Retired slugger, wife on a mission

JOSH AND GINGER WILLINGHAM  live out their Christian faith in Alabama hometown.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

FLORENCE, Ala.
Josh Willingham stayed up most of the night praying.
After going to the World Series with the Kansas City Royals in 2014, the 35-year-old slugger had a choice to make.
A difficult one.
The 11-year major-league veteran could play another season and hope to avoid the nagging injuries that had required multiple surgeries.
Or the free-agent left fielder could choose not to sign another contract. He could become a full-time father to his three young sons and start the next chapter in his life.
“I am a family-oriented guy, and my kids were getting older,” said Willingham, who with his wife, Ginger, shared the family’s story at Mars Hill Bible School, the couple’s alma mater. “And I was missing a lot of their lives.”

“As it turns out, I did get those offers,” he recalled during a benefit dinner held before the coronavirus pandemic forced social distancing.
The night before he had to decide, fellow Christians met at Josh’s house and joined the Florence native in seeking God’s direction.
“I can remember we were all praying about it,” he said.
“I just really struggled with the decision. But my only prayer was, ‘Lord, I just want to be 100 percent (certain) and have no regrets.’
“And I haven’t. It’s been a good time,” added Josh, who ended his career with 195 home runs, 632 RBIs and an .823 on-base plus slugging percentage. “I’m still involved with baseball, just in a different way — teaching little youngsters.”

Faith, hope and food for Venezuela

In a village of Venezuela’s Cojedes state, children receive meals paid for by Churches of Christ.
Retired minister Steve Watson and Venezuelan immigrant Cristian Yovera, both members of the Pegram Church of Christ in Tennessee, send medicine and relief supplies to the South American nation, where “whole families are fighting against hunger, fighting against an economic crisis and now fighting against a pandemic,” Yovera told The Christian Chronicle.
The note on the child’s box reads, “How are you? I hope you are well in spite of what is happening. Have faith and hope in God.” For more information, including how to contribute to relief efforts, see christianchronicle.org/helpvenezuela.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CRISTIAN YOVERA

“Kinoks City Royals left fielder Josh Willingham bats in a September 2014 game.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO BY REED HOFFMAN

KANSAS CITY ROYALS left fielder Josh Willingham bats in a September 2014 game.

Faith was instilled early in the lives of Josh and Ginger. Each attended Mars Hill Bible School, which is associated with Churches of Christ, from kindergarten through 12th grade.
The school’s roots can be traced back to 1947.

FAITH AND FAMILY

Special coverage of COVID-19 begins on Page 5
We are currently seeking Mentors to help guide groups requesting assistance with our online courses. Sign up now at mathetis.org/mentor-application.
Time to graduate, but with no Pomp and Circumstance

OKLAHOMA CITY

When my son Keaton was about 4, a police car pulled up beside our minivan at a stoplight.

At that exact moment, our sweet child piped up from the car seat behind us.

“Everybody, act natural,” he deadpanned, sounding like Elmer Fudd.

Where he came up with that, I have no idea. But two decades later, my wife, Tamie, and I still laugh about it.

Graduation time tends to make a parent nostalgic, which is why I find myself flooded with memories of my quintessential peacemaking middle son, now 22.

The coronavirus crisis derailed Oklahoma Christian University’s originally scheduled spring commencement ceremonies for Keaton and 367 fellow graduates.

However, a global pandemic can’t stop a teary-eyed father from reflecting on the momentous journey that led his little boy — er, young adult — to this point.

I picture Keaton, then 9, and I unrolling our sleeping bags on a patch of grass and rocks on a mission trip to a remote mountain village in Mexico. A braying burro and an insomniac rooster made it difficult to sleep.

I see us at countless Texas Rangers baseball games and chuckle at what happened when former American

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The Christian Chronicle interviewed JUNE 2020

See GRADUATION, Page 4

Inside Story

Bobby Ross Jr.

Bikokwa

Mutai

In Kenya’s Turkana County, Jecinta Iperit Ekunyuk shows two of the billions of locusts that have ravaged East Africa. “We are starving,” said the mother of eight. She has participated in food sustainability workshops provided by Healing Hands International. The ministry associated with Churches of Christ, which must respond to the dual crises of locusts and COVID-19.

Africa’s other plague

AN ARMY OF LOCUSTS has invaded in the midst of COVID-19. Churches of Christ and relief ministries prepare for the region’s next pandemic – hunger.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

They cover the sky like a lunar eclipse,” said David Bikokwa, describing the waves of locusts that have ravaged his homeland, Kenya.

The swarms, which originated in the deserts of the Middle East, are so dense that they’ve forced airplanes to divert, including an Ethiopian Airlines flight that in January made an emergency landing with bugs caked to its cockpit.

Nowadays, of course, there are almost no commercial flights in East Africa because of another plague — COVID-19.

Bikokwa, who worships with a Church of Christ in the West Kenyan town of Kitale, is sequestered in his home. So are Christians across the region, including Michael Mutai, a minister in the coastal city of Mombasa, Kenya.

“Wow! Having this pandemic after the desert locusts is like a curse,” Mutai said. After the first wave of locusts, “we were just about to thank God for the advent of long rains so as to bring back the vegetation.”

Then came the pandemic — and the news that the rains could mean a second, even larger wave of locusts.

“It’s a double tragedy,” said Francis Kipsang Bii, a program director for Christian Relief Fund, a poverty alleviation nonprofit supported by Churches of Christ.

“Locusts and the virus have brought everything to its knees, especially in a country where the majority of people live on a day’s wage,” said Kipsang, who lives in Eldoret, Kenya. Few Kenyans can work from home. Food insecurity already is a problem, “and the future food is destroyed by locusts.”

The Christian Chronicle
GRADUATION: Reflecting on son’s journey

FROM PAGE 3
League MVP Josh Hamilton signed with a rival team. Keaton, then 15, made a video that voiced his displeasure with Hamilton’s decision.

I envision us eating out — in ordinary times, this might not kindle such a longing — at our favorite burger, pizza and Tex-Mex restaurants and discussing the routine matters of life.

Keaton entered Oklahoma Christian, his parents’ alma mater, in fall 2019. Uncertain about his major and what he wanted to do with his life, he worked hard and allowed God to do the rest.

He joined a social service club, Chi Lambda Phi, and made close friends. He pursued his interest in writing and chose to major in journalism (there’s some history of that in his family).

He worked on the student newspaper, The Talon, and served as editor-in-chief his senior year.

Two years ago, he interned with the Norman Transcript, the newspaper in the home city of the University of Oklahoma. This past summer, he worked full time for The Oklahoman, the state’s largest paper.

As Keaton began his senior year, everything seemed to be going his way. He entered a contest and won a free year’s worth of Whataburger (for anybody unfamiliar with this delicacy, it’s the burger they’ll serve in heaven).

Then a different contest informed Keaton — one of the world’s most devoted Oklahoma City Thunder fans — that he had won an all-expenses paid trip to the NBA All-Star Game in Chicago.

“I think it’s safe to say I’m peaking in 2019,” Keaton said after winning the trip.

Unfortunately, 2020 would not prove so kind. Enter COVID-19.

Graduation day was supposed to be one of the highlights of Keaton’s life.

He was supposed to don a cap and gown and wink at his mother as she wiped her eyes with a tissue.

He was supposed to walk across the stage, shake hands with university President John deSteiguer and accept his diploma.

He was supposed to enjoy a party and get showered with gifts from family and friends celebrating this once-in-a-lifetime milestone.

Instead, he graduated virtually (whatever that means). His actual commencement ceremony is on hold, tentatively set for August. But who knows if that will be possible?

His mother, younger sister Kendall, 20, and I did our best to help him mark the occasion at home. His older brother, Brady, 26; sister-in-law, Mary; and 20-month-old nephew, Bennett, sent him a video message to offer their congratulations.

But it wasn’t the same.

It just wasn’t. “It is OK to be disappointed,” Keaton wrote in a column for The Talon. “But we must realize we will eventually be honored as graduates in some way, and we will reunite with our friends again soon. This event, whether it lasts two months or two years, is temporary.”

What a mature attitude! He gets that kind of thinking from his mom.

And there is a positive development (thank you, Lord!): Keaton has landed a job in his field, not an easy thing to do in these trying times for the news industry. Starting June 1, he’ll cover criminal justice and the state prison industry. Starting June 1, he’ll cover criminal justice and the state prison industry. Starting June 1, he’ll cover criminal justice and the state prison industry. Starting June 1, he’ll cover criminal justice and the state prison industry. Starting June 1, he’ll cover criminal justice and the state prison industry.

I’m so proud of Keaton and thrilled about this next step in his journey. And I’m trying hard — real hard — not to be too disappointed about his big day’s lack of pomp and circumstance.

BOBBY ROSS JR. is editor-in-chief of The Christian Chronicle. Contact bobby.ross@christianchronicle.org. Follow him on Twitter at @bobbyross.
Hours after Easter Sunday tornadoes walloped the twin cities of Monroe and West Monroe in northeastern Louisiana, Ryan Lee came home from working with a chainsaw crew. The mask intended to protect him from the coronavirus dangled around his neck.

“Well, did you wear your mask when you were out today?” Miranda Lee asked her husband, who leads One Kingdom, a ministry that focuses on mission work and disaster relief.

“A tornado just came through here. Nobody’s thinking about that,” replied Ryan Lee, whose work is sponsored by the White’s Ferry Road Church of Christ, the couple’s home congregation in West Monroe. “We’re just trying to get trees off houses.”

Miranda Lee, an ICU nurse who treats COVID-19 patients at the Monroe Medical Center, gently reminded him that the virus threat had not disappeared in the April 12 storm.

Already, she was feeling crummy — with coughing, shortness of breath and a low-grade fever — and worrying that she might have been infected herself.

Tension and frustration characterized the exchange as the Christian couple tried to balance concern for their family’s safety with a shared desire to help hurting people.

“I wanted him to be protected, and he was worried about others,” Miranda Lee recalled.

Ryan and Miranda Lee, both 39, met as students at Harding University in Searcy, Ark. He majored in business. She studied nursing. Both graduated in 2002.

They moved to West Monroe — where she grew up in the White’s Ferry Road church — in 2007.

They have two sons: Isaac, 8, and Harrison, 5.

Ryan Lee worked as a wealth management adviser for Merrill Lynch before becoming director of One Kingdom, which formed with the 2017 merger of WFR Relief and World Radio.

A registered nurse for 17 years, Miranda Lee is pursuing nurse practitioner credentials. She expects to receive her Master of Science in Nursing degree from the University of Louisiana at Monroe in May.

“They are both very diligent to stay healthy as well as continue to meet the needs of others spiritually as well as physically,” said Mike Kellett, the White’s Ferry Road church’s senior minister. “I couldn’t be prouder of both of them.”

‘SAD AND HEARTBREAKING’

While enrolled in graduate school, Miranda Lee has worked two shifts a week in the Monroe Medical Center’s intensive care unit.

Until she started feeling ill herself, those shifts put her in close contact with coronavirus patients, who can’t receive visitors because of COVID-19’s highly contagious nature.

“It’s just really been overwhelming,” Miranda Lee said. “It’s just been sad and heartbreaking to see these patients come in alone. You know, suffering and not having their families beside them.”

It’s just really been overwhelming,” Miranda Lee said. “It’s just been sad and heartbreaking to see these patients come in alone. You know, suffering and not having their families beside them.”

‘BLESSING ALL THE WAY AROUND’

Monroe is the seat of Ouachita Parish, where three tornadoes hit about lunchtime on Easter Sunday, damaging or destroying more than 450 homes, according to the National Weather Service.

No one died, and Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards called the lack of serious injuries a miracle, the Monroe News-Star reported.

See ONE KINGDOM, Page 6
The Church of Christ in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, is supporting a God-centered treatment program for men at SOZO Addiction Recovery Center, where, in the last four years, 49 men have chosen to become baptized into Christ as part of their recovery experience. This is particularly significant because the program only treats 10-12 men at a time.

In addition to mental health and addiction counseling in small groups and one-on-one sessions, the men become active members of the congregation and experience first hand the healing power of God’s love in a Bible-based congregation.

For more information about this uniquely successful program, visit: www.sozorecoverycenters.com

Executive Director, Bob O’Dowd
(501) 226-9575          bonhsv@suddenlink.net

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**ONE KINGDOM: Serving amid pandemic**

**FROM PAGE 5**

With no safe room in his house, Ernie Heckford, a lifelong Southern Baptist, bowed his head and prayed that God would protect his family, he told *The Christian Chronicle.*

 Heckford, his wife and adult son — joined by their dogs — buckled up in a vehicle inside the family’s garage, hoping that might offer an extra layer of security.

After the storm passed, Heckford emerged from the garage to find the power knocked out and pecan trees snapped in pieces all over his yard, one leaning hard against his roof.

Chad Johnson, Heckford’s boss with Graphic Packaging International, called to see if Heckford could help clean up tornado debris at the West Monroe paper mill. But Heckford explained the mess at his own house, and Johnson told him to focus on that.

A member of the White’s Ferry Road church, Johnson immediately called Ryan Lee. The mill superintendent knew a One Kingdom chainsaw crew was mobilizing and minutes away from Heckford’s neighborhood.

“It was just a blessing all the way around,” Heckford said of the half-dozen volunteers who showed up.

The team cleared the trees in a few hours — a task Heckford said would have taken him and his son days.

One Kingdom has performed the same job after past disasters, such as the deadly twister that struck Cookeville, Tenn., on March 3.

But the risk was different this time. “We’re trying to send teams out in groups of six or less,” Ryan Lee said. “Everybody has to wear masks and gloves, which, if I’m being honest, is hard to police.

“You know, you’re running chainsaws and all that stuff,” he added. “But everyone’s doing their best to maintain their social distance.”

**‘GOING TO EAT SOME FISH’**

Ryan Lee describes himself as a “touchy-feely guy.”

“I’m big on affection,” he said.

At disaster sites, he loves nothing more than gathering everyone — residents and volunteers — in a tight circle and praying arm in arm.

At Heckford’s house, he knew he couldn’t do that. The group prayed but without the normal touching.

One Kingdom volunteers work on tornado relief in the Monroe, La., area.

“I don’t want to fib and tell you that we all had yardsticks between us,” Ryan Lee said. “But we refrained from laying on hands.”

As the crew prepared to leave, Heckford promised he’d invite the volunteers back after the COVID-19 threat.

“I’ve got a freezer full of fish, and we’re going to have a big old fish fry when this virus is over,” the homeowner said he told them. “We’re going to talk about it and laugh about it ... and eat some fish.”

**‘IT’S NOT IDEAL’**

Miranda Lee got tested for COVID-19, but her result came back negative. She doesn’t know if she got a “false negative” — which experts cite in 5 percent to 30 percent of cases — or if she came down with something different.

“There are so many other viruses, and it’s allergy season in Louisiana,” she said. “So I could be run-down because I’m in grad school, and we’re homeschooling our boys and working from home, you know. Who knows?”

In any case, her fever has broken, and she has started feeling better.

Ryan Lee remains busy with the tornado relief effort.

Besides leading One Kingdom, he’s coordinating with Samaritan’s Purse, an evangelical humanitarian aid group that is organizing volunteers out of the White’s Ferry Road church’s parking lot.

And he’s doing his best to keep his wife happy by taking necessary precautions to avoid COVID-19.

“It’s not ideal,” he said of no hugs or handshakes. “But loads of work is still getting done, and relationships are still being forged.”
Ministries adapt practices to serve storm victims

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

A
fter an EF3 tornado slammed into Jonesboro, Ark., on March 28, the Nettleton Church of Christ could have used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse not to help.

Instead, the 100-member congregation immediately mobilized while taking precautions designed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. “Because the recent disaster happened in the midst of the nation’s ‘present distress,’ it has given us an opportunity to reach out to more people,” said Brock Kendall, who preaches for the Arkansas church.

Three hundred miles south of Jonesboro, the Jackson Street Church of Christ in Monroe, La., also didn’t hesitate to rally volunteers after twisters swept through the South on April 12.

“COVID-19 has added a measure of difficulty to the process, but we’re doing our best to embody God’s kingdom in our community,” said Travis Bookout, preaching minister for the 300-member Louisiana congregation.

One Jackson Street family heard from Jason Stewart, a member of the Parkview Church of Christ in Monroe, that tornado victims were going hungry.

So Steven and Jana Fitzhugh and their four children, ages 12 to 22, went to Sam’s Club and bought enough sandwich meat, bread and fruit to fill 140 lunch sacks.

The experience helped smack the family out of its funk over having to isolate at home.

“Here were people who had lost everything in a tornado and didn’t even have food for the day,” Jana Fitzhugh said. “It knocked us back into our reality.”

A SLOWER PACE

Normally, Churches of Christ are at the forefront of disaster relief.

The virus outbreak is slowing — but not entirely stalling — the typical response to spring storms, national ministry leaders told The Christian Chronicle.

Take Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort, which dispatches tractor-trailer rigs full of food boxes and emergency supplies to hard-hit areas across the U.S. The Nashville, Tenn.-based organization is accustomed to using a phone tree to notify about 1,000 area Christians — many of them older and retired — of its need for volunteers.

“And we’ll have 230 people show up at the same time to pack our boxes, which we can normally do in an hour and a half or an hour and 45 minutes max,” said Mike Lewis, the ministry’s executive director.

“Well, we can’t have 230 people in our warehouse now because of social distancing,” he added. “The next thing is, our volunteers are primarily in the high-risk age group.”

As a result, Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort is urging Nashville-area congregations to recruit groups of 10 young adults to work three- to four-hour shifts.

Even then, a process that took just a few hours before the pandemic could stretch to two or three days, he said.

That means that relief trucks to places such as Jonesboro, Monroe and Ooltewah, Tenn. — struck by the April 12 tornadoes — can take longer to arrive.

Another ministry, Ohio-based Churches of Christ Disaster Response Team, specializes in organizing volunteers to feed victims, clean up debris and distribute supplies. Often, those volunteers travel long distances in church vans and sleep in close quarters such as fellowship hall floors.

COVID-19 “affects us in a lot of different ways,” said Laura Cremeans, who directs the Disaster Response Team with her husband, Mark. “We’re not able to provide housing for our volunteers. We’re not able to interact with the families we’re working with.”

The Disaster Response Team sent out an “urgent” appeal recently for volunteers with recreational vehicles to join its work with the Ooltewah Church of Christ, about 20 miles east of Chattanooga.

“We are in desperate need of volunteers to cut and drag trees/limbs as well as tarp roofs,” the ministry’s email said. “Unfortunately, due to COVID19 we can’t house and feed volunteers but we do have space for RVs with generators.”

SERVING AT A DISTANCE

Mike Baumgartner, president and CEO of Disaster Assistance CoC, just wrapped up several weeks of providing meals after the March 28 tornado that killed 19 people in the Cookeville, Tenn., area.

Baumgartner, who worked out of the Double Springs Church of Christ in Cookeville, said he devised a system in which storm victims and people out of work because of the coronavirus could pick up sandwiches and snack cakes at an appropriate distance.

But he said COVID-19 had deterred the more personal aspects of the ministry, such as Don Hudson, Disaster Assistance CoC’s director of outreach, sharing Jesus with storm victims.

“He can’t come at his age because of the virus,” Baumgartner said. “Even if he did, his main purpose is sitting down one on one, face to face, and hugging people. He’s all about setting up Bible studies and seeing people every day and building a close relationship. He wouldn’t be able to do that now.”

In the northeastern Arkansas community of Jonesboro — where the March 28 twister destroyed or heavily damaged more than 150 homes — the Nettleton church helped about 350 people with food, water, hygiene products, furniture and appliances.

About 40 church volunteers worked at various times, wearing masks and gloves and “trying” to maintain a proper social distance, Kendall said.

“We had a team at the building handing out the food and attempting to reach out to those who came with the Gospel,” he said.

In Monroe, the Jackson Street church building sustained roof damage and lost power but otherwise escaped the April 12 storm intact.

Four years ago, the Louisiana congregation gained disaster relief experience when floodwaters deluged the community.

But the process was different this time: No handshakes. No hugs. No heart-to-heart talks and prayers.

Last time, victims came inside the church to receive assistance. This time, cars lined up to accept boxes from volunteers wearing masks and gloves.

“It’s just such an impersonal thing,” said Jana Fitzhugh, who helped along with her husband and children. “I just hate that.”

However, Fitzhugh prays that — after the time of social distancing has passed — the church might have an opportunity to connect with those helped.

“Anytime there’s a disaster,” she said, “I think it’s a time when we can really show up and let our community know that we care and love them.”
Uncle Sam pays some church salaries

OTHER CONGREGATIONS decline to take advantage of federal government’s relief bill.

BY CHERYL MANN BACON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

For three decades, Ray Holmes worshiped with the Pitman Road Church of Christ in Sewell, N.J.

An accountant for nonprofit organizations his entire career, Holmes also served as the Philadelphia-area church’s treasurer.

In March, he began gathering data the congregation would need when payroll funding became available via the federal government’s Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

But even before the coronavirus relief bill was passed, Holmes became ill and handed church finances off to an elder. He was admitted to the hospital the last week of March. The bill was signed March 27. Holmes died March 31 of Covid19. He was 63.

The package initially included $349 billion for the Payroll Protection Program. Subsequent legislation added $310 billion.

Generally, organizations including churches that employ fewer than 500 people are eligible. Recipients may apply for loan forgiveness if they spend at least 75 percent on payroll costs and the balance on mortgage interest, rent, and utilities.

Dan Cooper was Holmes’ friend and lead minister at Pitman Road for 35 years before becoming part-time connections minister in July 2019. Cooper and Dave Perine, an elder who works with giving, recommended the church of about 200 should apply for funding. The other elders agreed. After Holmes became ill, the pair worked to complete the application.

A week before they were to file, they encountered a question that would become a matter of conscience: “Current economic uncertainty makes this loan request necessary to support ongoing operations of the applicant.” Cooper said they couldn’t check that box.

“It was not necessary,” he said. “It would have been nice, but our contributions have been all right. The consensus of the elders was that there are others that need money worse than we do. So we decided not to apply.”

SURVEY FINDINGS

A survey of Protestant pastors by Lifeway Research found that 40 percent of congregations had applied for the federal assistance, which is administered by the Small Business Administration. Fifty-nine percent of applicants had received funds.

The 800-plus member Memorial Church of Christ in Houston also believed that people most in need should get the money, said David Duncan, the church’s preaching minister. While some expressed concern about unstated conditions, Duncan said such doubts were secondary.

Josh Means, Equity Bank’s Missouri president and a board member for Christian Financial Resources, said concerns about government overreach prompted an FAQ document for faith-based organizations.

“That’s why the SBA put out the document, to kind of put some of those concerns to ease for churches,” Means said.

The SBA said receiving a loan does not “limit the authority of religious organizations to define the standards, responsibilities, and duties of membership; limit the freedom of religious organizations to select individuals to perform work connected to that organization’s religious exercise nor constitute waiver of any rights under federal law, including rights protecting religious autonomy and exercise.”

Not everyone accepted that assurance, including several Christian Chronicle readers who responded to an online story about the funding. Some cited a Scriptural obligation to lay by in store rather than accept outside funds. Others expressed distrust of the government.

But for the 80-member Alum Creek Church of Christ in Columbus, Ohio, the coronavirus aid bill could make it possible to keep paying seven teachers in the congregation’s small preschool.

Minister Adam Metz, the only full-time staff member, was concerned about the teachers. “They’re a great staff, and we’ve worked hard to treat them as well as we could. There was not much hesitancy (about applying). Our primary concern was there were no strings attached.”

The church’s $21,000 request was approved in the second round.

Four times the size of the Alum Creek congregation, the Westhill Church of Christ in Cleburne, Texas, faced a similar dilemma.

Contributions dropped about 25 percent after services went online. With four full-time employees and seven part-time teachers in a Tuesday-Thursday preschool, elder Jeff Giles was relieved when he and another elder learned about the Payroll Protection Program possibility from a finance committee member.

“In my opinion, we’re supposed to be good stewards of finances,” Giles said. “It’s a gift, and for us not to accept it, in my mind, would have been a mistake.”

CHURCH-STATE QUESTIONS

Ultimately, the constitutionality of a program like this one will hang on a complex question: Does such a statute result in “excessive government entanglement” with religion?

Kenneth Pybus, chair of the Journalism and Mass Communication Department at Abilene Christian University, is an attorney and First Amendment scholar.

“The Constitution doesn’t just protect free exercise of religion, wherein it protects us as Christians from government involvement,” Pybus said. “It also protects government from the church. That’s what the establishment clause is.”

The landmark case that has guided church-state decisions for more than 50 years is Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971), wherein statutes in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island provided salary supplements to teachers at church-related schools. The court ruled the supplements violated the establishment clause and crafted
Kairos has 30 church plants in 15 states and applied for $58,000 to support 12 employees comprising six full-time equivalents. However, before its application was approved, the bank expended all the funds it allotted to the program. Kairos still hopes to be approved in the second round.

“For me, theologically, if God will use government to support what we’re doing,” Clark said, “we should embrace that, and in turn we should serve in our cities.”

Jessica Hemenway Knapp is associate minister of The Seed Gathering, a Church of Christ church plant and campus ministry at University of Arizona. Knapp said COVID-19 has changed everything.

“Students were sent home. It affected where we can meet and if we can meet,” she said. “We don’t know how it will be in the fall. If we could just get two months of salary as a buffer, that would be fantastic.”

Knapp has a Ph.D. in mathematics and left a faculty role for campus ministry. She recognizes the complexities of such programs.

“I understand the theological concerns, and some have asked, ‘Why would you even consider that?’ But in my mind, that money was going to someone, and I wanted it to go to students we have to meet their needs. I don’t believe accepting funds means the government controls how I minister to people and tell people about God.”

Dealing with banks can be challenging. “It’s really important for churches to bank at the right bank,” Means said.

Large banks are more interested in larger customers, and small banks may lack the liquidity for a program like the payroll protection loans, Means said. Relationships are key.

He also advises all churches to consult their attorney and keep detailed records to document that the funds were used in compliance with the bill’s requirements.

“If you come in with a Big Chief tablet or Word doc just listing where the money went, it won’t go well.”

Gareth Flanary, minister for the West Springfield Church of Christ in Massachusetts, assumed the money would not be available for churches.

He learned otherwise after watching a consultant’s webinar. Flanary believed the money could pay for two part-time positions and an intern.

“We’re a small church but very involved with community and missions in the area,” Flanary said. “We spend a lot of our resources in those areas and did not want to lose a beat when it came to those.”

He was surprised when the church’s $16,300 request was approved. “I’m very thankful for it,” he said.

Although Lifeway Research found fewer small churches pursued or received coronavirus relief funds, two church plant organizations with small congregations have done so.

Ron Clark, founding minister of the Agape Church of Christ in Portland, Ore., recently became executive director of Kairos Church Planting, which is associated with Churches of Christ.
By Chellie Ison | The Christian Chronicle

Mike Myers, considered a pioneer in youth ministry, died after battling pneumonia and COVID-19.

Church members gathered outside a Colorado hospital to pray, while inside Carol Myers watched through a glass window as her husband, Mike, was taken off of a ventilator.

“She couldn’t hold his hand, but she could be there through the glass of the ICU,” said Jovan Barrington, senior minister for the Littleton Church of Christ, south of Denver.

Mike Myers, known as a pioneer in youth ministry within Churches of Christ, died April 29 after battling pneumonia and COVID-19. He was 74.

His death came after weeks of health battles. Myers entered the hospital with pneumonia in mid-March, around the time social distancing measures were implemented in the United States. At the time, he tested negative for COVID-19. He was even able to leave the hospital at one point, entering a rehabilitation unit, where his family was allowed to visit with him through a window.

However, his condition worsened, and he was readmitted to the hospital. He again tested negative for the coronavirus, but doctors later tested fluid from his lungs. That test came back positive for the virus.

“We were all holding out hope,” Barrington said, “but we knew him being on a ventilator, that it was very serious.”

On the Sunday before he died, Barrington said, Myers had a good day. He was alert and sitting up in bed. With help from his nurses, he was able to do a few video calls with his family.

“It was his last bit of strength before a significant decline,” the preacher said. “After Sunday, his body began to shut down.”

That Wednesday, Barrington was alerted that Myers would be taken off of the ventilator.

One by one, Carol, their daughters Cari, Holly and Amanda and granddaughters Amanda and Ryann were able to go in and see him.

Outside, while practicing social distancing, the church prayed.

“We texted the congregation and said, ‘Today is the day. Let’s go pray,’” Barrington said. “We knew that was the day he was ... he was to leave. So we gathered and prayed.”

‘Founder and Hero’

Myers was what Dudley Chancey, a professor of ministry at Oklahoma Christian University, calls a “founder and hero of what we know as youth ministry.”

“It’s the end of an era in youth ministry in Churches of Christ,” Chancey said.

Myers’ work and reputation, Chancey said, put him in a special class of men — like Jim Moss, “Big Don” Williams, Wally Wilson and Dan Warden — who were instrumental in implementing youth ministry in Churches of Christ.

“There’s a void that he leaves, but it’s not one of those where there’s this deep hole of sorrow,” Chancy said. “He filled it. He filled that void by discipling other people. I see Mike Myers in several youth ministry guys I see around the country.”

Rick Odell is one of those in whom Chancy sees Myers’ influence.

“He plowed the ground for everyone who works in youth ministry,” said Odell, youth and family minister for the West Ark Church of Christ in Fort Smith, Ark.

Odell worked closely with Myers when he served as the youth minister for the Littleton church from 2002 to 2009.

Mike and Carol took the Odell family in and loved them well, Odell said.

The Myerses and Odells spent a lot of time together, enjoying many back alley hamburger joints and long talks.

“He was a mentor, an older brother,” Odell said. “We were kindred spirits in how we looked at God and God’s people. Above everything else though, he was my friend.”

Myers’ life, Odell said, is the greatest example he has ever seen of someone living out the Great Commission from Matthew 28.

“He was living the baton of faith to those of us around him,” Odell said, “and we have to realize that now it’s up to us to continue passing that baton.”

Myers began working in youth ministry in 1973. He and Carol both received associate’s degrees from Lubbock Christian University, which was a junior college at the time. They went on to graduate from Abilene Christian University.

He spent all but a few months of his career with the Littleton church. In the late 1990s, he transitioned into a pulpit ministry position.

He was the lead minister in 1999, when the Columbine High School shooting claimed the lives of 12 students and one teacher in the suburban Denver community.

“His church and leadership during that time were incredible,” Chancy said.
Wells trained generations of singers

EASTERNNAIRES FOUNDER ‘ran her race well,’ her daughter says.

BY HAMIL R. HARRIS | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

For more than five joy-filled decades, Dorothy Wells was the soft side of a spiritual dream team that combined faith, family and music to train five generations of voices whose influence echoed far beyond the Harlem Church of Christ.

The founder and director of the Electrifying Easternnaires and widow of R.C. Wells, longtime minister for the New York City congregation, died April 2 of COVID-19. She was 84.

Born July 7, 1935, in Nashville, Tenn., Dorothy was educated at the Nashville Christian Institute and then Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, where her mother was dean of women. There she met R.C. Wells, and the couple married May 27, 1953. Dorothy put her pursuit of higher education on pause to raise the couple’s son and two daughters and support her husband’s ministry.

Together the Wellses served Churches of Christ in Okmulgee, Okla., and Pontiac, Mich., before moving to New York City in 1965. There R.C. began a 50-year ministry with the Harlem congregation, and, in 1969, Dorothy organized the Electrifying Easternnaires, a choral group for young people ages 13-25. More than 25 congregations throughout the Northeast have been represented in the group that has traveled to more than 30 states, according to the group’s Facebook page.

As news of Dorothy Wells’ death spread among former members of the Easternnaires, her Facebook page filled with tributes. Singers who loved her offered videos of their own musical tributes, some gathered as a small group in someone’s living room, others in tearful video selfies singing solo tributes to a woman they described as pivotal to their spiritual journeys.

Jarrell El Bandolero Welbon seemed to express the emotions of many others when he posted to her page: “Dorothy Wells taught me, and so many others like me, how to love, respect, and appreciate music.

How to use music to touch people’s lives and souls. How music can bring someone out of a dark place in their lives and help them find the light.”

O.J. Shabazz, minister of the Harlem church, extended video condolences to church members and friends of Dorothy Wells throughout the Tri-state region and to her friends and colleagues at the New York City Board of Education where she worked 10 years as a computer associate and data entry supervisor. Shabazz described her as the passion and drive of the internationally acclaimed Electrifying Easternnaires.

Shabazz said by God’s grace the church would eventually have a chance to mourn and console one another, “in the fashion we’re used to. That day will come.”

Eugene Lawton, minister for the Newark Church of Christ in New Jersey, said, “Our brotherhood has suffered a great loss, and her inspiring legacy will touch unborn generations.”

Many of the friends and Easternnaires alumni who posted to Dorothy Wells’ Facebook page and on the Easternnaires’ page were among those who had gathered in January 2019 at the Central Church of Christ in Baltimore to celebrate the group’s 50th anniversary and honor its founder and director.

“This is about 50 years of singing and fellowship where no one was a stranger,” Dorothy Wells said in an interview last year. “The ones from 1969 relate to the ones who just got in in 2019.”

Several hundred singers from all over the U.S. — singers who had been groomed by Dorothy Wells and inspired to get their education and let their light shine — honored her in videos during the celebration.

“It is more than a song. It’s about relationships,” Wells said at the time. “We traveled together. We fly together. We have had losses, and the losses span many years. We do a segment called love the lost, but when we got to that segment, there were no tears. There was clapping because we knew them, and we love them.”

Education was of great importance to Dorothy Wells, who returned to Queens College in her 60s to work on her degree. She finished her bachelor’s degree in American Studies in 1998. Daughter Stacey Wells Young said the return to college was a big deal for her mother.

The Dorothy Carpenter Wells Scholarship Fund, established for Easternnaire alumni several years ago, continues to honor Wells’ legacy and her commitment to education. The fund has grown to $16,000, and friends hope memorial gifts will increase it further.

“When we were growing up, we didn’t fully appreciate the fact that my mother had so many other children, but now that she is older, it is a blessing,” Young told a reporter at the anniversary celebration.

Besides Young, survivors include son Fred Wells and daughter Peggy Wells Autry.

“My mother was doing music ministry before they called it that,” Young said. “I’m just glad that she could see some of the fruit of her labors and that she ran her race well.”
The worldwide shutdown of in-person gatherings left many Christians without the means to participate in a complete worship service. However, thanks to the ability to stream our complete worship service online, wherever you are in the world, you can join us every Sunday morning at 10:30 AM (CST).

You Are Invited To Our Online Worship

- Children’s songs
- A cappella singing
- Communion
- Preaching by Wes McAdams

Join us each Sunday at:
ccmcdermott.org/live
youtube.com/mcdermottroad

Orphan’s COVID-19 Rescue (James 1:27)

“The need for help is endless for the widow and orphan families around our children’s homes and we desperately need your help to feed as many as we can. Food is getting more expensive and harder to find each day. These families only need care until they can return to work when it becomes safe again. These vulnerable families live hand to mouth and without our care now, many just won’t make it. Please, can you help us buy food so we can save them?”

Director of Rose of Sharon Children’s Home, India

It takes only $35 to provide one month of food for a family of two. Can you help us help these desperate families? Any amount will be a great blessing for them.

To give a tax-deductible donation, log on to orphanslifeline.org and click on Orphans COVID-19 Relief Fund.

Or mail to Orphan’s Lifeline Int’l. 135 Kelly Rd. Kalispell, MT 59901 406-257-0868

Thank you!
Dave Board, President
Orphan’s Lifeline
ALABAMA
MUNFORD — Alva Dean Toyer, a member of the Jenifer Church of Christ, believes there is power in sisters from Churches of Christ coming together to pray.
For that reason, she launched Sister Connect Outreach Prayer Line in 2012. It has grown from 23 women on the original call to more than 150 participants nationwide each week.
“Because of its growth, we are considering operating two nights a week,” Toyer said of the effort, which recently celebrated its eighth anniversary. “I am so excited!”
During each session, women are encouraged to pray for one another and share “the concerns of our hearts,” she said.
The group has a seven-member, multi-state advisory committee that helps oversee its work. For more information, contact Toyer at alvatoyer@yahoo.com.

KENTUCKY
MAYFIELD — Businesses are hurting, and some people are going hungry because of the coronavirus crisis. The Seven Oaks Church of Christ found a way to help.
Church members provided free pizzas to the first 100 cars that showed up at Little Caesar’s on a recent Wednesday. The food was provided through the congregation’s long-running “Every One Counts” outreach program.
Those who picked up pizzas for dinner were invited to participate in the congregation’s Facebook Live class on Wednesday and worship remotely on Sunday, too, minister Josh Ketchum said.
“We were able to help a local business and also provide an easy, accessible meal to those in need,” Ketchum said. “It also is a way of providing an outreach and good name for the church.”

OKLAHOMA
EDMOND — Lessons can be conducted online, but the meals that come with the day’s education aren’t available in that format.
With school buildings shuttered because of the global pandemic, some children have gone without the breakfast and lunch that had been provided by their district.
The Edmond Church of Christ saw the need and responded. Cara Jernigan, an Edmond member and local educator, organized a task force to help.
Church elders approved funding that helped provide “grab and go” breakfasts and lunches for students at Will Rogers Elementary, next door to the church.
Volunteers from several Bible classes donned protective face coverings and gloves and packed the bags each day with food items that met federal nutritional guidelines. Others spaced themselves out on a circle drive at the church and distributed the meals as cars pulled through the line. Satellite distributions were made at a local trailer park, as well, with the school’s teachers helping out.

TENNESSEE
FAYETTEVILLE — Tim Hall received a call at home on a recent night. This isn’t at all unusual for Hall, minister for the Howell Hill Church of Christ. Nor was the request, really: Hall is asked regularly to baptize a believer, as was being requested.
But this time, everything was different.
“Tim?” asked a woman Hall knew well from his congregation, “Can someone be baptized while we are in a shelter-in-place?”
The caller explained that her 22-year-old grandson, Austin Carter, was ready.
“He doesn’t want to wait any longer, but he doesn’t want to put anyone at risk,” she said.
Hall said he would pray.
“We met at the church building, and I baptized that young man into Christ,” Hall said, explaining that after time spent talking to God, he knew what his answer must be.
Hall said he donned gloves in addition to his usual attire, and both went into the water for the baptism and came out together.

TEXAS
RICHARDSON — Girls from the Greenville Avenue Church of Christ, which comprises Girl Scout Troop 2477, earned Bronze and Silver awards from the organization.
The girls partnered with the African Library Project to build a library in Kampala, Uganda, as part of their qualification.
“These mission-minded girls had to collect at least 1,000 books and $600, which they did in excess,” said Elizabeth Afriyie, a church member and Troop 2477 leader. The girls also included devotional books and Bibles in the materials they shipped, she said.

Drive-in worship brings church ‘together’
Brendan Chance, minister for the Alexander City Church of Christ in Alabama, preaches atop a platform built over a pickup bed. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the drive-in outdoor worship allowed members to see each other from a safe distance. A short-range transmitter broadcast audio into vehicles. About 40 vehicles were counted. “I never thought I’d be preaching from a setup like this!” Chance wrote on Facebook.
**IN NOVA SCOTIA,** Churches of Christ are ‘small in number but mighty in spirit.’ Now they mourn after the worst mass shooting in Canada’s modern history.

**Standing together while apart**

**BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE**

It’s the kind of tragedy “you hear about in the news from faraway places,” said Darren Boehner.

But the deadliest rampage in Canada’s history happened at places he knows. And among its 22 victims are names and faces he and his fellow Christians recognize.

Boehner is ministry leader for the Mill Village Church of Christ, a 30-member congregation that meets in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, about 250 miles east of the U.S. state of Maine.

On Sunday, April 19, after church members worshiped in their homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many learned of the 13-hour crime spree that began the night before.

A man impersonating a police officer shot and killed victims inside and outside their homes and set multiple fires. Several victims died while trying to escape the flames or help other victims. Three of the deaths happened in Shubenacadie, about two miles from Mill Village.

The rampage ended in the town of Enfield when the shooter was killed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at the Irving Big Stop, where minister Ray Fisher has fueled up many times.

“It could have been me or someone I love,” Fisher said. “I did not want to believe what I was hearing. I remember thinking, ‘This is pure evil. Things like this don’t happen in rural Nova Scotia.’

“But they did.”

**’A HEART FOR THE MARITIMES’**

Three Churches of Christ worship among the 970,000 souls of Nova Scotia, the most populous of Canada’s three Maritime Provinces, known for its candy-striped lighthouses, rustic fishing villages and majestic red cliffs.

In 1855, minister Donald Crawford planted the Mill Village church in the province’s dairy farming country.

Years later another Church of Christ was planted in the capital, Halifax, and that church planted another in the town of Kentville. In the 1950s evangelists including J.C. Bailey, David Lidbury and Bruce Tetreau worked with the congregations.

Fisher and his wife, Laurie, are natives of Maryland who moved to Canada 22 years ago. They have served churches across the nation, with names such as Salmon Arm, Moose Mountain and Ice Lake. Now they split their time between Mill Village and Kentville, which has about 20 members, with occasional visits to the Halifax church, which has about 30 members.

“In general, the congregations are small in number but mighty in spirit,” Fisher said.

Laurie Fisher added, “God has placed us in a most wondrous land and with a heart for the Maritimes.”

**‘WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP’**

Canada’s social-distancing guidelines make it difficult for the people of Nova Scotia to mourn together, Ray Fisher said.

Still, he’s encouraged by what he sees — “hearts in windows, standing together (while apart) at the ends of driveways or on balconies, and the songs and music and the prayers.”

“I am still grieving and will be for some time,” he added. Meanwhile, he and his fellow Christians “weep with those who weep, and we know that Jesus himself wept when he saw the pain of family members who had suffered a loss.”

He recently concluded a series on “Promises of God,” which he began during in-person church services and concluded online. He discussed God’s assurances to his people:

“I will be with you, I will protect you, I will be your strength; I will give you peace.”

“I’d like to think God laid that anchor.”

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“I’d like to think God laid that anchor.”
Virtual leadership

CHURCHES OF CHRIST in the Caribbean move conference online — and draw 100 participants from congregations as far away as Canada.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

No, Michael Stewart was not standing before the majestic Golden Gate bridge as he spoke during the Church of Christ Annual Leadership Conference.

He was, in fact, broadcasting from the Caribbean but chose San Francisco as his background on the teleconferencing platform Zoom.

In the age of COVID-19, location seems to matter less and less, as Christians who participated in the virtual conference discovered. Hosted by Churches of Christ in Trinidad and Tobago, it originally was slated as an in-person event.

One hundred church members participated, some with children squirming in their laps as they watched their phone screens. The Christians logged in from across the Caribbean, the U.S. and even Canada. “Don’t Just Manage; Lead” was the theme.

In the midst of a global pandemic, it’s easy for issues of church leadership to fall by the wayside, said Gyasi Ambrose, who moderated the meeting. It’s also easy for ministers and church leaders to become discouraged, said Dominic dos Santos, who spoke on “Burnt-out Leaders.”

Dos Santos, director of the Trinidad School of Preaching, discussed signs of burnout and offered suggestions to help re-energize leaders.

Mahase Bissoondath, minister for the San Juan Church of Christ in Trinidad, spoke on “Personal Development for Today’s Leaders.”

Leaders should work with their congregations to develop strategies for growth, physical and spiritual, Bissoondath said. They also should develop tools to measure and monitor growth and be ready to make adjustments — much like the changes made to the conference itself.

Participants asked questions about how church leaders should deal with members who seek to usurp the leaders’ authority. Others sought suggestions for motivating church members to greater levels of service.

“We call it a ‘worship service,’” Bissoondath said, but merely attending isn’t “service.”

He stressed the need for church leaders to cultivate the talent in their congregations. Ministry, he said, is “using your God-given abilities, your passion, to do the things that God has commanded us to do.”

Stewart, minister for the Church of Christ Canaan on the island of Tobago, spoke on “Disruptive Leadership” — a good kind of “disruptive” that motivates congregations to grow, evangelize and plant new churches.

Too many Churches of Christ in the Caribbean are “splits, not sprouts,” he said. And far too many are comfortable where they are, not motivated to grow. These churches need leaders, not just managers, Stewart said.

The conference ran three hours past its scheduled time, but 80 people remained until the end.

“Thank you so much, because I needed this,” said Marsha Flament, a member of the Dale City Church of Christ in Virginia. “I am normally very fired up and inspired, and let me tell you, I’m now doubly so.”

Another participant said, “My sister has been begging me to get on Zoom. I thought it was a vehicle!”
PLAGUE: More may die from starvation than from COVID-19, minister says

FROM PAGE 3

more than 20 East African church members about how people of faith are responding to “the pandemic and the plague,” as Mike Karibu called it. Karibu directs a Christian Relief Fund program in Malindi, Kenya.

Although the future looks grim, all of those interviewed by the Chronicle expressed trust in the Lord to provide.

As they wait, Karibu and his family spend their isolation in prayer and fasting. “We pray for God to heal the world from this terrible and scary pandemic,” he said. “We are also praying for the U.S.”

Other African Christians are doing the same, and several told the Chronicle that, as they learn more about the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S., they feel a newfound sense of solidarity with their American brothers and sisters.

“We are together,” Mutai said, “and we believe that God will get us out of it. This is the time that we need one another more than ever before.”

SERVING THE HUNGRY AT SOCIAL DISTANCE

“In the near future, if help is not available, we will have more people starving to death due to famine than coronavirus,” said Geoffrey Kirima, a minister in Meru, Kenya.

Several other East African Christians echoed that sentiment, noting that many of their people work in what economists call “the informal sector,” selling food and necessities on the streets or running unregulated taxi services. The International Monetary Fund estimates that such businesses make up 34 percent of the economy of sub-Saharan Africa.

In Kisumu, Kenya, the bicycle taxis, known as boda bodas, aren’t running. That’s a loss of nearly 6,000 jobs, said James Were, another program leader for Christian Relief Fund. In many parts of East Africa, open-air markets have shut down.

In the impoverished neighborhoods of Kenya’s capital, Nairobi, daily wage earners “may see that their only option is to steal or starve,” said Charlotte Hackett, a longtime missionary who serves women and children and worships with the Nairobi Church of Christ, Eastleigh.

She and her late husband, Berkeley, founded the Kenya Christian Industrial Training Institute.

Hackett and Don Tingle, the institute’s director, said they’re worried about a COVID-19 outbreak in the Mathare slums, where many of their students come from. “Clean water in Methare is scarce,” Tingle said, “and social distancing is impossible.”

ISAAC SANYU reacts to the smell of a desert locust. The minister for the Kampala Church of Christ in Uganda and several other African Christians noted a toxic odor coming from the swarms. When locusts swarm, they are attracted to a toxic alkaloid in plants. Researchers estimate that one square kilometer of locusts can eat as much food in a day as 35,000 humans.

continued drilling water wells and hope to double the amount that we drill as soon as possible.”

The ministry also addresses spiritual needs in the places it serves, said Priscilla Wairimu, a program director in Kitale, Kenya. There, “most of the community members, especially the children, join us for daily devotions in the morning, where we remain very socially distant and pray. We practice fasting through this pandemic.

“We have also been praying for forgiveness, for hope for the future,” she said.

And they pray for a vaccine.

• Workers with Christian Relief Fund “are feeding every sponsored child as we have in the past,” said Milton Jones, the nonprofit’s president. “But we have also added children, family and other community members to our vast feeding programs. We have

LET TRIALS ‘BREAK YOU’ OR TRUST GOD

Across the region, Christians are stepping up their efforts to serve during the pandemic and the food shortages that are sure to come:

• The Eastleigh church has started a food pantry and helps those in need pay rent and buy medicines, hand sanitizer and soap. Working church members, other Churches of Christ and individual donors supply the funds for the ministry. Deacons have surveyed the church’s most vulnerable families and make efforts to stay in contact with them and assure that their needs are met, Hackett said.

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term strategies including “massive food-production training for individuals and communities together,” he said. Healing Hands will continue drilling water wells and offering special courses for African women focused on business skills.

“There are two ways you can deal with these trials,” he said of the locusts and the virus. “You can either let them break you, or you can trust that God will use them for something good. God will always leave the choice with you.”

‘FAKE MIRACLES HAVE VANISHED’

Dennis Okoth sees blessings in the trials.

He’s endured plenty already.

In the late 1970s, when he became interested in Jesus, his father, a traditional ruler in his village, had him poisoned by a witchdoctor.

Okoth survived and preached to his village. Eventually his family, including his father, was baptized. Now Okoth trains church planters at the Messiah Theological Institute in Mbale, Uganda.

“The locust invasion and now COVID-19 have basically turned the lives of people upside down,” Okoth said. Because of the lockdowns, people are looking inward at their personal relationship with God, and “false spiritualists who used to dupe people with fake miracles have vanished into thin air.

“In Africa there is a saying that, at the end of life, the rich and the poor are buried in the same size of grave,” Okoth said. More and more, Africans are seeing the truth in that saying as they follow the news from Europe and the U.S. Wealthy nations are struggling with the same virus.

“People are realizing that we are all equal, irrespective of our stations of life,” Okoth said. At the same time, “the West is coming to terms with the reality that guns and missiles cannot protect human life, but God can and always has.”

CONTRIBUTE to relief at christianchronicle.org/locust. See related Voices, Page 30.
members of the Eastridge Church of Christ got a bit concerned when they tuned in for their congregation’s Sunday livestream.

At first glance, it appeared that the Rockwall, Texas, congregation was violating the state’s shelter-in-place mandate prohibiting gatherings of 10 or more people — not to mention the distinct lack of social distancing.

Closer inspection, however, revealed that most of the congregants were unlikely to spread COVID-19 due to their complete lack of feet.

The church borrowed puppets from its children’s ministry to use as seat fillers, said Alan Middleton, youth and associate minister. The puppets had plenty of time, since they weren’t able to make their annual trip to the Leadership Training for Christ conference in Dallas with their young puppeteers. However, they didn’t return for the next week’s sermon, Middleton said, “because the preacher was too animated.”

In Dallas, the Prestoncrest Church of Christ also employed puppets to give their preacher a “live” audience. These special parishioners are thought to be immune to the virus, Prestoncrest senior minister Gordon Dabbs joked, “so we may end up installing the puppets as elders and deacons to help us with herd immunity in our church.”

In Fayetteville, Tenn., members of the Howell Hill Church of Christ filled the pews with nearly 75 stuffed animals — representing many of the members’ personalities — as a surprise for their preacher, Tim Hall.

“We believe Jesus expressed every emotion we express: joy, peace, anger, laughter, all of them,” Hall said. “This was one way our membership at Howell Hill felt they could share some love and encouragement to others.”

At first glance (livestream view, top) the Eastridge Church of Christ in Rockwall, Texas, appears to be forgoing social distancing. But a side view reveals a mostly-puppet audience, plus Larry the Cucumber.

These puppets seem to be absolutely enthralled by the preaching at the Eastridge Church of Christ.

Their counterparts seem less enthused about Gordon Dabbs’ sermon at the Prestoncrest church.

The special guests at the Howell Hill church reflect the personalities of the congregation’s members.
A rural Oklahoma community. In the midst of COVID-19, it's taken on a deeper meaning.

Despite the social distance, Stacy Christ says that the pandemic has created a sense of unity among Churches of Christ as members "visit" each other's online services.

"I'M NOT HIM, BUT I KNOW HIM"

"that we got to have church there, in the midst of a pandemic. I'm not him, but I know him,'” Stacy said. The kids play while the adults converse. "Everybody is just very family.

Then came COVID-19. In mid-March the Wewoka church stopped in person worship services, and the minister, Gage Coldwater, started broadcasting his sermons online. Church members, like Christians around the globe, were encouraged to worship at home.

Meet the Christ family — Ryan, Stacy and daughters Grace and Clara. They live on a slice of pastureland about an hour southeast of Oklahoma City. The foursome, whose last name is pronounced "Crist," usually worships with the Wewoka Church of Christ (which is pronounced the way you’d expect). It's a congregation of about 80 souls.

On most Sundays, "three hours after church is over, we're still sitting together." Stacy said. The kids play while the adults converse: "Everybody is just very family.

The Christ family — Stacy, Grace, Clara and Ryan — stand outside the 12-by-25-foot church building they erected across the street from their home in Wewoka, Okla.

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STAFF POSITIONS AVAILABLE

All candidates must be active members of the church of Christ and committed to Christian education.

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING.
Seeking to fill two key leadership roles, director of marketing and director of communications. Both positions report directly to the vice president for University Communications and Enrollment.

The director of marketing is responsible for working with internal stakeholders and University Communications and Marketing personnel to develop marketing strategies, identify promotional opportunities and coordinate marketing initiatives for the university and individual academic units and offices. Serves as project manager for all key marketing initiatives. Using project management software, tracks marketing project status and implementation, ensuring on-time delivery of project requirements. Directs workflow, work product and production schedule for designers, writers and photographers to ensure stakeholder objectives are met. Ensures brand compliance of all materials and visuals used in campaigns. Manages administrative personnel including administrative assistant and marketing coordinator. Qualifications: bachelor's degree in marketing, public relations, communications or related field, 5+ years developing, managing and executing marketing campaigns working with stakeholders, and coordinating internal and external resources.

The director of communications develops and guides the internal and external communications strategy for Harding University. The position also oversees team members in digital media and news services, which encompasses all social media channels, the university website, mobile app, videography, and external news media, in order to ensure messages and content in digital channels and media communication consistently articulate the University's mission and brand. Works in collaboration with all university offices and departments to help shape and execute their communication initiatives. Qualifications: bachelor's degree in marketing, public relations, communications or related field, 5+ years experience managing communications efforts in digital media and/or media relations for a brand or organization. To apply, visit harding.edu/jobs.

Lubbock Christian University is seeking an individual to plan and lead enrollment management efforts and manage financial aid scholarship budget. This person will report directly to the president, and be responsible for admissions, recruiting, retention, scholarship budget development, and the awarding of financial aid, and for all day to day activities and decisions involved in these areas. Some primary duties include:

- Supervise all division staff, directly or through subordinate supervisors
- Plan recruiting strategies
- Resolve problems and issues affecting the division and direct measures to improve its effectiveness and efficiency
- Manage efforts to collect data about prospective students, contact frequency, and monitor the application count
- Manage financial aid scholarship budget and oversee the awarding process of institutional, state, and federal financial aid

For a complete list of duties, qualifications, and components for the application packet, visit LCU.edu/OpenPositions

Ohio Valley University is a Christian college that offers faculty and staff the privilege to work in a small, dynamic campus community that changes the lives of students - for eternity. As a part of our faith-based university family affiliated with the Church of Christ, you’ll get real opportunities to mentor, teach, influence and play alongside students and faculty who share your beliefs and values. If you love making an impact on the lives of young people, and you believe in our mission - you belong here. We invite you to apply today!

Faculty and Staff Positions

Director of Student Involvement - The Director of Student Involvement works with the Dean of Student Life to ensure that OVU’s mission is accomplished and student leaders are developed. Specifically, the Director of Student Involvement facilitates the University’s social club system, intramural sports and various special interest groups. The director will promote student involvement in all university activities, manage the student activity center, and maintain an activities calendar. All is to be done in a way that is “Christ-centered” and “student focused.”

Head Women's Volleyball Coach - The Head Women’s Volleyball Coach is responsible for initiating and administering all aspects of the program including not limited to recruiting, scheduling of team activities and competition, training, academic monitoring, budget monitoring and fundraising.

Development Officer - This full-time position is an integral part of the OVU Development Team.

Application instructions and descriptions are available at www.ovu.edu/employment.

Please note that Ohio Valley University is affiliated with Churches of Christ, and, as allowed under federal law, demonstrates a strong preference for candidates with the same church affiliation and upholds the foundational tenets of its religious heritage in hiring practices.
Dean Miller knows firsthand how difficult life can be after the death of a spouse.

Minister leads Widowhood Workshops

BY LYNN MCMILLON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Dean Miller has preached the Gospel all his life.

At 67, he shares a message of hope for widows and widowers. This ministry was born out of the loss of his wife and seeks to lift others and himself out of the depths of sadness and depression.

Miller served churches in Tennessee and Ohio for over 45 years. For 33 of those years, he ministered to the Hartville Church of Christ in Ohio.

A 1976 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tenn., Miller married Ruth Ann, his high school girlfriend, at 19. After 33 years of marriage, Ruth Ann was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and suffered eight years of decline. She died Christmas Day 2013 after 41 years of marriage.

After struggling to find himself and his place in a new world of singlehood, Miller began speaking and teaching on widowhood.

In 2014, he launched Widowhood Workshop as a part-time ministry with his family’s help. This year, he transitioned to full-time widowhood ministry under the oversight of the LaVergne Church of Christ in Tennessee.

Dean has three daughters, Michelle Johnson, Melissa Cere (husband Tony) and Deanna LaVergne Church of Christ in Tennessee.

Minister leads Widowhood Workshops

PHOTO PROVIDED BY DEAN MILLER

Dean Miller has brought his Widowhood Workshop to 29 Churches of Christ in 11 states.

their eating habits. Drop food off at their house. Have children tape a picture to their window. Do a version of caroling from their front yard or porch. Do not ask them what they need. Just do things that will let them know they have not been forgotten.

Besides understandable grief at one’s loss, what other emotions do widowed persons experience?

Loneliness is almost always the first emotion discussed in my workshops because attendees commonly associate this with widowhood. The loneliness is unparalleled because marriage is the most precious and intimate of human relationships.

Uncertainty is another feeling. That uncertainty can fester and turn into fear. Questions about the future can be so overwhelming that one begins to doubt their ability to cope.

Going out in public in a “coupled” world, when you are no longer part of a couple, creates social awkwardness. Anger is common and often targets medical professionals, the departed spouse, even God. Then there is a loss of one’s identity. Previously one was a wife or a husband, half of a whole. Now that whole no longer exists, so who are you? A wide range of emotions is often experienced.

What special needs do the widowed have?

They need not to be forgotten. How many churches even know how many widowed members they have and who they are? Our long-term care leaves much to be desired.

One brother observed that we are good at the three C’s: cards, condolences and casseroles. After that, everybody goes home, but only one goes to their home alone. Widowed people are often socially deprived. Widows need people who minister to them, long after the cemetery, by presence in their lives.

People minister by the “laying on of ears.” There is nothing like the deafening silence in a widowed person’s house at night, especially in the long winter nights. Then, there are those special days when life after loss is more difficult: birthdays, anniversaries and holidays. Forgotten translates into feeling forsaken.

What about widowhood do we all need to be sensitive to?

Please don’t ever tell a widowed person, “I know how you feel,” because we don’t. Life’s losses help us appreciate another’s struggle or even empathize, but to say, “I know how you feel” can almost be offensive.

Also, respect the personal nature of the grief journey. They are going through something they have never experienced. Their behaviors may seem out of character. Healing may take much longer than anticipated. Don’t push. Just walk with them in their grief journey, no matter what, no matter how long.

Does widowhood challenge faith?

It certainly can. The loss of a beloved mate can shake one to their spiritual core. Why did God do this? Or why did he permit this? We may question why we feel so awful, knowing our mate is at home with the Lord. Don’t I have enough faith?

We can become internally conflicted like the father who brought his troubled son to Jesus: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). It’s not just the loss that can challenge our faith but the difficulty of living daily with the reality of the loss.

Our “feeler” and our faith aren’t always on the same page. Sadly, we are sometimes inclined to give our feelings more credence than our faith. Loss is not a choice, but how we respond to it is. Loss can be what drives us to our knees. It can prompt us to cry out to the Lord for help and strength.

See MILLER, Page 22
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If we provide a REFOCUS WEEKEND we will guarantee that if your congregation does not grow 5% in 2 years, we will donate $5000 to the Church of Christ related children’s home of your choice in your name.

A REFOCUS WEEKEND IS:
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(3) Saturday or Sunday Afternoon: Congregational Dream Session
(4) Sunday Bible Class: A church growth lesson
(5) Sunday morning worship: A church growth sermon

See https://occg.institute/services/refocus/ for more specific information.

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info@occg.institute
See website for cell phone shortcut!

MILLER: Widows, widowers need encouragement.

FROM PAGE 21

us to more passionately seek the Lord than ever before. Faith tried can also grow and become stronger (1 Peter 1:6-7; James 1:2-4).

How can churches serve the daily needs of the widowed?

Educate families regarding their responsibility to be the first line of ministry (1 Timothy 5:3-16). However, to minister effectively, education has to be provided to those families about grief, especially the grief experienced in spousal loss.

It pains me to see widowed people sitting alone in our assemblies. As strange as it may seem to the inexperienced, church can be a really hard place for the widowed to go. It’s a blunt reminder of loss. What sweet words: “May I sit with you today?” Help them find a ministry. Often, the person left behind was engaged in a ministry with their spouse.

What is their place in the church now that they are involuntarily single? Launching active local widowhood ministries is so important. These ministries can provide the encouragement widows and widowers need. They help rebuild social networks and even provide that ministry “fit” so important after loss.

Did widowhood change your relationship with your children and grandchildren?

Yes. It brought us closer together, even though we have always been separated geographically.

One evidence of that is the Widowhood Workshop ministry. We call it our “family passion project.” All 11 of us are working together in this ministry doing different things, even the five grandchildren.

They make door prizes for the workshops and serve attendees at our annual summer Widow/Widower Retreat in Middle Tennessee. We talk freely about “Nana” anytime we are together. We have chosen to have our loss bind us together even more closely.

WEBSITE: widowhoodworkshop.com
The Christian Chronicle Crossword

By Myles Mellor | www.ilovecrosswords.com

ACROSS
1. Where Jesus prayed, “May this cup be taken from me.”
6. “You clean the outside of the cup and ___, while the inside is full of greed …” (Matthew 23:25-26).
10. He oversaw the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls.
15. They watched their flocks.
19. One of the birds Noah sent out from the ark.
21. When evening came, Jesus was reclining __ the table with the Twelve. (Matthew 26:20).
22. Chapter in history.
23. And so on, abbr.
25. “Don’t become snobbish but take an interest in ____ people.” (Romans 12:16).
26. Fleed.
27. Exist.
28. “For you will be ___ by the way you criticize others …” (Matthew 7:1-2).
29. She brought valuable gifts to King Solomon, Queen of ___.
31. “Of course I know that ______ is coming,” returned the woman ...
33. “An ox knows its owner, and a ______ its master’s manger ...” (Isaiah 1:3).
36. “And then Jesus cried with a ____ ___, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

DOWN
1. “He will separate men from each other like a shepherd separating sheep from ___.” (Matthew 25:31-33.)
2. Object written on in the Bible.
3. “Look at the birds in the _____” (Matthew 6:26).
4. People of earth.
5. Made from a rib.
8. Man referred to.
11. Old Testament book named after a prophet whose name means “he saves” or “he helps.”
13. Group of animals
18. ‘Heal the sick, ____ the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.” (Matthew 10:8).
19. Look at the birds in the ______” (Matthew 6:26).
29. “Wear _____ but not an extra shirt” (Mark 6:9).
30. Road, for short.
31. “Does the shepherd who tends the flock never taste the ___?” (1 Corinthians 9:7-9).
32. Acclaims.
34. Mistake.
35. Chew on.
37. Latin for road.
38. A gift preferable to a scorpion.

Questions from 2 Samuel 8:
2. Who did David allow to live from among the Moabites? A. Those with brown hair, B. Those in the third length of cord, C. Those who promised to serve God, D. Those who could sing.
3. David defeated the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. What was this king’s name? A. Tebah, B. Berothai, C. Hamath, D. Hadadezer.
4. David captured 1,000 chariots and how many charioteers? A. 1,000, B. 2,000, C. 7,000, D. 10,000.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION and Bible Bowling answers on Page 34. Questions by Cindy Smethers.
Evangelist Search - Roanoke, Va.

We are seeking a full-time evangelist for edification and outreach. The successful candidate will have a strong love for Christ and desire to serve. Our small/mid-sized congregation has been present in the Roanoke Valley for 60 years. We strongly believe that faith in Christ is translated into the service of others. All are welcomed and encouraged to participate in worship and service. We offer competitive salary, negotiable benefits. Inquiries and CV should be submitted to:

Roanoke Church of Christ
2606 Brandon Ave., Roanoke, VA 24015
mmbranch@roanokechurchofchrist.com

Evangelist Needed - Kingman, Ariz.

The Desert Church of Christ is looking for an evangelical minister who preaches, teaches, and follows truth from God's Word. Being a congregation of 60 - 70 members without an eldership and desiring to grow, the successful candidate will be a "jack of all trades." Please send resume and salary requirements to:

Desert Church of Christ
Attn: Search Committee
PO Box 3673, Kingman, AZ 86402
bj67cv@frontiernet.net
(928) 279-2226 (please leave message)

Pulpit Minister Search - Las Vegas, Nev.

The Bright Angel Church of Christ is in need of a pulpit minister due to the retirement of our current preacher. The church has five elders and five deacons and an attendance of about 220 on Sunday morning. We are located in the northwest part of the city about 20 miles from the Las Vegas strip.

The ideal candidate will be an experienced preacher and teacher of God's Word. He should be able to present and defend biblical Christianity and know how to interpret Scripture. Experience and training in counseling will be helpful. If you would like to apply for this position, email an electronic copy of all relevant information about yourself to: BA@BrightAngelChurch.org with a subject heading of “Attention Elders.” Information should include: a link to a sermon archive where you currently preach and a file containing a work history, education, and references. Also include a list of any published articles and books. Electronic copies of any written material would be helpful.

Bright Angel Church of Christ
8570 W Bright Angel Way, Las Vegas, NV 89149
brightangelchurch.org

Full-Time Children’s Minister

The Walnut Church of Christ in Texarkana, Texas, is seeking to hire a full-time Children’s Minister. This person will work with our elders, staff, and families to direct our children’s program and provide ministry to our children from birth through the 6th grade. We are seeking both male and female applicants who have a heart for working with young children and a desire to help nurture and develop their faith. If interested, please email a resume and cover letter to:

wcoc.ministrysearch@yahoo.com or mail to this address:

Children’s Ministry Search Committee
Walnut Church of Christ
2720 Moores Lane
Texarkana, TX 75503
walnutchurchofchrist.org

House Parents

Join the exciting Childhaven ministry team! If you are seeking an avenue for making an eternal difference in the lives of others – consider the ministry of house parenting!

House Parents Are Needed! Seeking a couple of great faith and love for teens to serve Childhaven. Childhaven provides excellent salary and benefits and hires both husband and wife full time. Become a part of an outstanding and supportive team! For more information, contact Director of Social Service, Vicki Rhodes, by phone or email. To learn more, visit www.childhaven.com!

Childhaven, Inc.
PO Box 2070, Cullman, AL 35056
(256) 734-6720, vrhodes@childhaven.com

Associate Minister-Tolar, Texas

The Church of Christ is looking for an associate minister to work with the youth, teach Bible class and preach from time to time until our current ministerretires at the end of 2021 at which time the associate minister would become the full-time preacher if he is deemed a good fit by the elders. Tolar is a small, rural community, less than an hour from Fort Worth. Our average Sunday morning attendance is about 130. Tolar ISD is a 2A school. For more information, contact one of our elders:

Wesley Ives, (817) 559-0376
iveswc911@gmail.com

Full-Time Youth/Family Minister Wanted

The Center Street Church of Christ in Fayetteville, Ark., is seeking a mature family man with excellent preaching and biblical skills and a passion for youth and their families. We have approximately 290 members including about 40 teens in one of the fastest growing communities in the county. Inquiries and resumes should be sent to:

csymministersearch@gmail.com

For job qualifications, description and application process please visit:

centerstreet.org

Full-Time Pulpit Minister Search

The Central congregation in Shawnee, Okla., is seeking a mature family man, solid in the Truth, who has excellent speaking and teaching skills and who ministers with the heart of a servant.

Inquiries and resumes should be sent to:

centralministersearch@gmail.com

To download a detailed job announcement and job description, go to our website:

shawneecentraloc.org/media/Preacher_Job_Description.PDF

If more information is needed contact:

Bob Stephens: (405) 388-6218

Advertising deadline for next issue:

JUNE 5

tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org
Brian Starr in administration.

Roberts as chief financial officer and at Lubbock Christian University: Al McDowell has announced the appointment of two senior vice presidents.

LUBBOCK, Texas  —

LUBBOCK CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Providers and others in the area.

has distributed them to health care and delivering them to GM, which has been producing the devices and further inflaming the skin there.

loops from touching the backs of ears joins the elastic of the mask, keeping prolonged mask wear. The small area behind the ears can become irritated from because the tender area behind

requested item among workers of the program. Education is keeping options open for an end-of-season session.

Meanwhile, work on new camp facilities continues, board member Al Ogren said. A new dining hall is being rebuilt after heavy snow caused the roof to collapse.

Ogren said the dining hall is one of the centerpieces of camp activity and vital for the program. The camp is accepting donations for its completion as replacement is estimated to exceed the insured value. For more information, visit www.fpyc.org.

HIGHER EDUCATION

LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — In an effort to help make protective masks more comfortable, the university’s Raymond B. Jones College of Engineering has partnered with General Motors using 3D printer technology.

Representatives from the GM plant in nearby Spring Hill, just south of Nashville, recently approached Lipscomb to ask if the university could help make “ear savers” to be given alongside masks for essential employees. These are an often-requested item among workers because the tender area behind the ears can become irritated from prolonged mask wear. The small device is worn behind the head and joins the elastic of the mask, keeping loops from touching the backs of ears and further inflaming the skin there.

Lipscomb’s College of Engineering has been producing the devices and delivering them to GM, which has distributed them to health care providers and others in the area.

LUBBOCK CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

LUBBOCK, Texas — President Scott McDowell has announced the appointment of two senior vice presidents at Lubbock Christian University: Al Roberts as chief financial officer and Brian Starr in administration.

Signs of the times: ACU touts social distancing

A dozen new signs posted along the two-plus-mile Lunsford Foundation Trail that encircles Abilene Christian University in Texas intrigue those exercising while reminding visitors to observe social distancing. With phrases such as “The Lord Bless You and Keep You (6 feet apart)” and “You don’t have to walk on water, just walk 6 feet apart,” the campaign was created by campus police and ACU’s marketing department.

“Everybody’s gotten a kick out of them so far,” Chief Jimmy Ellison told KTAB. “I hope that everyone sees the fun in it but it also keeps them some good distance as well.”

In addition to his new role, Roberts will continue to work with the university’s athletic department and as coordinator of the LCU Foundation Board. Starr, previously executive vice president, began his career at LCU in the economics department at the School of Business.

OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

OKLAHOMA CITY — Heath Jones, a music professor at Oklahoma Christian University, wanted to do something to help keep his family active while they isolated themselves at home during the coronavirus outbreak.

So Jones, who plays and teaches jazz music, spent his days in quarantine planning — then building — a backyard bowling lane for his 15-year-old son, Eric, an elite bowler who must practice daily to keep his skills sharp. With local alleys closed and Eric averaging 12 games a day to perfect his technique, it was the only solution, Jones said.

“I love my son, and I love helping him continue to be such a good bowler,” Jones said.

SPOTLIGHT

Paper wins top honors

Oklahoma City — God keeps blessing The Christian Chronicle.

The international newspaper for Churches of Christ again earned top honors in two recent national contests.

For the seventh time, the Chronicle was recognized as the top newspaper in the “Best of Church Press” awards, sponsored by the Associated Church Press.

The Chronicle also won the ACP’s “Best in Class” first-place prize for social media presence for the second straight year.

Among 16 total ACP honors, the Chronicle received first place for feature article for “Fighting for souls, and lives, in Native America” by Erik Tryggestad; first place for news story and in-depth coverage for “A perpetrator in the pew” by Bobby Ross Jr.; and first place for story design for “A medical mission to Chad” by Tryggestad.

Meanwhile, the Evangelical Press Association recognized the Chronicle with its top prize for print newspapers for the second year in a row.

In addition to the staff honor, the Chronicle collected five individual EPA awards. Tryggestad received first place for his “Venezuelan Diaspora” series.

MINISTRY TRAINING

SUNSET INTERNATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

Lubbock, Texas — Sunset mourns the death of one of its early missionaries and a leader in its women’s program. Bobbie Rhea Johnson Paden died April 30. She was 91.

Paden and her husband, Gerald, spent 14 years in Italy, arriving in Rome in 1953 and succeeding Gerald’s older brothers Cline and Harold, who were among the first missionaries in Italy.

In 1971, the Padens joined the Sunset faculty in Lubbock. They were affiliated with the school for more than 40 years. Bobbie Paden lectured in the school’s women’s program and drew on her experience in the mission field to help prepare husband-and-wife teams for life abroad as missionaries. She was appointed the first dean of women.

WILLINGHAM: Ministry feeds needy children on the weekends

FROM PAGE 1

 traced back nearly 150 years. T.B. Larimore, a Restoration Movement church leader, operated Mars Hill Academy from 1871 to 1887. A group of Christians reopened Mars Hill at the same location in 1947.

“I love that I got to learn about Jesus every day,” said Josh, now 41. “I don’t think I truly appreciated what this place did for me until after I was finished and went off into the real world.

“All these values you learn when you come here when you’re 6 years old, they come to fruition, and you can use them,” added Josh, who was baptized at age 12 after returning home from a youth rally.

Josh’s father, David Willingham, retired as a Mars Hill vice president last year. His mother, Denise Willingham, has taught elementary students at the school for 35 years.

Ginger, 39, said her parents, Wayne and Ann Jaynes, sacrificed so their children could attend Mars Hill.

“I don’t think there was a house payment or a car payment that would have ever gotten in the way of payment or a car payment that Hill.

For so many years, Josh had one job: baseball player.

Now he’s the campus minister for the 325-member Stony Point Church of Christ, where Ginger grew up.

“That’s one of his many jobs,” pulpit minister Brad Adcock said. “He’s just doing a great job. We’re grateful to have him here.”

Josh also serves as an assistant football coach for Mars Hill Bible School, where he and Ginger always knew they’d send their sons: Rhett, 13; Ryder, 10; and Rogan, 8.

And he does charity work through the Josh Willingham Foundation. The nonprofit got its start when the Willinghams organized a benefit golf tournament named in honor of Josh’s younger brother, Jon Willingham, who died in a 2009 car accident at age 27.

The foundation’s flagship program — Isaiah’s Call — feeds needy public school students in Florence.
Hill Bible School, which has 450 students, said Nathan Guy, president of Mars Daily, the local newspaper. "They are godly, down-to-earth people who use their God-given talents to bless the lives of everyone around them. They are hospitable and generous and view all of life as a ministry. To know them is to love them."

Isaiah’s Call depends on volunteers — be they church members or retired teachers — to keep its shelves full of food, Ginger said. Mars Hill Bible School students also help with the program.

“That’s one of the things that I love about Mars Hill that’s different from other places,” said Ginger, a substitute teacher, golf coach and former PTO president at the school. “It’s that our kids can load up on a school bus and go serve. “They’ve had an opportunity to come to our building and learn about (Isaiah’s Call) and serve, and they’ve done that with our organizations, too,” she added. “You can’t put a price on that as far as our children getting to learn and serve.”

Mars Hill didn’t have a football program when Josh was a student, but he welcomes the opportunity to work with the team.

“I always like to help somebody along through life and make it easier to do what I learned,” he said. “And hopefully, I can be an inspiration to them.”

That tough decision he had to make in 2014?
Score it a home run.
Milestones

Memorials

Darline Bridges-Hornbeck
1917 – 2020

Darline L. Bridges-Hornbeck was born on Nov. 4, 1917, in Manitou, Okla., to Dora and Leonard Henson. She grew up in Texas and graduated from Central High School in Ft. Worth, Texas. She attended Baylor University and Lamar College. She graduated from the Woodrow School of Speech in Dallas as a speech major.

Darlene married George I. Bridges in 1935 in Overton, Texas. In 1944 they moved to Lawton, Okla., where he was in business, and she established a speech studio. They had two children, Dr. George I. Bridges and Donna G. Waller.

In the late 1940s, she was involved with weekly radio programs which presented plays and other radio entertainment. In 1950, her stage talent led to a starring role as the Virgin Mary in a movie filmed in Lawton, the Holy City, and in Hollywood titled, “The Prince of Peace.” Going to Broadway and appearing at the movie’s premiere was a highlight of her acting career.

Darlene has been an active member in the Church of Christ with many years of being a teacher in the Sunday school department. During the years of 1952-58, she was on KSWO-TV every Saturday afternoon with “The Children’s Bible Hour.” For 18 years she hosted a weekly non-denominational Bible class in her home for ladies of the Lawton area. When she and her husband, George, started spending their winters in Port Isabel, Texas, she had a weekly Bible class for approximately 20 years at the Chapel by the Sea in South Padre Island for the winter visitors.

One of the civic clubs in which she was a charter member was the Lawton Book and Play Review Club. For many years she was a regular book reviewer and even traveled to the Pan American Lectureship in Quito, Ecuador, to present her review of the entire Bible. She was a long-time member of two other clubs: Quest Club and the Lawton Woman’s Forum that began in 1952.

Some of her hobbies were fishing with George, who died in 1996, book reviewing, Bible study and teaching, sewing, playing bridge, and entertaining.

Beginning in 2000, several of her summers were spent helping a friend, Shirley Mitchell, in her gift store in Skagway, Alaska, where she sold books and other Alaskan native crafts. Her love of adventure has also taken her to Europe, Russia, Israel, Africa, China and South America, where she either toured for the fun of it or been involved in missionary endeavors.

Among her greatest joys, each Thursday, when she was in town, was cooking lunch for her son, George, his two sons, Trace and Todd Bridges, and three of their friends, Ross Hanks, Bob Milam, and Larry Hurst.

She married Bob Hornbeck of Lawton in March of 2008. He died of an accident in August of that year. She remained close to his two daughters, Jan Forse of Dana Point, Calif., and Jill Melrose, Medicine Park, Okla.

Survivors include a son, Dr. George (Linda) Bridges; a daughter, Donna (Larry) Waller; seven grandchildren: Liza Bridges of Perth, Australia; Dr. Trace Bridges, Dr. Todd Bridges, both of Lawton; Logan Waller, Hallie Waller, Vera Suarez, and Lavonne Waller of Dallas, Texas; and seven great-grandchildren: Connor and Ansley Bridges, Bronson and Jax Bridges, Jackson Watts, and Rhine and Cora Suarez.

Darlene was preceded in death by her parents, several brothers and sisters, and two husbands.

Memorial contributions may be made to World Christian Broadcasting, 605 Bradley Ct., Franklin, TN 37067.

Donna Nance
1939 – 2020

Donna Jean Moreland Nance was born in Oklahoma City, Okla. on Aug. 21, 1939, and stepped into eternity on Feb. 11, 2020.

She was a wonderful RN for over 30 years and a nationally known ladies’ retreat speaker. Donna is survived by her loving husband of 60 years, John Nance, and her children, Mike (Delores) Nance, Holly (Paul) Freeland, and Lisa (Mike) Pruitt. She was an amazing writer, loving wife, mother, grammy, great-grammy, and trusted friend. She demonstrated her compassion, faith, and Bible knowledge through her many ladies’ classes/retreats, teen classes, and Facebook writings. The essence of who Donna was is best described in her own words: “One of the character traits of maturity is how one treats those who stand on the sidelines of life, those who are often invisible to the mainstream, and those who blend into the background. Seek them out, be kind, be compassionate, be respectful and recognize each person’s value. There are no ugly ducklings in the eyes of their Creator.”

Charles Mahaffey
1923 – 2020

Charles Vaughn Mahaffey went peacefully in his sleep (as he had hoped) to be with his Lord in Heaven on Feb. 26, 2020. Charlie (to his friends, but Sonny to his parents), as the eldest of the eight children of Mark and Josephine Vaughn Mahaffey, was born on Oct. 26, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. Early in his life, Charlie developed his lifelong habits of Christian living, hard work, music and love of family and learning. Upon high school graduation, he attended Texas Christian University for 1½ years and proudly played his trombone in the Horned Frog marching band. All his life he loved to sing, and he sang in barbershop quartets and as a song leader at numerous Church of Christ homes across Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. Charlie was a very patriotic American. After 1½ years at TCU, he enlisted and served in the 552nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) Battalion attached to the 78th Infantry Division. He landed on Utah Beach during the D-Day invasion and was one of the first units across the Remagen Bridge in March 1945. Charlie was honorably discharged in December 1945 and immediately entered geology school at the University of Oklahoma where he graduated in 1948. He was a lifelong, passionate Sooner football fan. Charlie began his career as an exploration geologist for Cities Service Oil Co. in West Texas in 1948. There, at a church youth group in spring 1949, he met the love of his life, Alma Bell Henson, his wife for 62 years. Charles and Alma wed on August 27, 1949, and were together until her death in August 2011. Charlie was the first in his family to obtain a college degree, and he was the role model for his siblings, his children, and his grandchildren to obtain their college degrees. He nurtured his children to work hard, to finish any job you start, and to be the best you can be. After retirement from Cities Service Oil Co. in 1987, Charlie became a Master Gardener, taught gardening courses and, with Alma, traveled to most of the continents around the world, including numerous cruises and memorable trips, either with friends or on church mission trips.

Charlie was a committed Christian. As an active member of Park Plaza/The Park Church of Christ for 49 years and as an elder for almost 40 years, Charlie endowed the eldership with wisdom that will be passed on for generations. He recognized that we are all human,
that we all make mistakes, even elders, but elders should “err on the side of grace and mercy.” Charlie was a Sunday school teacher, a song leader, an active care group leader, active in mission groups, and staple every Tuesday at the food pantry. Charlie remained engaged until the end in the lives of his numerous family members, friends, and church brethren. He blessed and touched the lives of many people in Tulsa and around the world through his faith and good deeds. Charlie’s best accomplishment and legacy is that his children and 15 grandchildren are Christians.

Charlie will be missed by his family and friends, but we praise God that he fought the good fight, kept the faith, and is now enjoying his heavenly home.

Earle H. West
1925 – 2020

Earle H. West, 94, was born Aug. 3, 1925, and he died March 31, 2020. His father died when he was five, leaving Earle and his mother to live in the student dorms at Freed-Hardeman as compensation for her teaching.

Earle completed a junior college program at Freed-Hardeman University and later earned a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. Earle taught chemistry for 10 years at David Lipscomb University, and he served for 29 years at Howard University, Washington, D.C.

In 1951 Earle married Tommie Ann Hickox, and they began their work serving the Lord’s church. Earle served as minister for churches of Christ in Goodlettsville, Tenn., Nashville, Tenn., and Cleveland, Ohio, and for the past 50 years as an elder for the Silver Spring (Md.) Church of Christ. While living in Cleveland, Ohio, he was asked by the Cleveland Plain Dealer to debate a well-known atheist, Charles Smith, and it was widely attended. Earle authored and published several Bible study materials and along with Tommie conducted teacher training workshops.

He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Dr. Tommie A. West, four children: Mary Ann Sudbury of Ponca City, Okla.; Earle H. (Diane) West Jr. of Morganville, N.J.; Elizabeth (Mike) Snyder of Arlington, Texas; Paul S. West of Houston, Texas; ten grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

Howard Leftwich
1932 – 2020

Howard Doyle Leftwich was born Jan. 29, 1932, in Burden, Kan., and passed away Monday, April 13, 2020. After graduating from Burden High School he went to Wichita University, graduated with a degree in accounting, and passed the CPA exam. In 1950, he was introduced to Marilyn Evans, and they were married Jan. 24, 1952. After college graduation, they moved to Kansas City, Kan., where he was employed by a national CPA firm, and their two children, Donald and Linda, were born.

In 1967, Howard was recruited to move to Oklahoma and teach at Oklahoma Christian. By 1970, he had completed his Doctor of Business Administration degree at Oklahoma University and began teaching a full load at OC. He initiated the accounting major at OC, and he was named Chairman of the School of Business at OC, a role he held until stepping down in 1993. He continued to teach business courses until retiring in 1999 and was a respected and beloved professor. Howard was honored with the Gaylord Chair of Distinguished Teaching Award and Merrick Award. He was a faithful member of the Memorial Road Church of Christ, Edmond, Okla., where he served as an elder from 1972 to 2019, resigning due to failing health.

He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Marilyn; children Don (Janie) Leftwich and Linda (Bob) Wheeler; five grandchildren; and four great-granddaughters.

George England
1924 – 2020

Hickman County, Tenn., native George W. England passed from this life on April 11, 2020, at the age of 95. Mr. England was born on July 14, 1924, in the Hassell’s Creek community near Lyles. Following World War II, he was a resident of Nashville for the remainder of his life.

He is survived by a daughter, Nancy (Reed) Fite, Hermitage, Tenn., and son, G. David England, Nashville; three grandchildren: Jamie Fite, Indianapolis; Melody (John) Gurley and Tim (Charissa) England, Nashville; three great-grandchildren, Isaac and Andrew England and Amelia Gurley; and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was a member of the Vultee Church of Christ for nearly 70 years, serving faithfully as a deacon, Bible class teacher, and volunteer in many church life activities.

“Our family lost the best friend we’ve ever known,” Nancy said. “Dad is now singing with the angels and hugging our Mom again. He missed her so much. We thank God for allowing him to be our Dad, teacher, and friend. Mom and Dad are back together, so their love story continues.”


With Appreciation

The Christian Chronicle appreciates and acknowledges generous gifts received in memory of Howard Leftwich, David Rix and Sandra Thatch.

Submit tributes to milestones@christianchronicle.org. Submissions start at $25.
EDITORIAL

Reopen with an abundance of caution, compassion

Several states are relaxing their shelter-in-place restrictions. Some smaller congregations have begun meeting again. Most larger churches believe it’s not yet time.

And many church members, especially the elderly and immunocompromised, believe it will be some time before they feel comfortable enough to return to in-person worship services.

The architecture of many of our buildings simply is not conducive to social distancing. We have seen some recommendations from churches that plan to rope off every pew, to put tape on floors to space out congregants in the lobby, to make traffic in certain hallways flow in one direction. These are good recommendations. Look for more in The Christian Chronicle in the months to come.

Meanwhile, perhaps the best use of this space is to advocate for tolerance. That’s something we’re not seeing much in our exchanges on social media. Instead, we’re seeing phrases like: “We should reopen everything. If you’re scared, just don’t go out.”

Followers of Jesus should never, ever say such things. Or share such things. Or “like” such things on Facebook.

Nor should we refer to those who advocate reopening as “idiotic” or “reckless.” The economic toll of this pandemic is real, and it will affect millions of lives for months and maybe even years to come. We all need to practice compassion.

Most of all, brothers and sisters, please, please stop repeating and reposting rumors, conspiracy theories and outright lies about this pandemic. It’s killing our witness to the outside world — especially to younger generations.

Paul urged Christians in Ephesus to no longer behave like children, “tossed and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error” (Ephesians 4:14).

Let’s follow Paul’s example.

LETTERS

Staying ‘rooted in our Jerusalems’


Following are additional comments on worship and evangelism during the pandemic:

“Many of our members do not have smartphones. They do not have television sets either so livestreaming services doesn’t work here.

“We are encouraging families to worship at their homes. I prepare a Bible lesson every week and distribute hard copies to the various families. My wife prepares the Lord’s table and distributes the same every Sunday morning.

“After our family worship, I visit members’ homes for follow up and encouragement. Of course I wear a face mask and keep social distance during this visits. I make frequent calls during the week to the members who have mobile phones to check on them and get to know if there is any matter that needs to be brought to my attention.

“I pray for God’s intervention. Only God can save this situation.”

David Marube | Kisia

“We have encouraged our members to carry out cell group fellowships in their homes. One preacher has remarked that God may be giving us opportunities to have the gospel get deeply rooted in our Jerusalems before we could venture out to Judea and Samaria.

“We plead with God to spare Africa from more atrocities. We are searching the scriptures, especially the Psalms, for passages that speak encouragement and hope in situations like these. The Spirit of the Lord is actively blessing us to be optimistic in all situations.”

David Tonui | Nairobi

“As calamities increase and the world falls into greater distress, the believer’s response must be a testimony of unwavering faith. When I can rest through storms, when I have cast every burden on Christ and I hold my faith position, then I have obtained a good report’ (Hebrews 11). And I am becoming a beacon of hope to those around me.

“Those who watch my life at home, at work, and on my block may not respond openly. But they will know there is hope and redemption available to them. They can look at me in my hour of crisis and say, ‘There is hope! There stands someone who hasn’t lost faith in God. There is a fighter who won’t quit. He trusts his God.’

“If all we can say to a sinful world is, ‘The end is near, judgment is beginning, and we told you so,’ then we’re not offering them any hope at all.”

Augustus Kimanzi | Mombasa
IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC a Christian draws strength from her great-grandmother, who often had to worship at home as she cared for a daughter with multiple health challenges.

‘Where two or three are gathered ...’

FALLS CHURCH, Va.
Zoom to Bible studies and YouTube church. It’s the longest I’ve gone without attending worship.
And every Sunday I think of my great-grandmother — how she would have loved to be able to see and hear her preacher while she was at home alone with her daughter. How she would have loved to follow along with the Scripture, songs and communion, knowing friends were following along, too.

My great-grandmother was Cordelia Ruth Barnes Davis Darby. Her grandfathers were ministers in Tennessee, and Ruth grew up in Texas picking cotton, chasing cattle and going to school when time permitted.
She was not well educated, but she regularly submitted religious poems to the newspaper. She was a hard worker and an extraordinarily gifted artist. If you’ve ever gone to an older, country church in North Texas, you may have seen her work above the baptistery. She made extra money painting baptistery pictures.
She worked hard when women had few employment options. Her husband, Clarence, was a tenant farmer, and they had four children. Ruth supplemented their income by taking in laundry, nursing sick neighbors and sewing — all jobs that allowed her to stick close to home.
She had to be at home. Her second daughter, Kathleen, needed her.

When Kathleen was born, her spine was twisted. She had a cleft lip and a bulge where her skull should have closed. Today, a few surgeries would have fixed most of the problems, but in 1916 a farmer’s family didn’t have the money, and the doctors didn’t have the knowledge to perform the necessary procedures. The doctor told Clarence that no one would think less of him if he just let her go.

Don’t feed her, the doctor said. It won’t take long.

“Well, of course we’re going to feed her,” Clarence said, appalled. But in reality, it’s likely no one expected Kathleen to survive.

She didn’t walk until she was 7 years old. Her cleft lip made it difficult for people who didn’t know her to understand her. Her scoliosis and the adjustments her body made to accommodate it meant she was in pain, which made her short-tempered.

She didn’t go to school because the other children were frightened of her and made her feel bad. And she wasn’t healthy enough to attend regularly.

She loved going to church, but many times she couldn’t.

On many Sundays, Clarence would take the other children to church, where he was an elder, and Ruth and Kathleen stayed home. Ruth took Matthew 18:20 to heart: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

They had their own communion cups, and Ruth was well versed in Scripture. Their worship was genuine, doctrinally sound and probably pretty inspiring.

Toward the end of her life, Kathleen told her mother, “I think Jesus is coming after me soon.”

When Kathleen died at 43, Ruth wrote in her diary, “It was like giving up my right hand! But nothing could help, and it had to be, because I had prayed to God often to let me live longer than she, so I could take care of her. And I am thankful for that.”

As I watch church on YouTube, I think of Ruth and Kathleen and everyone worshiping the Lord in unusual circumstances.

As a child, Ruth walked to church on roads so muddy, it sucked the shoes right off her feet.

As a mother, she ensured her daughter worshiped God regardless of her physical limitations.

As I stream the sermon, I think of Ruth filling her glass communion cups with grape juice, preparing to meditate with her daughter on the Lord’s Supper. Like many of us, she thought it was important to keep it every Sunday.

She wrote, “So let us never forget our date each Sunday with Christ to eat supper with him on his day, the Lord’s Day, for when we miss, our place at his table is empty. The Lord will miss our presence.”

And our presence, whether remote or in person, is important, not just to God but to one another.

KATE HOOTEN lives in the Washington, D.C., area and worships with the Church of Christ in Falls Church.
By the Grace of God: The Story of Freed-Hardeman University” candidly details the 150-year story of ‘the most doctrinally sound Christian college.’

It seems like God wants Freed-Hardeman to be here.” With those words, David Shannon began his tenure as Freed-Hardeman University’s current president. Greg Massey’s book “By the Grace of God: The Story of Freed-Hardeman University” shares that sentiment.

From its very beginning, the Henderson, Tenn., university associated with Churches of Christ has faced considerable challenges. Yet, despite strong headwinds, it is still here. And Massey, a professor of history at Freed-Hardeman since 1993, offers an interesting and enlightening glimpse into the university’s story.

“By the Grace of God” is filled with engaging stories, making it an enjoyable read. These stories illustrate institutional and personal challenges faced during the Great Depression, World War I, Pearl Harbor, Vietnam and 9/11.

From the opening story of Wayne Poucher paying for his first semester by winning a speech competition with co-founder N.B. Hardeman’s help, to the closing story of scattering Paul Copeland’s ashes on the campus, Massey illustrates the special place FHU continues to be for many.

Members and alumni of the university will be interested to learn stories of supporters for whom buildings and scholarships are named. Massey also traces the history of such beloved university traditions as its athletic programs, social clubs, Makin’ Music and Bible Lectureship.

The book, however, is not just for the FHU community. Anyone interested in Christian higher education and its influence within the Restoration Movement will find this book helpful.

Prominent voices within Churches of Christ have passed through the campus of Freed-Hardeman: Hugo McCord, James O. Baird, Earl West, Leroy Garrett and Rubel Shelly. Twentieth century controversies among Churches of Christ — premillennialism, pacifism, campus evangelism, institutionalism, Bible translations and denominational relationships — passed through personalities and programs on the university’s campus. These controversies sometimes challenged the school’s reputation as “the most doctrinally sound Christian college,” Massey writes.

The author tells how leaders of FHU fought to preserve that image against attacks by Foy Wallace, Ira Rice and others. These battles often unfolded, sometimes quite personally, in the influential pages of Gospel Advocate and Firm Foundation.

But “By the Grace of God” is more than a highlight reel of FHU’s history.

Massey is candid about the rocky relationship between “feuding founders” A.G. Freed and Hardeman. He does not shy away from difficult moments such as Hardeman’s painful departure, Leroy Garrett’s lectureship arrest and various internal debates over finances and accreditation.

More recent history receives less critical attention, though Massey is honest about one of the school’s greatest failings: civil rights. Sadly, as with too many Christian colleges, Massey reveals how needed change was influenced primarily by federal factors, often hidden, that shape our understanding. The result is a thoughtful, inspiring and challenging book that provides a framework for life.

Massey is excited to spend a perfect summer day with his mama.
A one-year Dwell subscription is $29.99 or free with limited content. Christian Chronicle readers can purchase a subscription for $19.99 at dwellapp.io/christian-chronicle. The Dwell website also offers a lifetime subscription or monthly payment plans for churches.

Audio app Dwell could save your quarantined spiritual life

How have you been spending your quarantine at home? Are you bingeing on Netflix? Has your mind gone to mush? Is your alone time with God falling short?

My personal study with God is severely lacking. Honestly, it was lacking long before quarantine. And I’m a preacher’s wife. Gasp! I’ve tried everything — getting up early to read my Bible, journaling before bed and attending all the church services and Bible studies. Personally, I can’t blame quarantine for my disconnect.

But whether you blame quarantine or not, it may be time to try something new. I recently discovered Dwell, an audio Bible app, and it is saving my spiritual life right now.

The app is a hybrid of a Bible app and a music app. Dwell co-founders combined background music (you can turn the music off if you wish) with carefully curated Scriptures that flow seamlessly like poetry. For me, it’s the best of both worlds and exactly what I need.

In the past two months at home, I’ve spent more time in God’s word during quarantine because I’ve been able to listen while I walk or clean up after my kids for the billionth time.

When I discovered this app, I was immediately drawn in by the artwork, unique voices (Rosie is my favorite) and the high-quality content.

In the app, you’ll see five tabs on the bottom of the screen: Home, Plans, Passages, Playlists and Library.

Click the “Plans” tab, and you’ll find these are much like reading plans in the YouVersion Bible app. You’ll choose one based on a topic, theme or book of interest and then listen every day until the plan is complete. The app suggests popular or trending themes, or you can search topics specific to your needs.

The “Passages” tab offers Scriptures to meditate on or memorize and topical listens such as Paul’s Pastoral Letters or Jesus’ Stories. You can also search for books or verses.

Next is the “Playlist” tab, my favorite. Here you will choose chunks of Scripture specific to your needs. These Scriptures are selected from throughout the Bible and are placed together like one continuous thought.

And last is the “Library” tab. This has every book of the Bible listed and a search bar. This is similar to the “Read” tab in the YouVersion Bible app.

If you want to increase your time with God but are always on the go, try listening to the Bible on the Dwell app. You know you’ll be washing dishes at least three more times today anyway.

SEE AN INTERVIEW with Dwell co-founder Joshua Bailey at christianchronicle.org/dwell.

LAURA AKINS is Reviews Editor for The Christian Chronicle. Contact laura.akins@christianchronicle.org.
When this finally ends – and it will – don’t allow yourself to be unchanged

Eventually this pandemic will end. We’ll mourn our losses and adapt to a new normal. And at some point, maybe a year from now, we’ll be so busy that we’ll almost forget this ever happened. That’s almost a comforting thought. But I don’t want it to be. I don’t want to emerge from the cocoon of isolation un-transformed, unchanged.

In the past two decades I’ve been blessed to encounter souls for whom the words “give us this day our daily bread” aren’t just liturgy. They live in rural Honduras, in bustling Bangkok, on the Indian reservations of Arizona. These brothers and sisters hold on to our God like I hold on to my 401(k). Their faith puts mine to shame.

As I sit in their homes and hear their stories, I promise God I will change. I’ll be more thankful, more generous. I’ll worry less and trust more. Then I return home. And within hours I’m back in my routine, struggling to get the kids to school on time, crushed under the weight of deadlines, budgets, board reports. I’m right back where I started.

Unchanged.

Back in 2011 I went to South Sudan with a small group of church members representing The Sudan Project. It wasn’t yet an independent country, so we had to stop in Ethiopia and get permission to enter. There I met Curt King, the legendary well-driller for Healing Hands International.

Curt told us a story about drilling a water well in an Ethiopian village. The villagers surrounded his drilling rig after the job was done, dancing, rejoicing. He spied a lone villager in the distance, holding up a small cup of juice. He walked through the crowd to Curt’s truck and offered it to him.

“I knew I shouldn’t, but I was like, ‘Man, this is from God,’” Curt said. He drank it and thanked the man.

“So you get sick?” I asked.

“Oh, man, I’ve never been that sick in my life!” he said. “I was in the hospital for a week!”

A few days later, I was in the South Sudanese village of Pajok, where there was no clean water source. We bought cases of bottled water for ourselves before we made the trip to the village over twisting dirt roads. (We had to stop on the way back for a military unit to dispose of a land mine from the country’s long civil war.) We worshiped under a roof of thatch and battered United Nations tarps. As the congregation rejoiced in their language, Acholi, I spotted a boy walking toward me, arm extended, offering me a glass of water — most likely from the polluted river from which he and his people drink.

I was terrified. The words of Curt’s story throbbed in my brain. Luckily, one of the South Sudanese Christians saw what was happening. He leapt from his seat and intercepted the boy — like a soldier falling on a live grenade.

Back in Juba we got information on the water tables in Pajok to help Healing Hands know where to dig. As usual, I felt transformed by the experience. And, as usual, I quickly fell back into my routine when I returned home. Unchanged.

I went to Walmart with my family to pick up some of the things we consider to be necessities. On the beverage aisle I stopped in front of the wall of bottled water, stacked floor to ceiling. It all flooded back — the thatch roof, the boy, the glass. I lost it. I broke down, right there in the beverage aisle. They’re dying in South Sudan because they don’t have this, and here it’s on rollback for $3.96 per case. I prayed for God to use us to correct this great imbalance. And I prayed for that boy.

I hope that God grants me similar moments of clarity after this pandemic ends, after I’ve fallen back into my old routine or adapted to a new one. I pray that I will not forget the lessons I’ve learned — to be still, to love more, to honor those we’ve lost and to drink deeply from the everyday blessings we receive.

ERIK TRYGGESTAD is president and CEO of The Christian Chronicle. Contact erik@christianchronicle.org and follow him on Twitter @eriktryggestad.
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-Nhamo Marunga, Mutare School of Preaching