwater population.

The campus ministry is supported by private donations and the Stillwater Church of Christ. It's housed in a building that is now 50 years old (though the ministry has been around much longer).

I recently heard that one of the presidents of a university associated with Churches of Christ encouraged others to support campus ministry — whether at a Christian university or a state school. His point was that both are doing kingdom work.

I agree, and I appreciate his words. I want to echo his encouragement by asking you to consider supporting some type of college ministry.

Whether it's at a state school, like the University Center, or a Christian university, your dollars could go a long way in helping a young person come to know Christ. And that is worth every dollar you can spare.

CHELLIE ISON is digital news editor for The Christian Chronicle. Email chellie@christianchronicle.org.
The Christian Chronicle Crossword

By Myles Mellor | www.ilovecrosswords.com

ACROSS
5. He was swallowed by a great fish.
10. Feasted upon.
11. Mother of Jacob and Esau.
13. “Sit at the my right ___, until I make your enemies your foot-stool,” Psalm 110.
14. Mother-in-law of Ruth; her name meant sweetness.
15. Their origin traces through the ancient Hebrew people.
17. Leaves used by Adam and Eve.
19. There were five of these in the feeding of the 5,000.
20. Copper symbol.
21. He was slain by David.
23. He disowned Jesus and was later forgiven.
26. Daniel and the lions’ ___.
27. Above.
28. Pharisee who reminded the Sanhedrin of the law that requires a person must be heard before being judged.
31. Governor of Judaea.
32. “Be holy because I __ holy” 1 Peter 1:16.
33. Vital water source for crops.
36. Hole in the ground, a trap.
37. Wrathful.
38. A religious ceremony (usually among Orthodox groups).

DOWN
1. Sister of Mary and Lazarus.
2. Father of Leah and Rachel.
3. Sweet baked food.
4. One of Abram’s sons.
5. Book before Lamentations.
6. Central part of an old church building, also a river in France or the hub of a wheel.
7. “Messiah” composer.
8. He gave the Sermon on the Mount.
17. Genesis described it, the ___.
20. The Lord ___ for you.
21. Evil’s opposite.
23. Teach.
25. Decorative picture of colored glass pieces.
29. David, Saul or Solomon.
30. Jesus’ mother.
33. Part of a chariot wheel.
34. Thou shalt ___.
35. Master’s degree.
36. Father, for short.

BIBLE BOWLING
Navigating deep waters in 2 Samuel

“Rescued” is the theme for the 2020 Leadership Training for Christ conventions on Easter weekend. As King David sings in 2 Samuel 22, “He reached down from heaven and rescued me; he drew me out of deep waters ... He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.”

See christianchronicle.org for a list of locations and other resources — plus the answers to these practice questions from 2 Samuel 1 for the Bible Bowl and Bible Quiz events:

1. Where did David stay after he struck down the Amalekites?
2. How long did he stay there?
3. What two things distinguished the man who arrived from Saul’s camp?
4. What do these two things signify?
5. What does the man report about Saul and Jonathan?
6. What does the man claim that Saul asked him to do?
7. How does this man’s account compare with the account in 1 Samuel 31?
8. After David asks the man where he is from, what else does he ask him?
9. What does David order his soldiers to do to the man?
10. What does David order to be taught to the people of Judah?
11. In what book (in addition to 2 Samuel) is the lament written?
12. “Daughters of Israel, ____ for Saul, who clothed you in ____ and finery ...”

Help our kids study for Lads/LTC
Lads to Leaders and Leadership Training for Christ conventions will be here before you know it. Submit original questions from Luke and 2 Samuel to letters@christianchronicle.org.

ANSWERS: Page 34

Single & Single-Again Women
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please complete our SURVEY by November 30: www.IronRoseSister.com/singles

Equipping women to connect to God and one another more deeply in English, Spanish, and bilingual contexts across the Americas
Dismissing a minister: What not to do

**FIVE WORST PRACTICES** are highlighted by experts who urge church leaders to do better.

Second of two parts

Talking with ministers who have lost their jobs can feel repetitive. And depressing. The ministers don’t all paint themselves as perfect or without weakness or fault — one described himself as “29 years arrogant” when recalling the circumstances of his dismissal at a young age.

Regardless, a few themes about minister dismissals repeat like the chorus of a praise song or a lament. Those refrains are painfully familiar to mentors and consultants at places such as Hope Network Ministries and the Siburt Institute for Church Ministry at Abilene Christian University:

“They wanted me to lie.”
“I didn’t see it coming.”
“The severance was a joke.”
“My family lost more than a job. We lost our church.”

Some churches do a good job of following best practices for dismissing a minister.

But many don’t.

In addition to failing to use best practices, circumstances often are complicated by the autonomous nature of Churches of Christ. Even if an elder group takes all the correct steps, a minister can feel mistreated.

“They did the right thing,” one former minister says of a congregation that provided a generous severance and sent him and his wife to meet with Paul Faulkner, founder of the Ministers Support Network and ACU’s Marriage and Family Institute.

The minister appreciates that the church invested substantially in his transition out of service to that congregation, but he says his dismissal was still really difficult.

“Because we had no pastoral check-in, I fell through the cracks. Then my wife left, then the Christian school (where he had taken a teaching job) asked me to resign.”

He had also taken a part-time job at a Christian church that he believed was grooming him for a full-time role. It cut ties after the divorce.

“I lost my wife, my career, my 6-month old daughter. I was really angry.”

All this, despite the best efforts of the church that fired him. Imagine how life goes for ministers leaving churches whose termination processes are less thoughtful and less generous.

Experts say these are some of the worst ways to terminate a minister:

1. **If it’s not the truth, it’s a lie.**

   The most disturbing stories of malpractice are elder groups who ask a minister to resign but then claim the decision was mutual or was solely the minister’s. Then the elders require the minister to sign a non-disclosure agreement in order to receive a severance package.

   Robert Oglesby, director of the Ministers Support Network, says, “It’s deceitful to ask for a resignation and NDA.”

   And it almost always backfires. When the next minister leaves for his own reasons, people question what really happened.

   “It hurts credibility of leadership,” Oglesby says. “People always find out.”

   When notice needs to be made to the congregation, the elders should work with the minister to write the statement. While they may have to agree to disagree about some aspects, he says both parties should have input.

   “Ministers and leaders need some control over what will be said,” Oglesby says.

   That wasn’t the experience for a youth minister who went on to find a new congregation where he now is serving happily. However, even years later, he still can barely describe the day he walked into a meeting expecting to see all the staff and elders for the congregation where he had served for more than two years. Instead, only three elders and the most senior minister were present.

   “They told me I had been warned six months ago that my job was under review (which was never mentioned in the previous meeting) and that the elders as a group had decided that I was not a good fit for the church,” he says.

   Shocked and crushed, he still replied that he would agree to resign in three to six months and begin immediately looking for another job. The other minister in the room said that timeframe would not work.

   “They required my immediate resignation or I would be fired immediately ... They gave me two letters, one stating that I resigned and one stating that I acknowledged that I had been fired for misconduct. When I asked about the misconduct charge, the elders and the preacher discussed several different accusations in front of me that were not true and eventually said to me, ‘Don’t worry. Whatever it is will sound bad when we are done with it.'”

   The minister asked for a few days to discuss the issue with his wife. But he was told the letters were not to leave the room; and the decision had to be made then or he would be fired. With a young family to support and a mortgage on a recently purchased home, he signed the resignation letter. The young minister later learned that other elders not present that day were unaware of the meeting.

   Carson Reed, executive director of the Siburt Institute, says elders don’t always speak with the same voice.

   “One elder says one thing to a minister; and another says something else to that minister, so the minister is often confused and unable to assess in reality what the elder group thinks or the church thinks,” Reed says.

2. **Failing to provide the time and resources needed to improve.**

   Not every problem should lead to a dismissal. Regular, written evaluations should instead lead to mentoring and an investment in resources to help a minister improve. That takes time, but it can help a church save its relationship with a minister and may even keep a young preacher from leaving ministry altogether.

   With fewer young people entering ministry and more young ministers leaving after only a few years, that’s of critical importance.

   Doug Peters, minister at Grace Crossing Community Church of Christ in Conroe, Texas, north of Houston, also serves as a consultant for Interim Ministry Partners. He believes experienced church leaders have a responsibility to young ministers. “We can’t expect them to be as
mature as your 56-year-old elders. We bear responsibility to help shape and coach them,” Peters says.

He urges elderships to find an outside person to help coach a minister, but he emphasizes that the mentor needs to be an experienced minister — someone with training as a coach, not just a good guy or someone’s brother-in-law.

Peters says he fears churches have run many good young ministers into other fellowships or out of ministry altogether.

“Our extreme autonomy has sometimes led to kingdom amnesia. We forget we’re part of something bigger and fail to reach out and get help. Most elders are at one or two congregations. Ministers are more often in several. Elders can’t be so focused on extreme autonomy.”

3. No warning signs.

One of the best practices for an eldership working with a minister is to provide written expectations and regular evaluations with documentation of progress or problems. The opposite is when elders surprise people, specifically, the minister.

A minister who now serves productively in a congregation in the northeast recalls a surprise moment early in his career.

“My wife and I had gone away over the holiday to be with family and let family know we were pregnant with our first child,” he says. When the couple returned home, the minister told the elders that he and his wife were planning on announcing the news to the congregation during a Wednesday fellowship meal.

But on the day of the announcement, the elders told him his position was being terminated. “We went on with the [pregnancy] announcement before the mid-week celebration, then I went home and told my wife, ‘We don’t have a job.’ The elders knew our intent to do this when they scheduled this meeting and termination. In terms of best and worst practices, it speaks to that,” he says.

Then the next Sunday, the elders announced the minister was no longer going to be employed and was seeking other opportunities.

“I was never given a reason. I inquired specifically. Is it because of performance? No. Is it because of budget constraints? No. What is it? We just feel we need to do this; it’s right for the church.”

The church did pay three months severance and allow the couple to live in the parsonage longer than that, but it took more than nine months for the minister to find a new position.

Peters believes a probationary period makes much more sense.

“Why can’t you put them on probation? Then you’ve given (the relationship) every opportunity,” he says. “Set your own anxiety as an eldership aside, and spell out what needs to happen over a specified period of time.”

4. Too little money. Too little time.

Oglesby says severances given to ministers are often way too short.

He recently heard of a minister who received two weeks of pay — after serving with the church for four years.

“They know in their heart of hearts no one is going to get a new job in two weeks. They need to make sure they’re caring for the family. You’ve created one crisis only to turn around and create a financial crisis.”

Oglesby says elders know that search committees work slowly, often at a glacial pace. “When you’re letting this person go, remember they are starting a very slow process.”

Reed says failing to understand how long it takes to find a new job — often three to six months or longer — can put a family at risk for the better part of a year. “It’s a big hardship,” he says.

“Ridiculous” is how Grady King describes it. King, co-leader of Hope Network and director of church resources at Oklahoma Christian University, has seen 30-day severances given to ministers. “Thirty and out is ridiculous. Corporations do better than that. You can’t find a job in six weeks. It’s unreasonable.”

5. Too little shepherding through the trauma.

Beyond the issue of severance and the challenges of searching for a new job, ministers and their spouses often are most grieved about losing their church family. Suddenly, the shepherds who were supposed to be caring for them are gone.

Eddie Sharp, senior consultant for the Siburt Institute, says ministers need time to grieve and recover. “You cannot relocate or just reset. When a preacher gets fired, he’s ‘gunshot.’ He’s not ready for family to go to another church and just start again. Pick a Kubler-Ross stage. It’s exactly like grief and dying. There’s anger, denial, bargaining. You’ve got to give people some time.”

Sharp also says a preacher’s wife often is more aware of her husband’s precarious job status than he is.

“She sort of knew. He had been in denial. When it finally came down, he was in shock, and she’s got to be the wife to the guy who feels wronged and blindsided. And she’s thinking, the blindness was on your side.”

King believes not including the spouse in the conversation is a mistake.

“I can’t tell you how many spouses are bitter, angry, that no one had a conversation with them, zero. They’re not included. That pollutes the ministry because if your wife is not happy and good in ministry, it’s hard to stay in ministry.”

Shepherding the whole family through the grief process requires a courageous eldership.

King knows one elder who sat down with some young children and teenage kids and said, “I know it hurts. Would you talk to me?” The kids lost their support network and their friends.

“Once you talk to the minister, you have to listen to the anger and frustrations without being defensive,” King says. “I hear so many say, ‘Once they let us go, nobody checked with us. Nobody said, ‘How are you doing? How can I be helpful?’”

King likens the dismissal of a minister to trauma. When trauma happens to the physical body, it affects the whole body. The body of the church is no different.

Cheryl Mann Bacon

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 baconc@acu.edu.

If this is ever not going well, would you please tell me?
Ministers need honest evaluations, say ministry consultants, plus a network for feedback and accountability.
Find the web-exclusive report, plus Part 1 of this series at christianchronicle.org.

The future of the church: Let us dream

That'll preach.

We were blessed to be at the recent Harding University Bible Lectureship in Searcy, Ark., on the night that Harold Shank gave the keynote sermon.

Shank, a longtime preacher and Bible professor who previously served as president of Ohio Valley University in Vienna, W.Va., reflected on the early church’s focus on fellowship.

He attributed that emphasis to the first century Christians’ focus on the resurrection of Jesus; to the Holy Spirit at work within them; to their devotion to the mission; and to their following the example of Jesus.

But Shank really got rolling as he asked the audience to dream a little about the future of Churches of Christ:

• A future in which foster care shortages no longer exist because Christians take in all the children who need care.

• A future in which churches don’t sell their buildings and move to the suburbs but stay in the struggling communities that need Jesus.

• A future in which congregations resemble the multinational, multigenerational makeup of early congregations.

• A future in which orphans, widows and aliens see the Church of Christ in any town as a place where they can turn for love and support.

We were scribbling quickly as Shank made his points, so hopefully he — and you, dear reader — will forgive us for any that we didn’t get exactly right.

But we were inspired as he repeatedly ended his points with this refrain: “Sounds like the early church to me!”

Amen.

That’ll preach.
Living in a world with a missing God

THE OLD TESTAMENT STORY of Esther, which never mentions the Lord by name, abounds in relevance today. Have you ever felt that God was distant and removed from our culture today? Do you watch the news and scroll through social media, shaking your head at the seeming absence of a higher power in life? In the Old Testament book of Esther, God is never mentioned by name, but his fingerprints and his plan are still there. That’s a central theme in Chris Altrock’s latest work, “Behind Esther: Thriving When God Seems Distant.”

Altrock, senior preaching minister for the Highland Church of Christ in the Memphis suburb of Cordova, Tenn., encourages us to look deeply into the ancient book of Esther. In its pages, we discover that “there’s a God who has placed us on the road at just the right time in just the right place,” he writes, “so we can partner with him in helping a hurting world.”

The ancient days of Persia may seem unlike our modern society, but many of the sinful actions of King Ahasuerus and Haman are repeated continually today. We see pride in rulers obsessed with power and their own wisdom who ignore God. We see the exploitation of women in modern-day human trafficking. And we see the continued plague of prejudice and racism.

We also see in Esther’s story an example of patient, brave humility. She dared to face the king and advocate for the people of God. We can do the same. Over the 12 chapters of his book, Altrock outlines a list of habits and practices from Esther that we can develop in order to change a seemingly godless world into a God-filled one.

He highlights habits gleaned from the actions of Mordecai and Esther: examen (a devotional exercise in which we evaluate our conduct), waiting, engaging, humility, radical prayer, valuing others, empathy, generosity, mercy, purpose, celebration and service.

By practicing these habits, we can turn a world that may not know our Father into one that not only believes in him but celebrates and shares him.

Our society often sees only what Altrock calls “instrumental value.” People have value only “if they can lead to or produce something else valuable,” he writes. “Alone, they have little to no worth.”

Using stories from our culture and personal tales from 20 years of ministry, Altrock reminds us of the intrinsic value we all have as children of God.

“What our world needs is people who can respond to crisis not with despair and not with violence,” Altrock writes, “but with abiding joy and hopefulness that comes through a conviction that there’s far more going on than what we first see.”

In Print

Katie Isenberg


Reading this book will give you good insight into how you can be a light to them in a dark time.

KATIE ISENBERG and her family worship with the Keizer Church of Christ in Oregon.

Want Christian leaders to be all they can be? The Army can help

Ever find godly wisdom in an unexpected place? It happened to me when I read the “The U.S. Army Leadership Field Manual.” I was trying to develop a class for men about being a leader in the home and was having no luck in the Christian literature world. I found plenty of books for elders, deacons and ministry leaders. I found other books about family devotions and family prayer life but nothing that discussed daily living.

In frustration, I went outside the box and asked myself, “Who has to train and develop leaders in large numbers all the time?” This led me to the U.S. Army. Its approach is a 100 percent servant-leadership model called “Be, Know, Do.”

“Be” refers to all the good character traits a leader needs to have. A leader must be authentic and trusted to look out for the interests of others.

“Know” means having the skills that a leader needs to develop, including empathy, listening, planning and the like.

“Do” refers to how a leader acts in harmony with good character traits to bring out the best in others.

When you read the field manual from a Christian mindset, you see the example of Jesus throughout the discussion. The book also discusses the Army’s “After Action Report” concept, which emphasizes doing better going forward. We don’t ignore sin, but we do want to learn from our mistakes and do better. This is an excellent approach to disciplining children.

I even found a discussion of grace, where the Army cautions against creating a “zero defects” environment where harsh punishment creates fear of taking a risk to pursue good things.

One of my favorite parts is a discussion of how important it is for everyone, from privates on up, to know what the mission goals are. In a spiritual context, we all understand that the goal is taking as many people with us to heaven as we can.

When we share that goal, we can take the initiative when opportunities arise and still do good when our communication breaks down and unexpected obstacles appear.

The Leadership Field Manual has been updated a couple of times since, but the 2004 edition that I read is still in print.

ROGER TATE is a deacon of the Pleasant Ridge Church of Christ in Arlington, Texas, and a former trustee of Members of Churches of Christ for Scouting. He serves on the special needs and disabilities committee of the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America.
NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

Wayne Newland. Not Every Hill is Calvary! Self Published, 2018. 40 pages. $3. Heritage21@maine.rr.com.

How do we know what God wants? In the late 1800s, a formula became traditional within part of the Restoration Movement. It was used to determine what was right and wrong in worship and church organization and was the essential rationale when Churches of Christ separated over use of musical instruments. Often known today by the shorthand “CENI,” this hermeneutic (method of interpretation) assumed that a PATTERN was set forth in the New Testament, that all practices must be authorized by COMMANDS, EXAMPLES, or NECESSARY INFERENCES (CENI), and that SILENCE prohibits anything not so authorized.

Until the latter 1900s, this thinking dominated our brotherhood and is still taught in many congregations. Some brethren have long used it to support opposition to multiple communion cups, Sunday schools, kitchens, etc. Newland attempts a fair analysis of CENI, explores an alternative for knowing what God wants, and addresses such questions as: What are the commands that we are to obey if we love Him? How many are there? What is freedom in Christ? When might we choose to curtail our freedom?

“Not Every Hill…” can provide a good start for individual or group study of how to interpret Scripture afresh.

BIBLE STUDY


This systematic overview of Revelation treats Revelation and the rest of Scripture as a coherent whole. It presents Bible prophecy as an overview of time and history and shows how these things relate to our modern world.

As a young man Mr. Fain took a rationalistic view of prophecy and only slowly realized its importance to the entire Christian age as something needed for both conduct and preparedness. This book discusses how the visions should be taken and why the prophets of old are still relevant. Fain views us as right in rejecting premillennialism but as wrong in stopping our study.

The book presents solid evidence that: 1. Not all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled. 2. That Rome and the Caesars are at best types and shadows of things yet to come. Ancient Rome and the Caesars only fit Revelation to a point. That “only to a point” condition is one of the common Biblical signs of a type or shadow in Scripture. The rest comes with the ultimate fulfillment.

Mystery Babylon and the Mystery of Lawlessness are viewed as age-long entities, reaching their fullness only very near the end — thus, the relevance of Revelation to the entire Christian Age!

These are the tools you need for a second look at Revelation.

“Panoramic, coherent, instructive.” Dennis Conner, Raleigh, N.C.

“Fain makes the case for systemic integrated reading of Scripture … a book well worth reading and discussing with fellow believers.” Dr. Bill Bagents, Heritage Christian University.

“Substantial and enlightening,” Larry Murdock, Lawrenceburg, Tenn.

Available through your bookseller.

Free supplementary material is available at: http://AngleofEntry.com/

FINISHING STRONG


Ian J. Drucker was born in Wheaton, Md., and was reared in the Jewish faith. However, after his sister was diagnosed with cancer in 1993, he started to explore the possibility of Jesus as the Messiah.

As a result of his exploration, he and his wife, Marti, became Christians. Ian worked in the field of electrical engineering for over 20 years. In 2002 he began teaching the gospel message part time at the county detention center and in 2004 moved into the pulpit full time.

In January 2017 Ian was diagnosed with high-grade invasive bladder cancer which would soon be classified as terminal. This would begin his crash course in just what it means to REALLY trust God. Marti states, “Ian began teaching by example what a purpose-driven death could look like as a Christian who believes God’s promises. He began helping all of those around him to accept his impending death by his joyful smile and the evident peace that could not be denied. He was in awe of what was about to happen to him! Ian went on to write this book in his last few months, filled with all the things God taught him, yearning to leave some Godly wisdom for his grandchildren, family, and those who might be helped by his words about God — it is where he poured out his heart, hoping to leave a blessing behind.” Ian went to be with our Lord on April 11, 2018.

It is Marti’s hope and desire to encourage others as they consider this fresh way to view the end of this journey, this death that we will all face. Face it not with fear or dread or false promises, but, instead, face it with full trust in the promises of Christ that lead to acceptance, peace and a joyful expectation of what is to come!
Administrator Needed

Crowley’s Ridge Academy (CRA) is a private Christian school (preschool through 12th grade) in Paragould, AR, with a 65-year history. The school is seeking a full-time Administrator.

The Administrator is responsible for leading Crowley’s Ridge Academy spiritually, academically, financially, and organizationally. The Administrator should reflect a Christ-like servant attitude with excellent communication and leadership skills. The Administrator is accountable for the operation of the school, focusing on communication with staff and key stakeholders, ensuring the fiscal responsibility of the school, and working closely with the Board of Directors to accomplish strategic goals. The Administrator works for and reports to the Board of Directors.

Minimum qualifications include a bachelor’s degree and 3 years of management experience leading a successful business or organization. Candidates must be active members of the church of Christ and committed to Christian Education.

Please apply by 11/30. Send resumé, cover letter, and references to: board@crafalcons.org

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

Crossword answers | From Page 29

MALACHA SOTONTE

HAWK RAVEN

HADON AMES

FISH OASES

OLI GLEES

DEY REAR

ANGRY SACRAMENT

Why attend a Christian university?
Here’s an answer you weren’t expecting

HENDERSON, Tenn.

Far too many of us think that “Christian education” means you have to sacrifice some of your education to get the Christian element.

And far too many of us think that Christian campuses are shelters that hinder us from preparing for life in the real world.

I got to talk about these issues with President David Shannon during my visit to Freed-Hardeman University. This year the university, which is associated with Churches of Christ, celebrates its 150th anniversary (more on that in a future issue). The school also has a record-breaking of enrollment of 2,117 students, about 83 percent of whom come from our fellowship.

Milton Sewell, a former FHU president and current trustee of The Christian Chronicle, invited me to FHU to see some friends of mine from FACE: French African Christian Education. It was great catching up with George Akpablil, Ed Jones and Bill Morgan, to name a few.

I was privileged to read Scripture during chapel before Akpablil talked about the ministry training he does in Benin and across West Africa.

Sewell and his wife, Laurel, were my gracious hosts. (Yes, we ate at Jacks Creek B-B-Q. Divine!) I got to see a Lipscomb classmate of mine who now teaches at FHU and a young lady I met while writing a “Churches That Work” feature on the Long Island Church of Christ in New York in 2014. (She can’t be old enough for college.)

FHU’s current president comes from another congregation we profiled in “Churches That Work” — the Mt. Juliet Church of Christ in Middle Tennessee. David Shannon was the preacher for the church when Bobby Ross Jr. wrote about it in 2012. Shannon took on the presidency of FHU in fall 2017.

As a preacher, he has seen church members grapple with the decision of where to send their kids after high school. It’s not easy. College is expensive. And Christian colleges seem even more expensive (though my friends in admissions could show you some numbers that might surprise you).

As Shannon visits churches, he talks about FHU’s commitment to God’s Word. That doesn’t surprise anyone.

He also talks about the school’s high acceptance rate into post-grad programs — and how its nursing students consistently score well above the national average on licensing exams.

That causes jaws to drop. That’s right. A big reason to choose a Christian university is because of its academic standards — not in spite of them.

I was blessed immensely by my undergraduate years at a Christian university. They prepared me — academically and spiritually — to succeed as a grad student at a state university and to serve in campus ministry.

It’s time for our churches to renew our commitment to Christian education. Shannon suggested that churches select a Christian university or a nearby campus ministry — or both — and support them with our time and our dollars. I think that’s a noble goal.

Christian universities don’t prepare you for the real world; they are the real world. Let’s make sure they remain beacons of light in a world that eschews knowledge.

ERIK TRYGGESTAD is president and CEO of The Christian Chronicle. Contact erik@christianchronicle.org. Follow him on Twitter at @eriktryggestad.
**MINISTER NEEDED**

**Full-time Pulpit Minister - Luling, Texas.**

The Church of Christ in Luling, Texas, is in search of a full-time pulpit minister for a congregation with an average attendance of 225. Current minister is retiring after 26 years. Applicants should have a minimum of 5 years experience as a pulpit minister, be a good speaker and Bible teacher, and relate well to all ages. Resumes, including an internet link to audio/video sermons, should be emailed to Tim Fletcher at:

tim.fletcher58@gmail.com

Thomaston Road Church of Christ
Attn: Pulpit Minister Search Committee
5859 Thomaston Rd, Macon, GA 31220

**Full-time Pulpit Minister - Macon, Georgia.**

Thomaston Road Church of Christ (www.trcoc.church), is seeking a full-time pulpit minister for a congregation with an average attendance of 225. Current minister is retiring after 26 years. Applicants should have a minimum of 5 years experience as a pulpit minister, be a good speaker and Bible teacher, and relate well to all ages. Resumes, including an internet link to audio/video sermons, should be emailed to Tim Fletcher at:

tim.fletcher58@gmail.com

Thomaston Road Church of Christ
Attn: Pulpit Minister Search Committee
5859 Thomaston Rd, Macon, GA 31220

**Full-time Pulpit Minister - Flower Mound, Texas.**

The Church of Christ in Flower Mound, Texas, is searching for a full-time pulpit minister to lead a congregation that values biblical preaching and teaching. The ideal candidate will have a minimum of 5 years of pulpit ministry experience, a commitment to biblical counseling, and a desire to work with small groups and students. Resumes, including video samples, should be submitted to:

bill.watson@acs4u.net

**Full-time Pulpit Minister - Charlotte, N.C.**

The Church of Christ in Charlotte, N.C., is seeking a full-time pulpit minister to lead a vibrant congregation of 150. The ideal candidate will have a minimum of 5 years of pulpit ministry experience, a commitment to biblical counseling, and a desire to work with small groups and students. Resumes, including video samples, should be submitted to:

bill.watson@acs4u.net

**CALENDAR**


**Nov. 6** Renew Gathering. Nashville/Franklin, Tenn. Harpeth Christian Church. info@renew.org. See renew.org.

**Nov. 15, 16, 17** Scenes From the Life of Christ. Stonecrest Church of Christ. McDonough, Ga. stonecrestcocc.theatrearts@gmail.com. See stonercsc.org.


**Dec. 12** Church Involvement Conference. Athens Church of Christ. Athens, Tenn. (423) 920-3060. involvementcoach@att.net. See churchinvolvement.com.


**FULL CALENDAR:** www.christianchronicle.org.

To include your event for $25, contact tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org.
Believers in Rwanda Bring About Positive Societal Transformation

Transformation. It's a word you're probably familiar with—especially when goal planning. Perhaps your goal has been “to get in shape.” Or maybe you made the audacious goal of reading through the Bible this year. Whether your goals are physical or spiritual—the end result should have the same outcome: positive transformation. It’s no different for what we hope to achieve through the missionaries we train. When training missionaries, the goal is never to equip them to make the cultures they serve more like Christian Americans, but more like Christ. To put it simply, disciples make disciples. When individuals are transformed by Christ, they have the power to bring about societal transformation.

For the past 10 years, MRN has had the privilege of serving in Rwanda. During that time, the missionaries focused on loving people and sharing the Good News in tangible ways. Daily, our missionaries and Rwandan partners worked with street kids, provided clean water to communities, started a technical school for genocide survivors, and discipled girls leaving prostitution. Even though illegal, prostitution is rampant due to the high poverty rate in Rwanda. Many university students supplement their income through prostitution just to survive and make ends meet. Though hard to believe, it is very much their reality.

While our team was serving in Rwanda, they encountered two such young women trapped in the prostitution industry who came through Peace House—a partnership program designed to teach life skills. These young women not only learned how to sew and start their own business, but they became believers of Jesus. As they were being transformed, God led them to men who also loved Jesus. Now they are happily married and actively discipling other girls leaving prostitution. Notice these two beautiful women on their wedding days above. The crowns on their heads remind us of Isaiah 61:1-3: The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. To comfort all who mourn—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

These young women are now oaks of righteousness firmly planted by the Lord in their culture. As they grow, their impact will continue for generations to come. What a powerful display of societal transformation! And it all started with people who heard the call and were obedient to follow. But it didn’t stop there. The calling was fulfilled because of generous donors just like you! Because of the support from faithful friends, we are able to train and help launch missionaries all over the world to make the same kind of impact. Our goal this year is to train 30 more missionaries to make an even greater impact in the Mediterranean Rim. An area where faith in Christ has barely existed for over a thousand years. Will you help us proclaim the Good News to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom to the captives, and bring about positive societal transformation? To learn how you can get involved with MRN, visit mrnet.org. We look forward to partnering with you!