COVID-19 hits churches hard

CONGREGATIONS ACROSS the U.S. wrestle with the spiritual and emotional toll of the pandemic.

BY DEANA NALL | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Vanessa Hawkins was worried.

It was early March, and her sister, Crystaline Kuykendall, had been ill with a variety of symptoms. When Hawkins called to check on her, Kuykendall said she couldn’t remember the previous two days.

“I could barely hear what she was saying, so I called EMS and sent them to her house,” said Hawkins, the secretary for the Oakland Church of Christ in Southfield, Mich.

Coronavirus cases were just beginning to pop up in Michigan, and when Kuykendall had tried to get tested, she was sent home since she was not running a fever at the time. Once at the hospital, she tested positive and declined quickly. Because of the COVID-19 risk, Hawkins could not visit her sister, and when she tried talking to her on the phone, she could not understand her.

Finally, Kuykendall’s son was allowed to visit.

Kuykendall was placed on a ventilator with the hopes that she would begin responding to medication and improve. But on April 2, after an 11-day hospital stay, and despite her doctors’ best efforts, she died. Her death was one of 80 attributed to COVID-19 in Michigan that day, but to Hawkins and Kuykendall’s other loved ones, she was not just a number. She was a cherished sister, mother and friend. Hawkins credits her Oakland church family with surrounding her family with prayers and support.

“IT’S a very close-knit family here,” Hawkins said of the congregation of about 300 in the north Detroit area.

The COVID-19 outbreak has touched the congregation in a profound way.

See CORONAVIRUS, Page 16

Hope from the ashes

IN THE MIDST OF RENOVATION, an Arkansas church was firebombed. Now its members are rebuilding more than just a meeting place.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

When his church was firebombed, Jameel Robinson took it personally.

“I felt like I had failed God. I felt like I had failed the church,” said the 39-year-old, who left a lucrative job in environmental engineering to minister for the Lewis Street Church of Christ in Little Rock, Ark.

On May 31, as hundreds rallied at the Arkansas State Capitol about three miles away, protesting the death of George Floyd, fires broke out at the century-old church building and a nearby auto parts store. Both were set intentionally, police said.

The church was near the end of a massive, much-needed refurbishment project headed by Robinson, who helped secure a $1.2 million loan for the upgrade.

The project already had been an ordeal. Two years ago, soon after he took the pulpit at Lewis Street, Robinson had delivered a message that shocked his new flock: Get out of the building. It wasn’t a sermon. He had toured the building and found mold from repeated flooding, plus asbestos.

“I put everybody out,” he said. “I thought I was going to be fired. Some of them were so upset.”

He had the building remediated, removing the harmful materials. Then he had a cardiac episode that landed him in the hospital. About a month later, the church’s roof caved in, and the building flooded.

See ASHES, Page 10

HIGHER ED PLANS: Amid COVID-19, colleges and universities associated with Churches of Christ prepare for a fall semester like no other. Page 19
As I come to the end of the first school year in which I have served as president of SIBI, I am reflecting on some of the things that have impacted me during this time, and yet I can't help pondering upon what has impacted all of our lives this year. To be sure, my year was interesting, but whose wasn’t? In common, we face a pandemic; social injustice; bigoted hatred and murder; political and religious polarization; wage decline and job loss. Perhaps you are tired of hearing about such things. Perhaps you think we haven’t yet heard enough. It is in such moments that I need reminding that as impactful as such circumstances might be, our God is above all our circumstances, and we do well to also remember His ongoing work in and through us.

I am, therefore, reminded of God’s grace in allowing me to be a part of a worldwide ministry which equips His servants. And yet, I find that the servants are so few when the scope of the true need is considered. We are surrounded every day by people who have not heard of the Savior and do not know His love. Who is ready to tell them? I believe in our process of training and in our God’s ability to use that to equip able spokesmen of the Word, but oh, how we pray that He would send us more students. We have the space, we have the curriculum, but where are those who want to learn and serve? “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few” (Matt. 9:37). The ultimate pandemic in our world is one of sin, and its effects are eternal. Thanks be to God that He allows us to join Him in His labor of love.

I also reflect on the blessing that is mine to be a gospel preacher and to train others to share in this same glorious task. The primary purpose of SIBI in the midst of a broken and fractured generation has never been clearer nor more pressing. We are sending out ministers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to proclaim justification by faith in His name. This is our challenge, and this we are doing from our residential studies in Lubbock, from our 75-plus international partner schools, from more than 150 satellite schools around the U.S., and through more than 350 who study with us online. This is what we do and will do, by the grace of God.

And, I am reminded of our true hope in Him who sets us free. The great plague of our world and our society is not ultimate, but in Christ we have a living hope (1 Peter 1:3) through His resurrection from the dead. Personally, I am more hopeful today than I have ever been that the best is yet to be. I believe that Sunset is looking at a bright future as it trusts in the power of its Lord. His strength and His resources are readily available. His Word is an ever present guide for all that we do, and His sacrifice has already secured our victory. Of all the people on this earth, WE ARE the most hopeful.

All my reflections bring me back to these two core things: that Jesus is my loving Lord and that I am to Preach the Word!
On topic of race, there’s so much that I don’t know

When I was in grade school, my mother said my best friend, Tyra, could come over and play. Mom was surprised, though, when I stepped off the school bus with a Black boy. I never had mentioned my friend’s race; his color didn’t matter to me.

In the years since, my mother has retold this story with pride. Though she had expected my best friend to be White, she and my father raised my brother, sister and me to believe that all of God’s children are created equal.

Through the years, I’ve shared how my grandparents brought busloads of Black children to their small White church in the early 1970s. Papa and Grandma did that — despite the outcry from some fellow Christians — because they wanted those boys and girls to learn about Jesus.

In my 15 years with The Christian Chronicle, my colleagues and I have worked hard to increase the diversity of our coverage and feature more Black voices and faces in our pages.

Until just recently, I felt pretty good about my efforts to love and embrace my Black brothers and sisters. I saw no need to dwell on concepts such as White privilege or systemic racism.

Harry Keep Benson’s name on auditorium

UNIVERSITY PLEDGES to honor slain alumnus Botham Jean in a different way on campus.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Harding University will retain the name of its daily chapel venue — Benson Auditorium — despite an online petition signed by more than 18,000 that characterized the late George S. Benson as “a vocal racist and supporter of segregation.”

Bruce McLarty, president of the 4,900-student Christian university in Searcy, Ark., revealed his decision in a lengthy online statement titled “On the matter of the Benson Auditorium.”

“Rather than remove his name, the University needs to tell the more complete story of Dr. Benson — both the high points and the low points, the inspiring and the painful,” McLarty said in response to the petition.

Benson served as president of Harding, which is associated with Churches of Christ, from 1936 to 1965.

“His letters and his speaker’s notes testify to the complex life and thoughts of a man who had human flaws, but who kept growing and changing his entire life,” McLarty said. “Dr. Benson indeed gave speeches in chapel opposing integration of Harding College in the late 1950s. That he said these things is true, and Harding University regretfully acknowledges that. Yet, before the end of his tenure, this man who defended racial segregation presided over the integration of Harding College in 1963.”

Still ‘Pitching for the Master’

TEXAS CHURCH ELDER was a pioneering reliever for the Cardinals, Cubs, Giants, Yankees and Royals.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

When Joe Chesser was 9 years old, his family attended church with Lindy McDaniel, a young pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals.

One Sunday, Chesser brought a baseball to worship at the West End Church of Christ in Wellston, Mo., just outside St. Louis. The boy gave the ball to McDaniel, then 21 and in his second full season with the National League team.

The year was 1957.

“He had the entire St. Louis Cardinals team autograph it for me,” recalled Chesser, now 72 and an elder and preacher for the Fruitland Church of Christ in Jackson, Mo., about 100 miles south of St. Louis.

Chesser still has that baseball. Some of the autographs have faded. But others

See PITCHER, Page 12

PHOTO PROVIDED BY JOE CHESSER

Joe Chesser holds the ball that the St. Louis Cardinals signed in 1957.
**INSIDE STORY**

**RACE: It’s time to listen and dig deeper**

**FROM PAGE 3**

In my mind, the civil rights battle had been fought in the 1960s.

But then George Floyd was killed.

I talked to Black Christians about the video of a White police officer pressing his knee against the Black suspect’s neck. I heard the pain in their voices as they recounted Floyd complaining, “I can’t breathe.” I listened as David Watkins III, minister for the Twin City Church of Christ in Texarkana, Texas, described an officer stopping him for speeding.

As a White man, I’d worry about getting a ticket.

Watkins — not to mention his 7-year-old son in the backseat — had a bigger concern when he saw the flashing lights.

“The first thing my son said to me is, ‘Daddy, is he going to shoot you?’” Watkins recalled, as I noted in a *Chronicle* story last month.

For a child to ask such a question, Watkins said, “is all that I need to know about what he knows about being Black in America.”

Here’s what I’ve learned in the last few weeks: There’s just so much I don’t know.

So here’s what I plan to do: Listen. Seek answers in God’s word, not in politicians or cable TV talking heads. Dig deeper and work to understand better.

I’m encouraged by the positive dialogue that Floyd’s tragic death has inspired in numerous Churches of Christ across the nation.

In my own home congregation — the Edmond Church of Christ in Oklahoma — preaching minister Randy Roper organized a series of Zoom meetings for White and Black members to talk.

“I don’t really have a formal agenda, but I do want to discuss at least two things: (1) your perspective on race, racism, racial prejudice, racial diversity, etc., especially as it pertains to our congregation,” Roper told a group of us in an email, “and (2) ideas for moving from conversation to action in the church. Of course, we may want to have follow-up conversations after this initial one — let’s just wait and see where the Spirit leads us.”
Christians rally, emphasize ‘freedom in Christ’

BY HAMIL R. HARRIS | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

M embers of Churches of Church used Juneteenth — an annual celebration of the liberation from slavery in the United States — to march through the streets of Baltimore.

The spirited rally mixed praise, preaching and conversations with strangers the Christians met along the way. After months of online worship, church members enjoyed singing a cappella hymns together.

 Ministers who shared the microphone reflected on the unrest caused by the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd and similar cases nationwide.

“We have a lot of uncertainty and social unrest, and people need direction. They need encouragement, and they need comfort,” said Elmer Sembly III, minister for the Woodlawn Park Church of Christ in Windsor Mill, Md., in Baltimore County.

“The Church of Christ has largely been silent and physically absent during times of civil unrest,” added Sembly, an African American preacher who led the march and rally. “Churches have prayed, but we need presence to let people know that we care and that God cares.”

The march began at Baltimore’s War Memorial Plaza, filed past the police headquarters and snaked down Frederick Douglass park along the Inner Harbor. Police in cars with lights flashing and a helicopter in the sky followed.

“The spirit and the power of presence is awesome. That’s why the church showed up, and you showed up,” Sembly told the crowd. “We are here as a church to find out what is happening.”

Woodlawn Park member Shelly Edison, who helped organize the event, leads a faith-based organization called Change Starts with Hope.

A law school student at Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif., Edison is the mother of two boys.

“I am afraid that I might have to bury my Black boys and they might not make it to my age,” she said of her motivation for getting involved.

John Wilkie, minister for the Edgewood Church of Christ in Harford County, Md., north of Baltimore, also took part in the event with some of his members.

He said the effort to help people in Baltimore must go beyond marching and ministry through megaphones.

“It is not just, ‘Deal with problems,’” Wilkie said. “It’s dealing with different systems, and if the systems can be addressed, then people can address policies.”

Samuell Pounds came up for the event from Winter Haven, Fla., where he preaches for the Hilltop Church of Christ. In addition to preaching in his style of employing the ABC’s in his sermons, Pounds talked about freedom.

“What does it mean to be free?” he said. “John 8:36 said who the son sets free is free indeed. The problem with America today is that they have turned away from God.”

Willie Hubbard, minister for Maryland’s District Heights Church of Christ, south of Baltimore, said:

“The problem today is that we are not dealing with sin. As Christians, we have a job to do because it is through us (that) God will heal the world.”

The march and rally lasted more than three hours, and Sembly said the event was an excellent start to meeting needs in the community.

Samuel Knight, interim minister for the Church of Christ North West in Pikesville, Md., added that it comes down to education.

“We need less ritual and more action,” Knight said. “We need to educate people to pool our resources and educate them about finances.”

SEE A VIDEO of the rally at christianchronicle.org.
‘Black Lives Matter’ agenda questioned

TO SOME, SLOGAN advocates equality and justice. Others voice concerns about organization.

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

To Christians such as Taneise Perry, the phrase “Black Lives Matter” voices a simple truth about the importance of equal treatment and justice for Black Americans.

To Perry, a Black mother of three sons, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has little to do with an activist organization that has raised millions of dollars and maintains a website at BlackLivesMatter.com.

“For me, it’s a really sad day to know that racism is a political issue,” said Perry, a Church of Christ member who lives in Charlotte, N.C. “Most people — I would say 99 percent of people who are out there protesting — are not card-carrying, dues-paying members to that organization. It’s really about supporting a movement.”

But to others, including Merijo Alter, the Black Lives Matter Global Network — incorporated in Delaware — pushes a radical agenda that threatens the Christian way of life.

“Their own writing shows that they are on the opposite side of the spectrum from those of us who try to follow Christ’s teaching,” said Alter, who is White and a member of the High Ridge Church of Christ in Missouri.

“We should be at the forefront of being politically incorrect by affirming that ‘All Lives Matter,’ yet this is construed as a racist remark,” added Alter, whose husband, Bill, is a former Republican state senator in Missouri. “I was taught as a child (to sing), ‘Red and yellow, black and white, we are precious in his sight.’ We have been hijacked by this disgusting organization.”

Larry Knight, a member of a Church of Christ in Tulsa, Okla., expressed similar thoughts: “I am a Bible-believing Christian, so I naturally believe that all lives matter. But it appears that some of our brethren … need to look into what the organization Black Lives Matter stands for. … One of BLM’s stated goals is to disrupt the family structure prescribed by God.”

John Edmerson, who is Black and serves as the senior minister and an elder of the Church of Christ at the Vineyard in Phoenix, said he is not a proponent of the Black Lives Matter Global Network’s stands.

But Edmerson said: “Yes, you can say ‘Black Lives Matter’ and not sign on to a platform that represents a lot of things that Christians in the Churches of Christ don’t really espouse or adhere to.”

The hashtag preceded the Black Lives Matter Global Network, which was founded in response to the 2013 acquittal of a neighborhood watch volunteer who killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. Also, FactCheck.org points out that a number of groups use the phrase “Black Lives Matter” in their name.

“BLM grew initially out of the death of Trayvon Martin,” Edmerson said, “but has now expanded to include Black people represented in any societal setting with special emphasis supporting the LBGTQ+ platform and the doing away with male-oriented leadership in the family.”

DEATH INTENSIFIES DEBATE

Nationwide protests and racial unrest after the police killing of George Floyd have intensified the debate over the Black Lives Matter movement.

Two statements on the “What We Believe” section of the Black Lives Matter Global Network’s website particularly alarm many Christian critics:

• **We disrupt** the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.”

• **We foster** a queer affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise).”

“I wonder if Christians who hold up signs that indicate they support this organization are aware of all that they stand for,” said John Telgren, preacher for the Nebraska City Church of Christ in Nebraska. “Shouldn’t Christians have their own movement that is not in danger of accepting” the global network’s agenda?

But as some advocates of saying “Black Lives Matter” see it, the organization’s agenda is not the main reason many Christians oppose the expression.

“In my experience, many people’s reluctance to say ‘Black Lives Matter’ is not based on connections to Marxism or the LGBTQ movement,” said Tim Parish, who is White and the preaching minister for the Huntington Church of Christ in rural West Tennessee.

“For many, it seems to be rooted in old Southern racism. Often, people are unaware of their own biases and may not even know themselves that racism or White supremacy lives deep within their hearts.”

Parish, whose predominantly White congregation drew 325 to 350 worshipers on a typical Sunday before the coronavirus pandemic, read a Scripture and said a prayer during a recent peaceful protest march in his community.

“Many White Christians were reluctant to be associated with the protest, and several countered with the phrase ‘All Lives Matter,’” he said. “Somehow, even saying ‘Black Lives Matter’ was offensive to them.

“But one protester’s sign said something that I thought was powerful: ‘All lives can’t matter until Black lives matter.’”

A PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ISSUE

The response to Floyd’s death — including violence, destruction of property and uprooting or defacing of monuments in some places — has become a central issue in the presidential race.

President Donald Trump, the Republican incumbent who counts White evangelicals as his base, has promised to protect America against
“these radicals (who) would tear down the very heritage for which men gave their lives to win the Civil War.”

Former Vice President Joe Biden, on the other hand, has criticized Trump for tweeting words such as “when the looting starts, the shooting starts.” The Democratic candidate pledges “action to reverse systemic racism with long overdue and concrete changes.”

A recent survey by the Barna Group, which studies religious trends, found a stark contrast in perspectives between White and Black Christians. Only 38 percent of White practicing Christians believe the U.S. has a race problem, according to the survey conducted in late summer 2019. But that number more than doubles — to 78 percent — among Black practicing Christians.

“Another reason the debate regarding treatment of Blacks in U.S. history is heated now, of course, is because there is an impending presidential election, and neither candidate is perfect (are they ever?),” Neal Coates, a political science professor at Abilene Christian University in Texas, said in an email. “President Trump has also made incendiary comments regarding race relations and immigrants.

“Finally, BLM, the organization, does not proffer a solution,” added Coates, who is White. “Instead, many citizens believe the ‘experiment’ of America has resulted in an exceptional country like none other. These advances include a new type of (free) government and constitution, a civil war which freed slaves, universal suffrage, improvements in transportation and communication, great sacrifice during two world wars, defeating the evils of communism, leading the creation of international law and organizations, encouraging free trade on land and at sea, improving civil rights, increasing life span, defeating diseases, and exploring space — the list is long. Americans want to move forward, especially at a time when dangers exist such as the Russian president moving to claim power for the remainder of his life. Authoritarianism, and organizations that focus solely on the ills of America’s past, do not provide hope for the future.”

CHURCH’S VOICE SILENT?

Perry, the owner of a Christian apparel and gifts boutique and co-founder of the women’s faith website Be Glam & Grace, spoke during a panel discussion on race issues organized by The Christian Chronicle.

She and the other two speakers — Edmerson and Jeremie Beller — were asked if one could support the “Black Lives Matter” motto without endorsing the organization itself.

Perry questioned why people can look past the extremist elements of animal-rights and pro-life groups and still support those causes yet want to focus on certain bullet points of the Black Lives Matter organization.

“I want to know why is it that you could watch Rodney King be beaten within an inch of his life by officers with batons,” she said, referring to a Black man whose 1991 beating by Los Angeles police sparked riots, “and then watch officers on your computer screens execute people for mere insubordination, but yet folks can look past those bad apples and still support the greater good of ‘backing the blue.’”

Beller, who is White and serves as congregational minister for the multiracial Wilshire Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, said he, like Edmerson, has concerns about the global organization.

“But then I’ll ask one more layer of the question,” said Beller, whose Ph.D. dissertation focused on religion and racism. “Why is it that people feel the need to look for outside organizations to do this? Why is it that people put so much trust and faith in political systems and in organizations like Black Lives Matter?”

“The reason, in Beller’s view? “It’s because the church has not been the voice God sent us to be.”
BY CHELLIE ISON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

W

hen protesters filled the streets in Fort Smith, Ark., Police Chief Danny Baker chose not to approach them with pepper balls and tear gas. Instead, he sent a snow cone truck to serve the crowd.

“First, snow cones are a lot cheaper than tear gas,” said Baker, who also is a worship leader at the Poteau Church of Christ, across the state line in Oklahoma. “And second, they seem to be a lot more effective.”

Officers in the western Arkansas community of 88,000 also handed out water bottles to the demonstrators.

“As police officers, we should be treating every encounter with every person we have as an opportunity to improve their life so that they don’t need our services anymore,” said Baker, who stressed that he understands Fort Smith’s approach likely was not possible in places where protests turned to rioting.

Policing in America, since the death of George Floyd in late May, has been tense, stressful and challenging.

“We’ve had our hands full the last several weeks,” said Wendell Franklin, police chief in Tulsa, Okla., the state’s second-largest city with 400,000 residents. In many cities, the protests following Floyd’s death grew larger than expected. The crowds were demanding changes to what they believe are “systemic issues” of racism in policing and government across the country.

In Tulsa, Franklin — a longtime member of The Park Church of Christ — took over as the department’s first permanent Black chief in February.

He had met with protesters and said he knew their motives were peaceful. However, he believes some used the protests as an opportunity to cause trouble — breaking windows and looting local businesses.

“Obviously, the First Amendment allows people to peacefully assemble, and we will protect that all day long,” Franklin said. “When it gets to a point where there is civil unrest, that is no longer peaceful and no longer something that we can allow.”

Besides the protests, Franklin’s department mobilized as a public rally by President Donald Trump drew thousands to a Tulsa arena and then mourned as Sgt. Craig Johnson, one of two officers shot in a traffic stop in late June, died of his injuries the next day.

In Calhoun, Ga., a town of 17,000 about 70 miles northwest of Atlanta, protests were mostly peaceful, said Detective Kevin Sutton, an elder of the Adairsville Church of Christ.

But with so much unrest across the country, the tension could still be felt.

“We’re just a little bit more on edge because of the radicals that are out there,” Sutton said.

All three Christian officers said they believe what happened to Floyd, who was accused of trying to pass a fake $20 bill at a convenience store, was wrong.

“I don’t think that there’s a law enforcement officer anywhere that could defend what took place and justify why that happened,” Franklin said.

Baker said he believes the unrest has been building for years, mentioning previous cases involving unarmed black suspects who died in police custody.

“There are a lot of things in our country that I think need to be evaluated,” he said. “We need to look at how we treat people, how we interact with people.”

As for the idea of systemic racism, Baker believes there are always areas that police departments can evaluate and seek to improve.

Sutton, who has been in law enforcement for 40 years, said he believes the idea of systemic racism is more of a political agenda than an actual need for change.

“Our country is suffering from possibly the worst scam in its history, and it’s running on emotions and ignorance that’s being fueled by lies and a false narrative and not on the facts,” he said. “Obedience to the word of God is the answer, but most people aren’t interested in that.”

There are “knuckleheads” in any line of work, he said. Unfortunately, it’s the actions of those few that reflect negatively on the entire profession.

Franklin does believe the idea of systemic issues is worth investigating.

“There are always opportunities for improvement. I’ve always believed that,” he said. “I think also there are people who are one-sided and don’t think holistically and really look at what some of the underlying conditions are.”

However, he said that for change to be effective, it needs to be researched by those who understand policing. “It would be similar to you going to a doctor and saying, ‘Hey, I think you should do surgery this way,’” Franklin said.

He and Sutton point to deeper issues that face the nation and drive the need for change.

“It’s not just a law enforcement problem,” Franklin said. “We need to talk about our education system, parenting, our family life.”

“This country is a product of the homes in this country,” Sutton said.

Baker sees the unrest as an opportunity for God’s people to be what we’ve been called to be — to be the salt and to be the light,” Baker said.

“Satan is successful by creating division, by creating calamity and chaos. ... I see that becoming more and more and more the issue in social media, in our interactions with each other, in our politics.”

He believes there’s a hardening of hearts happening in the U.S.

Christians, he said, need to evaluate their own hearts, deal with any “ugliness” and focus on God. He encourages fellow disciples to pray for those on the frontlines and look for ways to bring their communities together without sowing discord.

“I think we have a responsibility as believers,” Baker said. “We need to be the ones that aren’t losing control right now.”
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Mathetis is a tool produced by World Bible School
ASHES: Diversity should be ‘embedded in the very walls’

FROM PAGE 1
Electrical problems followed. Then it flooded again.
“I said, ‘Lord, I think you sent me to the wrong congregation,’” Robinson said.

He met representatives of The Solomon Foundation, a nonprofit church extension fund, and secured the loan to modernize the facility, though he soon learned that most of the money would have to go toward bringing the building up to code.

“I poured my heart into this project,” said the minister. Literally. His cardiac problem required surgery, so he conducted conference calls on the project from his bedroom as he recovered. His wife, Demetria, fussed at him for not resting.

He tried to serve his church “with the heart of Nehemiah, with the determination of Joshua,” he said.

Then, on May 25 in Minneapolis, Floyd, a Black man, died as White police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd’s neck for nearly nine minutes. Six days later, in the midst of nationwide, racially charged protests, flames climbed the walls of the Lewis Street building and punched three holes in the ceiling.

Through social media “we saw it burning in real time,” said Willis Young, who had just placed membership with the church along with his wife, Jasmine.

She said: “We saw the riots and the looting happening, but you never think this will happen to a church. And if it did, it wouldn’t happen to your church. It made me think about race relations, how Christians should be at the forefront.”

A BIGGER AND BETTER PLAN
Doug Crozier, chief executive officer of The Solomon Foundation, was worshiping with his congregation, Southeast Christian Church in Parker, Colo., when his cell phone started going off incessantly. He soon learned about the firebombing in Little Rock and called Robinson.

“We’re 100 percent behind you,” Crozier told the minister. “We’ll be there to help you rebuild. We will.”

The foundation serves churches with roots in the Restoration Movement, including Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. The Lewis Street church had invested about $800,000 of its loan in the rebuild so far. The church has insurance for damage from riots or terrorist attacks, which should cover that amount, Crozier said.

The Solomon Foundation recently launched an initiative to raise $2 million or more for the church. Instead of refurbishing the building, “we’re tearing it down and building a new building in its place,” Crozier said.

“The original dream was to rebuild the church from the ground up. We’re going to challenge people from across the country to help us.”

The foundation will commit some matching funds toward the project.

Kim Tate, a longtime member of Lewis Street, serves as the church’s communication director.

“We keep trying to jump over hurdle after hurdle after hurdle,” she said of the building project, “but every trial and tribulation we go through helps us come up with a bigger and better plan.”

FROM POOL HALL TO PROVIDENCE
For members of the Lewis Street church, it’s never been about the building.

“When you walk in … it’s nothing but love,” Willis Young said. His wife agreed.

“We visited for a few Sundays, and it felt like home,” she said.

The church started 86 years ago in a family’s home and moved to a pool hall. They worshiped upstairs while patrons played pool and shot craps below. Later, they moved to a funeral home. The owners would clear the bodies from their meeting area before worship.

Finally the church settled into the building on Lewis Street and grew to nearly 600 members. Its first ministers, Warren Williams and R.L. James, were “great, great men of God,” Robinson said, “sound, pioneer preachers.”

In recent years, however, the church had suffered from leadership challenges and had fallen to about 35 members. In hopes of revival, the church recruited Robinson, a preacher’s son who grew up in an abusive, violent home.

“I was homeless at a young age, got caught up in street life,” he said. Then he met Ora Davis of Jackson, Miss., who cared for him like her own son. She taught him Bible and took him to the North Flora Church of Christ.

The minister, Curtis Page, baptized him and became like a father.

By age 16, Robinson was the church’s community outreach director. At 22, he became assistant minister. For the past four years, Willie McCord, minister for the 10th Avenue Church of Christ in Columbus, Miss., has served as his spiritual mentor.

Robinson earned an engineering degree and worked for a plant in Mississippi that manufactures residential roofing, siding and insulation. About three years ago, he was a guest speaker at Lewis Street, and the congregation asked him to serve as its minister.

“The only way I’m coming to Little Rock is if God shuts the plant down,” he told them. A year later, on Valentine’s Day, he got called into a meeting. The plant was closing. He was moving to Arkansas.

That was providential, said Charles Allcott, vice president and relationship manager for The Solomon Foundation, who has worked with Robinson during the rebuild.

“All was done on purpose,” Allcott said. “And I do believe it was God-ordained for him to be at Lewis Street for a time such as this.”

‘WE’D RATHER PROTEST OUR ANGER THAN SHOW LOVE TO OUR FELLOW MAN’
In spite of the facility’s problems, Lewis Street has grown to 160 members since Robinson arrived. Several young Christians — including Willis and Jasmine Young — have become part of the church.

“God saved this church from the fire,” Robinson said. “Perhaps we’re supposed to use it for His glory.”

The Solomon Foundation’s new campaign, “Show love to our fellow man,” is overseeing a large-scale renovation of the church. The goal is to build a new Lewis Street facility that will house the church in one location.

“People need face-to-face interaction,” Robinson said. “That’s what churches are about.”

In Little Rock is if God shuts the plant down, he told them. A year later, on Valentine’s Day, he got called into a meeting. The plant was closing. He was moving to Arkansas.

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In spite of the facility’s problems, Lewis Street has grown to 160 members since Robinson arrived. Several young Christians — including Willis and Jasmine Young — have become part of the church.
Those believers, the millennials, took the firebombing hardest, Robinson said. The church’s older members lived through the struggles of the civil rights era, when the Little Rock Nine desegregated Arkansas’ school system despite threats and opposition from the state’s governor.

For the younger Christians, “they’ve only read about it,” Robinson said. “Now they’re being exposed to racism and police brutality and corruption. … This has been a battle. This has been a war for so long.”

When a TV reporter asked him what he’d like to say to those who started the fire, Robinson said, “I forgive them.”

“We’re living in a world where love, forgiveness is something that we ignore,” he said. “We’d rather protest in our anger than show love to our fellow man.

“Love is the only source that can move us all forward. We’ve moved on from there.”

Diversity, the minister said, should be “rooted and embedded in the very walls where we worship.” He’s dubbed the effort Project Hope.

Other churches in the area have rallied to the cause, said Cecil May III, connection minister for the Levy Church of Christ in North Little Rock. He and a network of ministers have met and prayed with Robinson. May said he appreciates the church’s Christlike response to the attack.

“Instead of pointing fingers of blame,” May said, “the Lewis Street family just quietly went to work rebuilding while continuing what has recently become a resurgent ministry.”

Church members have caught the vision, said Marcus Harlston, a 35-year-old who oversees the church’s social media accounts.

“In the Bible, there’s no bond, no free, no Jew vs. Gentile,” he said. “We’re all one so we need to show the city, the state, the United States how to come together.”

As for Project Hope, he added, “I can’t wait to see the finished product.”

PROJECT HOPE

Now the Lewis Street church plans to renovate more than just its building.

In addition to the new facility, Robinson hopes to bring in a Spanish-speaking minister and reach out to Little Rock’s Latino community. He’s invited White ministers to speak to the congregation, which currently meets in its gym, staggered, spread out and masked due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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PITCHER: 'What I admire most about Lindy is his love for the Lord'

From Page 3

remain visible, including Stan Musial, Hoyt Wilhelm, Alvin Dark, Wally Moon, Dick Schofield, “Vinegar Bend” Mizell and Von McDaniel, one of Lindy’s two pitcher brothers.

“To me, the most important thing about Lindy McDaniel was not his baseball career, although playing for the Cardinals, my favorite baseball team, is great,” said Chesser, who remembers watching McDaniel pitch at St. Louis’ old Sportsman’s Park.

“What I admire most about Lindy is his love for the Lord and his desire to share the Good News with the lost.”

‘FAITH IS THE ANCHOR’

At age 84 — nearly a half-century after he retired from a 21-season major-league career — McDaniel remains active in teaching and preaching the Gospel.

He serves as an elder of the Lavon Church of Christ, a 50-member Texas congregation about 35 miles northeast of Dallas.


McDaniel grew up on a farm just north of Hollis, Okla., in the state’s southwestern corner.

The oldest son of Newell and Ada Mae McDaniel became an avid Bible reader at a young age.

When he signed with the Cardinals in 1955 — receiving a $50,000 bonus equal to $450,000 in today’s value — the can’t-miss prospect did so with a stipulation.

“I said, ‘I must go to church,’” he recalled. “They agreed to do that for me. Every organization in baseball gave me that privilege to go to church on Sunday. I knew I couldn’t survive the game unless that happened. So that was a really important piece for my signing a professional baseball contract.”

Before starting his baseball career, he attended his freshman year on a basketball scholarship at the University of Oklahoma. Later, he studied Bible for one fall semester each at two colleges associated with Churches of Christ: Abilene Christian University in Texas and Florida College in Temple Terrace, Fla.

In 1963, McDaniel started producing a monthly publication called “Pitching for the Master,” which he kept going until his final season in 1975.

In verses such as 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and Ephesians 6:13, the apostle Paul likened the Christian life to running a race and putting on the full armor of God.

“Just like Paul, I was just using sports to teach about the principles of Christianity,” McDaniel said.

‘OVERPOWERING THE HITTERS’

A pioneer of relief pitching, McDaniel played in an era when bullpen hurlers were expected to throw multiple innings.

In his prime, he could warm up in a minute and get batters out with “a good fastball, a forkball, a sharp slider and good control,” McDaniel noted on his personal website.

How fast did he throw? He has no idea. The radar gun didn’t make its major-league debut until the 1970s, when McDaniel’s career was ending.

“At my peak in 1959 and 1960, I was just overpowering the hitters,” McDaniel told the Chronicle. “I know that much.”

In 1960, McDaniel went 12-4 with a majors-leading 27 saves and a 2.09 ERA. He made the National League All-Star team and tied for third in balloting for the Cy Young Award, given to the majors’ best pitcher. (Later, the Cy Young honor was split into separate awards for each league.)

McDaniel’s most memorable performance came on June 6, 1963, his first season with the Cubs.

He entered the game in the 10th inning at Wrigley Field. The score was tied, 2-2, with one out. The Giants had the bases loaded.

As McDaniel faced the catcher, the runner on second base — San Francisco’s Willie Mays — took two steps toward third.

“Mays uttered a curse word as the shortstop, Andre Rodgers, tagged him out,” McDaniel recalled.

He struck out Ed Bailey to end the top of the 10th and was the first scheduled hitter in the bottom of the inning. McDaniel began the 1963 season with a .179 career average, but since he had thrown only four pitches, Cubs manager Bob Kennedy let him bat.

On a 2-2 count, McDaniel swung at Billy Pierce’s fifth pitch.

“It was a slider that didn’t slide too
well,” McDaniel said. “McDaniel smashed the ball into the left-center bleachers. The walkoff home run gave the Cubs a 3-2 victory. It moved Chicago into a first-place tie with San Francisco, the Cubs’ first time atop the standings that late in the season since 1945. “Of course, the whole team met me at home plate when I rounded the bases,” McDaniel said. “I got three standing ovations in the game, and (my time in the game) only lasted 15 minutes.” Later, Mays was one of McDaniel’s teammates with the Giants. Other Hall of Famers with whom McDaniel played included George Brett, Lou Brock, Ernie Banks, Orlando Cepeda, Bob Gibson, Harmon Killebrew, Mickey Mantle, Juan Marichal, Willie McCovey, Musial, Red Schoendienst, Gaylord Perry, Wilhelm and Billy Williams. Berry Tramel, longtime sports columnist for The Oklahoman, contends that McDaniel himself deserves consideration for baseball’s all-time pinnacle. “These days, relief pitchers throw to one hitter or for one inning, then retire to the clubhouse to be fed grapes and fanned by serfs,” Tramel wrote in a 2002 column when McDaniel was inducted into the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame. “In McDaniel’s day … relievers were not spoiled specialists awaiting the perfect situation. McDaniel sat in the bullpen, ready at any call to enter the arena.” McDaniel said he still enjoys watching baseball on television and follows the Texas Rangers since he lives in the Dallas area. The game is different than in his time — both in terms of the million-dollar salaries and the technology. “Every hitter knows every pitch you’re going to throw against him and vice versa,” he said. “They have pictures and videos, and we didn’t have any of that when I played. The game has become more specialized.” ‘CONSCIENTIOUS, STUDIOUS, DEVOUT’ Church and family keep McDaniel and Nancy, his wife of 12 years, busy. He remarried after cancer claimed his wife, Alice. McDaniel’s family includes five children, 15 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. “Lindy is one of the most conscientious, studious, devout people you will ever find,” said Terry Sumerlin, a Lavon church member who preaches two Sundays a month. “His affections are set above. My wife, Sherry, and I love him and his dear wife.” The Lavon church endeavors to take members through the entire Bible every four years. That intentional study program, McDaniel said, has resulted in “people getting a lot more familiar with the whole Bible.” “We’re all imperfect beings, and we’re saved by the grace of God,” McDaniel said. “But God asks for certain things from us as Christians, and one is obedience to him and to live a new life. So that is my main concern.”
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GLBC is offering Biblical Greek completely online beginning in September. Nathan Brown studied at Faulkner University (B.A., M.A.) before moving on to McMaster University, where he recently completed a Ph.D. His research focused on applying recent advances in Greek study to Mark’s Gospel. Nathan loves studying Greek and reaping additional insights about God and His Word. Join us this fall to begin acquiring tools to deepen your study of God’s Word.

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Mali
BAMAKO — They receive God’s word with big smiles behind their masks. That’s the report from Mali, where nearly 95 percent of the West African nation’s 19 million souls claim Islam as their faith. Minister Peter Ofori recently distributed copies of La Sainte Bible (“Holy Bible” in French) to small groups of Christians in Mali — who are enduring isolation due to their faith and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Bibles were provided through a project of French African Christian Education, a nonprofit supported by Churches of Christ. The project has provided more than 25,000 Bibles to people in 11 African nations. See theyneedbibles.com.

NEW ZEALAND
DUNEDIN — The lockdown was hard for Leah Graefe, an American serving the Dunedin Church of Christ on New Zealand’s South Island. She lost three of her grandparents while she and fellow church members were unable to travel.

But the COVID-19 pandemic also “unified our congregation and community in amazing ways,” she said. “Many of us were regularly able to deliver groceries to elderly and high-risk members and friends. Some of us spent days on the phone checking up on and encouraging one another or writing letters to drop in mailboxes. Those who live in the same communities were able to walk to each other’s homes and visit over the fence for hours. This was especially valuable for those of us living on our own.

“We all had needs, and we all were able to meet different needs.”

Indian church launches theology school

Minister Prabhu Kumar speaks at the inauguration of the Mike Hale School of Theology in Punadipadu, India. Kumar, minister for the Punadipadu Church of Christ, launched a program in 2013 to grant one-year diplomas in theology. The program became a school named for the late Mike Hale, a longtime supporter of the work. Kumar is a coordinator for World English Institute, and the school uses guest instructors in the U.S. who teach via teleconference.

Kumar requests financial support to help feed students and support local teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Maryville Church of Christ in Tennessee sponsors the work.

New Zealand has been lauded for its response to the pandemic and had no coronavirus cases out of its isolation facilities at press time. Churches have resumed in-person services, Graefe said.

PHILIPPINES
QUEZON CITY — “We have been in home quarantine for over three long months now,” said Raj Buo, a missionary who serves a Church of Christ of about 15 families in Pecsonville, a suburb northeast of the Philippines’ capital, Manila.

“Most of the brethren are under ‘no-work-no-pay’ class,” Buo said.

So he and his wife, Dea, are helping about a dozen families with food.

“With limited funds, we bring to them relief items so they have something to eat,” Raj Buo said.

“The senior ones and those families with little kids are our priority.”

The church continues to meet online, with Raj Buo preaching and his wife teaching Bible class for children.

“Response from the village is quite remarkable.

“The Churches of Christ have spoken loudly in our village.”

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — Like many of his fellow Americans, Habtu Zemech has been weathering the COVID-19 pandemic with online church services, telecommuting software and the occasional meal via Door Dash.

But the elder of the Church of Christ in Falls Church realizes that most of his brethren in his country of birth, Ethiopia, don’t have that kind of access.

“I am deeply concerned how my brethren in Ethiopia will mitigate their inability to meet together due to COVID-19,” Zemech said. “Where will they find their spiritual strength if they don’t have the means to communicate and assemble together? For how long will this pandemic change their view of God?”

Ethiopia, population 109 million, is home to about 600 Churches of Christ, mostly in rural areas without high-speed internet access, Zemech said. But many Ethiopians have cell phones, and some church members have downloaded an app called Telegram Messenger and are using it to send updates, Bible verses and messages of encouragement.

One church member recently posted Jesus’ words from John 14:1, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.”

“It gives me hope,” Zemech said, “to see the efforts of my brethren to keep the spirit of unity and stay faithful at this difficult time.”
“Things were rough there for a while,” minister Edward Cribbs said. A number of the Oakland flock in addition to Hawkins lost family members, and members Eric and Sherry Beasley were both infected. Sherry’s case did not require hospitalization, but Eric’s was particularly brutal. He spent eight days on a ventilator and 64 total days in the hospital. Now, to relearn how to walk, Eric is in physical therapy — something that had to be delayed since his insurance lapsed after he was off work for so long.

Before Eric got sick, he was tempted to think COVID-19 was a hoax because he didn’t know anyone who had it. But by the time he went to the hospital, he was admitted with 40 other people. And out of those 40, only he and one other patient survived.

“There were people who prayed for me throughout my ordeal who still won’t wear a mask,” Eric said. “All of those deaths were real people. They were all someone’s loved one.”

Oakland’s leadership has worked tirelessly to support members who have been deeply affected by COVID-19. The day Eric was released, he rolled out the doors of the hospital in his wheelchair to see a group of Oakland members holding signs and balloons and cheering for him. Church members also surrounded those who haven’t been sick themselves but still carry the weight of the pandemic. Some churchgoers lost family members to something other than COVID-19 but still had to have funerals with no more than 10 people to comply with state mandates regulating gatherings.

“I performed half of one funeral service with 10 family members and the other half with another 10 family members because it was a large family,” Cribbs said.

And some members were exhausted from working on the front lines of the pandemic, including a funeral director who has conducted as many as six funerals some days. He told of bodies being stored on freezer trucks because the morgues had run out of room.

To maintain fellowship throughout this ordeal, the Oakland church has made the most of technology by using mass emails and texts so members know daily who to pray for. The congregation’s five elders divided the membership into five zones to make sure everyone’s needs were covered.

And after two months of no Sunday services, Oakland has begun meeting again — in the church parking lot. Cribbs or another Oakland leader preaches from a podium while members watch the live service through Facebook or YouTube from inside their cars.

“Horn honking has replaced amens,” Cribbs said. “We’ve gotten accustomed to this new normal.”

**‘NEW NORMAL’**

The “new normal” is what many churches have had to adjust to since mid-March.

At the Broken Arrow Church of Christ in Broken Arrow, Okla., every other row of chairs is gone to allow for 6 feet of space between rows. Since the congregation resumed meeting in person on May 31, family groups sit together with empty chairs on either side of each group.

Doors are held open on Sunday mornings so members don’t have to touch door handles. Communion is served in self-contained, disposable packaging. Still, only about half the membership shows up at the building on Sundays.

“And that’s a good thing,” said minister Tim Pyles. “If they’re not ready to come back, they need to stay home.”

Among other precautions, the Broken Arrow church takes an extra step: After services begin, photos are taken of where everyone is sitting in case someone ends up testing positive later.

The photos can show where the person was sitting and with whom they were in close proximity. Pyles and his membership take these precautions so seriously for good reason. He and his son, 27-year-old Coleman, tested positive for COVID-19 in mid-March, which was very early in the pandemic for Oklahoma.

“Our illnesses were so early,” Pyles said. “The pandemic in this part of the country was still somewhere else in people’s minds. But it got here real quick when Coleman and I were diagnosed.”
As the father and son recovered, the congregation focused on drawing closer together, communicating daily and serving others.

“Relationships have been established between people who didn’t know each other before this happened,” Pyles said. “Rather than just having offerings of classes on Sunday and Wednesday, we started classes on Facebook and YouTube and Zoom throughout the week. I started sending out a Daily Bread email with a Scripture or encouraging thought. I had never done that before. We also had a COVID task force with college kids who had come home. They made grocery runs.”

Although Pyles and his son have recovered, some symptoms make unexpected appearances before disappearing again. Coleman continues to suffer from fatigue, and Pyles was so unnerved by his returning night sweats that he was tested for COVID-19 again. But the result was negative this time. So he continues leading his church through an unprecedented global event that hit very close to home.

“There was no drill for this and no textbook,” he said. “No lectureship entitled ‘How to Lead your Church through a Global Pandemic.’ But this has heightened our sense of our identity.

“It reminded us of who we are as disciples of Jesus and children of God,” he added. “It increased our appreciation and value of being able to assemble. I know all of us had taken that for granted because we had always met. To have been deprived of that, for good reason and by circumstances beyond our control, people longed to see each other again. We were reminded why God made us to need community and fellowship and encouragement.”

OVERCOMING ISOLATION

For the Summit View Church of Christ in Yakima, Wash., in-person services resumed July 12. That only lasted one week before the area’s infection rate prompted the government to rescind permission for religious groups to gather.

The state’s nursing homes became a COVID-19 hotspot early in the pandemic, and the congregation had two members in nursing homes who caught the virus but made full recoveries.

“None of our members have passed away from it, for which we are very grateful,” said minister Kevin Jensen.

Church secretary C.J. Catt said the lack of socializing among members has been difficult both emotionally and spiritually.

“There are a lot of widows in our congregation, so being alone without the normal contact has really emphasized their being isolated, Catt said.

The church has tried to fill this void by organizing a calling tree, in which at least once a month everyone who participates calls members assigned to them, Catt said.

“This helps you feel they are not alone, but we also assess their needs and if we can help in any way,” Catt explained. “We then route the concerns to one of our deacons to assist them, or he finds someone in the congregation who can help as well. We switch names around so we end up talking to different people. Some of them we don’t know very well, but this is helping us to connect with each other.”

ENGAGING ONLINE

In areas where case numbers continue to spike, many churches are still meeting online only.

This is the case for the Church of Christ on McDermott Road in Plano, Texas. Plans to begin outdoor services at the building on July 5 were sidelined when Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order on people meeting in large groups, said minister Wes McAdams.

“Churches were exempt from that, but we still didn’t believe it was wise to meet in person,” McAdams said.

At this congregation of about 1,000 members, keeping children engaged during this time has been no easy task, said Rosalyn Miller, children’s education coordinator.

“We have tried to be creative and watch what others are doing too for inspiration,” she said. “We offer a combination of Zoom Bible classes and Bible lessons videos for our children. We have also engaged families with an online Family Challenge Bible Series and a Craft Thursday Pickup event, as well as a summer T-shirt and gift that each family could pick up.” Children’s ministry and youth ministry interns also work to engage with the congregation’s youth.

Technology has helped keep families connected throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic. Mikie Kindsfather, children’s education coordinator, said engaging with families during online services has made a difference.

“Families were encouraged to send in a photo, and those were compiled into a touching video shared during an online worship service,” she said. “We received a lot of feedback about how great it was to ‘see’ each other.”

FAITH AND HOPE GO ON

While congregations early in the pandemic might have looked forward to getting back to normal, the reality is setting in that what was formerly “normal” could be a thing of the past. And this means those suffering a profound sense of loss must rely on faith and hope to go on.

When Hawkins’ sister died, the family could not gather at the funeral home with friends and fellow church members as in the pre-pandemic days.

“We couldn’t go to the cemetery because cemeteries weren’t allowing families,” she said. “We went to the funeral home for a few minutes, and then we went back to the car. There weren’t even any chairs in the funeral home.”

So how can someone process grief when it seems as though grief was never allowed to begin?

In Hawkins’ case, she sits down every week and writes her sister a letter.

“I didn’t really get to talk to her when she was in the hospital, so I just tell her how I’m feeling,” Hawkins said. “We just keep praying and trusting in God.”
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Higher ed plans not written in stone

AMID THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic, Christian universities prepare for a fall semester like no other.

BY CHERYL MANN BACON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

Almost everything printed here could change tomorrow. Or today. Pandemics are complicated like that. And few organizations must wrestle with as many of the complications created by COVID-19 as Christian universities.

Spaces for work, worship, learning and living must be made safer for thousands of students who by nature are social beings. They date, play intramurals, meet for study sessions, eat together, stay up late together and travel to campus from homes in hot spots nationwide. And yes, sometimes they party.

They are among the age groups most likely to contract the virus during the latest surge. Often, they are taught by individuals whose age and family members put them at higher risk of serious illness.

The pandemic challenges colleges’ financial viability as well as student and employee health and safety. Students expect a transformative experience that now must factor in social distancing and non-traditional learning on heretofore traditional campuses. Then there are the daily realities of temperature checks, classroom sanitation and masks.

Twelve of 14 colleges and universities associated with the Churches of Christ responded to a Christian Chronicle survey. Their answers and interviews with faculty, parents and students reveal unlikely optimism and stark realism.

The 12 represent nine states: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. In mid-July, daily confirmed new cases were rising in all of them.

Rochester University in Rochester Hills, Mich., and Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, did not participate in the survey.

STUDENTS = DOLLARS

Only two schools surveyed acknowledge planning for significant enrollment drops: Lubbock Christian University in Texas at 7 percent and Florida College in Temple Terrace, Fla., at 10 percent.

Abilene Christian University in Texas predicts a flat enrollment or slight decline. The rest anticipate increases. Crowley’s Ridge College in Paragould, Ark., with enrollment of about 200, is preparing for a 17 percent increase.

Yet, as early as March, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that more than a third of prospective freshmen were considering a gap year. In May, even elite universities were plumbing waitlists to fill freshman classes.

A gap year is not for everyone, however. Andrew Morgan will be a freshman at Pepperdine University. Despite the national trend, he never considered a gap year.

“I thought it would be a hindrance to my performance in my first year of college,” said Morgan, who attends the SEED Gathering, a Church of Christ in Tucson, Ariz.

Universities’ largest budget items are salary and benefits, and private universities’ largest revenue source is tuition. Thus, optimism notwithstanding, every school that responded

CONTINUED

FALL SEMESTER PLANS: Higher education institutions associated with Churches of Christ prepare to reopen

Abilene Christian University
Abilene, Texas | 5,210 students 2018 ENDOWMENT: $439.1 million

Classes will resume online after Thanksgiving. Additional class times and non-traditional spaces are being added to achieve distancing and lower density. The period between classes will expand to 20 minutes to facilitate cleaning. About 78 percent of instruction will be face to face, down slightly from 80 percent most semesters.

Face masks are required indoors for all employees, students and campus visitors except when alone in a private space, and outdoors when physical distancing is possible. Free testing will be available for employees and students. Quarantine housing will be available for those who cannot quarantine at home.

SOURCE: Linda Bonnin, senior vice president for marketing and strategic communication

Crowley’s Ridge College
Paragould, Ark. | 194 students 2018 ENDOWMENT: $1.3 million

Crowley’s Ridge projects a 17 percent enrollment jump. It plans face-to-face classes with social distancing, divided larger classes and staggered class times.

Some may be moved online. The school trimmed fall budgets by 10 percent in a zero-based budgeting plan put in place by its new president. As of May 31, fundraising had increased by 20 percent. No layoffs were attributed to COVID-19.

Face masks and hand sanitizers will be available for employees, students and guests. Masks will be required in facilities where 6-foot distancing is not possible. Temperature checks will be conducted before entering facilities. Those with an elevated temperature will be asked to submit to testing off campus.

SOURCE: Richard Johnson, president


**CONTINUED**

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‘Is it safe or not safe?’

CONTINUED

Vienna, W.Va., did not reply to the question about chapel.

For students, the loss of chapel and social events threatens to overshadow the excitement of going off to college. “For me, it’s really stressful, trying to decide, ‘Is it safe or not safe? Should we be wearing masks?’” said Megan Prater of Vienna, W.Va., who will be a freshman at Harding.

Beginning such an important stage of life in a time of uncertainty is hard, she said, but especially hard is fearing she’ll be robbed of the things she’s most looked forward to.

The price tag amid the uncertainty about those experiences challenged the Prater family’s commitment to Christian education, said Megan’s father, Robert, preaching minister for the Crosstown Church of Christ in Tulsa.

“We’re making a big investment,” he said. “And we weren’t going to make that kind of sacrifice for a virtual experience.”

GO, FIGHT, WIN?

Football is not the only fall sport, but football is the biggest and most complicated.

Only three institutions associated with Churches of Christ have intercollegiate football: Faulkner plays in the NAIA, Harding in NCAA Division II and ACU in NCAA Division I.

All three plan to play but acknowledge their conferences — or the NAIA or the NCAA — could change those plans, as happened in March when ACU’s men’s and women’s basketball teams traveled to conference tournament sites then loaded up to return home after the NCAA canceled March Madness.

Harding plays on-campus in First Security Stadium, which seats about 4,500. Jeff Morgan, Harding athletic director, said Arkansas state guidelines allow large, outdoor venues to open at two-thirds capacity. “If we get to the point where we’re getting to play,” he said, “we have plans in place for what that would look like.”

The NAIA already has pushed back the start date, and Faulkner’s Mid-South Conference has limited the season to nine games. “Ours will be eight,” athletic director Hal Wynn said, “and we will play home-and-home against several schools.”

Alan Ward, director of athletics at ACU, remains hopeful. “If we’re going to have in-person classes, I’d like to make every attempt to have a sports season as well. But the health and safety of our athletes are paramount. It’s difficult to control the bubble for student-athletes,” Ward said, echoing the reality faced on the academic side.

Protocols for practice, housing, classrooms, workouts, voice lessons, dormitories, chapel, musicals, football games, libraries and more can only control so much.

College students also live their lives on and around these campuses.

Megan Prater was in chapel while visiting Harding the day after alumnus Botham Jean was shot and killed in Dallas in September 2018.

“People were hugging and crying and doing what Harding was about — I don’t know how that can be the same,” she said. “How can we be a community behind a mask, even if that’s the best thing for us?”

Morgan, the Pepperdine freshman, said he is confident the administration will make good decisions about safety.

“More than anything, I don’t want it to be too big of an inhibitor of the experience,” he said. “I still want to have a good time.”

Ohio Valley University

Vienna, W.Va. | 509 students

2018 ENDOWMENT: $2 million

Enrollment projections are on target for fall after a 35 percent drop in 2019. Contingency plans are in place, but to date, the pandemic has necessitated no layoffs.

Classes run Aug. 17 through Nov. 18 with finals Nov. 19-21. To accommodate shortening the semester by one week, instructors will schedule additional instructional time during an evening or weekend. Face masks are required inside academic and athletic buildings. Occupancy will be limited to 50 percent of the fire marshal’s rated occupancy.

The campus has enough dorm rooms to provide a single room for every student should that become necessary.

SOURCE: Michael Ross, president

Oklahoma Christian University

Oklahoma City | 2,247 students

2018 ENDOWMENT: $30.2 million

Returning students are enrolling slightly behind expected rates, while new students are enrolling slightly ahead of last year, thus budget planning has been done for several scenarios. Twelve full-time and three part-time staff were laid off, and a dozen open positions are unfilled.

Fall classes begin two weeks early on Aug. 13, and finals will conclude before Thanksgiving. Classrooms, labs and other experiential learning spaces are adjusted to accommodate healthy distancing. Online courses will be about as in typical semesters, but some learning models are planned that will include flexible options for students.

More single living spaces will be available. Spaces are designated for quarantine should that be necessary. Employees, students and visitors will wear masks in all shared campus spaces.

SOURCE: Risa Forrester, chief communications officer

Pepperdine University

Malibu, Calif. | 7,961 students

2018 ENDOWMENT: $904.1 million

Pepperdine has exceeded its fall undergraduate enrollment target but anticipates declines in international and graduate enrollment. A hiring freeze was implemented in the spring, merit increases and non-essential capital projects suspended and endowment payout held flat, but no layoffs or furloughs.

Fall semester begins Aug. 17, two weeks early, concluding before Thanksgiving. Spring semester begins Feb. 8, proceeding without a spring break, and ending May 20.

Instructional options will range from in-person classes on the Malibu campus, fully online courses or a mixture of in-person and online meetings. Some on-campus classes will require attendance, while others will provide options for remote/online instruction to students distant from campus.

Residence halls and community spaces will meet spacing guidelines and quarantine housing designated. Pepperdine plans to meet and exceed the screening and testing requirements determined by the local and government agencies. A face covering requirement is in effect and will remain so until L.A. County public health lifts its recommendation.

SOURCE: Alex Forero, public relations manager

York College

York, Neb. | 445 students

2018 ENDOWMENT: $15.6 million

York expects a record enrollment in the fall. Housing appears full, and measures to protect against COVID-19 are being considered by a task force. Similarly, plans for instruction and social distancing in the classrooms and elsewhere are underway.

The semester will begin Aug. 25 as planned, but students will not return after Thanksgiving and will complete the semester online unless they are athletes or international students who cannot return home. Masks will probably be required for class and chapel. Testing and screening will be available.

SOURCE: Steven Eckman, president (retired)

EDITOR’S NOTE: Enrollment and endowment figures are from 2018 U.S. News’ Best Colleges report, except for Crowley’s Ridge College and Florida College, which provided numbers directly to The Christian Chronicle. For the latest fall semester plans of colleges and universities associated with Churches of Christ, see christianchronicle.org/higheredcovid.
Uncle Sam helped churches meet payroll

BY BOBBY ROSS JR. | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

At least 47 Churches of Christ across the nation received loans of $150,000 or more through the federal government’s coronavirus relief bill, a Christian Chronicle analysis found.

In all, those Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act loans amounted to at least $9,450,000 — and as much as $23 million — for Churches of Christ, according to a list released by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the passage of the $670 billion Payroll Protection Plan — which was designed to avert mass layoffs by the nation’s small businesses.

Roughly 1,900 jobs, from ministry staff to daycare workers, were retained by the Churches of Christ listed. However, the federal data did not cite specific numbers for a few congregations that received funds.

Also, the names of loan recipients, including churches, that received less than $150,000 were not released. Those unidentified recipients comprise more than 80 percent of the total loans.

Meanwhile, at least 10 higher education institutions associated with Churches of Christ got loans.

The combined total amount received by those universities fell between $11,200,000 and $27,350,000. Roughly 2,500 jobs were retained at those schools, according to the government.

Noticeably absent from the list: Abilene Christian University in Texas, Harding University in Searcy, Ark., Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn., and Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif. Generally, organizations, including faith-based institutions, that employ fewer than 500 people were eligible for the funds. Those universities exceeded the limit.

Recipients can apply for loan forgiveness if they spend at least 75 percent on payroll costs and the rest on mortgage interest, rent and utilities.

After the Payroll Protection Plan’s passage, many congregations across the nation debated whether to seek government assistance or rely entirely on member contributions. Of the nation’s 30 largest Churches of Christ (as reported in a directory published by 21st Century Christian), 19 congregations were among those receiving loans of $150,000 or more.

The data analysis was conducted for the Chronicle by Ryan Burge, an assistant professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University.

Listed below are the churches, universities and number of jobs retained:

**$2 MILLION TO $5 MILLION**
- Faulkner University, Montgomery, Ala. (494 jobs).
- Oklahoma Christian University, Oklahoma City (440 jobs).
- Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, Tenn. (380 jobs).
- Lubbock Christian University, Texas (321 jobs).

**$1 MILLION TO $2 MILLION**
- Florida College, Temple Terrace, Fla. (144 jobs).
- The Hills Church of Christ, North Richland Hills, Texas (254 jobs).

**$350,000 TO $1 MILLION**
- Crowley’s Ridge College, Paragould, Ark. (77 jobs).
- Pleasant Valley Church of Christ, Little Rock, Ark. (48 jobs).
- York College, Nebraska (240 jobs).
- Memorial Road Church of Christ, Edmond, Okla. (39 jobs).
- Harpeth Hills Church of Christ, Brentwood, Tenn. (32 jobs).
- Highland Street Church of Christ, Cordova, Tenn. (45 jobs).
- North Boulevard Church of Christ, Murfreesboro, Tenn. (74 jobs).
- Otter Creek Church of Christ, Brentwood, Tenn. (61 jobs).
- Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ, Austin, Texas (100 jobs).
- Ohio Valley University, Vienna, W.Va. (173 jobs).

**$150,000 TO $350,000**
- Twickenham Church of Christ, Huntsville, Ala. (28 jobs).
- Southwest Church of Christ, Jonesboro, Ark. (15 jobs).
- Campbell Church of Christ, California (number not available).
- Hilltop Community Church of Christ, El Segundo, Calif. (22 jobs).
- Campus Church of Christ, Norcross, Ga. (15 jobs).
- North Atlanta Church of Christ, Georgia (34 jobs).
- North River Church of Christ, Marietta, Ga. (27 jobs).
- Southeastern Church of Christ, Indianapolis (36 jobs).
- The Park Church of Christ, Tulsa, Okla. (34 jobs).
- College Hills Church of Christ, Lebanon, Tenn. (14 jobs).

**LIST OF CHURCHES**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>Number of Jobs</th>
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<td>Church of Christ, Brentwood, Tenn.</td>
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MINISTRY JOB OPPORTUNITIES

HOUSEPARENTS:
Have you considered devoting a period of your life to a ministry committed to helping troubled children? Look no further... Southeastern Children’s Home is located in upstate South Carolina between Spartanburg and Greenville, at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. SECH has an immediate opening for houseparents to live in a cottage on the 50-acre campus and care for up to 6 adolescent children. Both husband and wife are employed by SECH. Competitive salaries, paid time off, medical insurance, 24 hour backup, and support by case manager staff, housing, utilities, food allowance, gas allowance, and van for work use are provided.

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT:
The Director of Development is responsible for planning, implementing, and administering a comprehensive fund development program for Southeastern Children’s Home. The Director of Development is also personally active in face-to-face cultivation and engagement of prospects and donors. Must be a person of integrity and enthusiasm; BS or BA degree OR 3-5 years of experience in fund development; Certified Fundraising Professional or willing to earn certification; commitment to spiritually-based mission of SECH; desire to grow professionally and personally; basic computer skills in word processing, spreadsheets, and database; working knowledge of donor tracking software; and demonstrate commitment and competency in web-based communications, including social networking.

STAFF COUNSELOR/THERAPIST:
SECH has an immediate opening for a Staff Counselor/Therapist. The therapist’s general function is to oversee the daily operation of Southeastern Counseling Center as well as to grow our existing client base. This may include: budgeting, maintaining files and licenses, training, obtaining contracts and counseling, and helping with on-call of our residential program. This position further involves providing direct mental health services, including but not limited to: conducting assessments, individual/group/family therapy and crisis interventions with on-call of our residential program. This position further involves providing direct mental health services, including but not limited to: conducting assessments, individual/group/family therapy and crisis interventions with on-call of our residential program. Minimum and additional requirements: SC licensure as a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), Licensed Independent Social Worker (LISW), or Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) preferred.

Contact Robert Kimberly, Executive Director
(864) 439-0259 or rkimberly@sech.org, PO Box 339, Duncan, SC 29334

Hope Harbor
We Reconcile Families
We have an opening for a Mental Health Specialist
hopeharborinc.org/jobs

Looking for a Mission-minded couple
BEREAN CHILDREN’S HOME
HOUSE PARENTS NEEDED
CONTACT: ANDREW REDD
ared5268@gmail.com
(601) 823-5776
www.bereanhome.org

Call To Serve
Southern Christian Home is growing and we have exciting opportunities for individuals and couples to serve the needs of at-risk children.

Custom benefit packages are available:
• salary  • housing  • health insurance  • vacation  • retirement plan

If you feel the call to serve, contact garyg@scheme.org or call us at (501)354-2428.

Our mission is to glorify God by providing services that meet children’s physical, moral, mental, social and spiritual needs.

YOUTH MINISTER SEARCH - PANAMA CITY, FLORIDA

Jenks Avenue Church of Christ is a family-oriented, stable, balanced congregation with an active membership. Our ministry staff serves alongside six elders, 24 deacons, and a diverse range of families (age and racial mix). We are blessed with a healthy family blend. Boasting some of the world’s most beautiful beaches, a state college, lots of outdoor activities and a good southern atmosphere, Panama City, Bay County, Florida, is a wonderful place to do ministry and raise a family. We are looking for a minister who is committed to God’s mission to make and develop disciples. Our youth ministry is primarily focused on encouraging the spiritual formation of our young people and helping them integrate with the body of Christ. We offer a competitive salary and benefits package which includes relocation expenses. If interested, contact:

Todd Thompson (toddtjenks.64@gmail.com) and Chris Donlan (chris@jenkschuchofchrist.com)

New Mexico Christian Children’s Home
House Parents

The New Mexico Christian Children’s Home is currently seeking married couples for House Parents. NMCCH is a private, not-for-profit, Christian organization serving children in need since 1954 and is supported by the generous donations of churches and individuals. House Parents work a one week on/one week off schedule with 8-12 children (with their own children included in the count.)

Some of the benefits include:
• Competitive salary
• Housing and utilities provided
• Medical, Dental, Vision and Life Insurance
• 401(k) company match
• Satisfaction of making a difference in the lives of children and families

Requirements:
• Be at least 21 years of age or older
• High School diploma or equivalent is required
• A valid driver’s license with a good driving record
• Ability and desire to work and live with youth
• Ability to pass a thorough background check and reference verification procedure in order to deter mine one’s fitness to satisfactorily and safely care for youth
• Must be married at least two years

For inquiries, contact Allen Mann, Director of Public Relations. For more information and to fill out our online application, please visit our website at: http://nmcch.org

contact@nmcch.org or call 575-356-5372
‘There is something wrong with their Christianity’

**FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST** must realize that their Black brethren are still suffering, says Fred Gray. If they don’t …

**W**here were Churches of Christ during the Civil Rights Movement?

Whenever Jerry Taylor hears the question, “my response is that they were front and center primarily represented in the person of Dr. Fred Gray,” he said.

Gray, who served as an attorney for Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, grew up in the Holt Street Church of Christ in Montgomery, Ala. At age 12 he moved to Tennessee to attend Nashville Christian Institute, an African-American boarding school operated by members of Churches of Christ.

“This stalwart defender of justice is a national treasure who stands tall in the Civil Rights Movement as well as among Churches of Christ as the spiritual embodiment of integrity, intelligence, eloquence, courage, wisdom, truth and humility,” said Taylor, founding director of the Carl Spain Center on Race Studies and Spiritual Action at Abilene Christian University in Texas.

Gray’s cases frequently set precedent. Browder vs. Gayle integrated buses in Montgomery in 1956. Gray took NAACP vs. State of Alabama to the U.S. Supreme Court, winning the right of the NAACP to do business in the state.

Wes Crawford, author of “Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence,” said: “Fred Gray pursued justice with as much passion and ability as any other figure in American history. He is an icon of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Now 89, Gray still preaches whenever possible and served as an elder of a Church of Christ in Tuskegee, Ala. Amid the national conversation on race sparked by the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, Gray talked to *The Christian Chronicle* about faith, justice and his dream for Churches of Christ.

Civil rights attorney Fred Gray speaks at Oklahoma Christian University in 2015.

*What can you tell us about the thinking of African American churches in our present climate?*

I can’t tell you because some of them may think one way, and some may think another way. Even when I go to visit sometime, I wonder if this is a Church of Christ where I am sitting. So there may be some differences of opinion.

African Americans have suffered so much from slavery until now and are still suffering. If White churches don’t realize that and if they can’t believe there is something wrong, then I think there is something wrong with their Christianity.

Racism is contrary to what Jesus taught. We need to stop it and correct it. The same is true about inequality on the basis of whether it is health care, employment, housing, education or criminal and social justice.

Whites have a much greater opportunity to develop than Blacks. We need to do something about narrowing that gap. The struggle for equal justice continues, and that responsibility is upon all of us as members of the Lord’s church.

We appreciate what you are doing and what *The Christian Chronicle* is doing. I want you to know that there are some White Christians who are members of the Church of Christ, and some White Church of Christ-related schools that are doing things to help end inequality and racism.

*What do non-Black Christians fail to understand about the injustice that Black Christians feel and have experienced?*

No. 1, there ought not to be Black Christians and non-Black Christians.

If we all did what Christ said, we would all look at each other and see each other as Christians and do as Jesus taught us on the Sermon on the Mount: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

For me as a non-White person to say what a White Christian feels would not be objective. I can understand and I can tell you what I think about injustice and anything about it, but it is hard for me to say what a White person feels about injustices or what blacks may feel.

*What are your thoughts on injustice?*

Oh, well, I can tell that! To make a long story short, I saw injustices being done then, and I thought that somebody needed to be doing something about it. I thought Black people had problems in Montgomery, and I decided I wanted to help solve those problems. I made a commitment as a teenager that I was going to become a lawyer.

Less than six months after passing the Alabama bar, I had my first civil rights case, the case of Claudette Colvin, a 15-year-old Black girl who did what Mrs. Parks did, but did it nine months prior.

But I didn’t stop preaching.

**Have Christians made any progress since those days?**

If we as Christians do what the Lord tells us to do, then those persons who do not practice equality and justice for all will know that they are wrong. They need to repent and do what they can to help solve the problems that still confront us.

I think that is true of Whites, and I think that is true of Blacks, and I think that is what the Christian and what the Lord taught us in the example that he lived for us, doing his personal ministry here on earth.

What is your dream for all Churches of Christ?

Christ’s word has not changed since it was recorded by inspired men of God who wrote them as directed by the Holy Spirit.

When I look to that first Pentecost following the resurrection, as recorded in Acts 2, and what it took to become a Christian that day, I believe it takes the same thing today to become a member of the church.

My vision is for the church to continue to be the church established by Christ, to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent.
HARDING: Decision disappoints petition organizer, Black Student Association

FROM PAGE 3
Jackson House, a 2014 Harding graduate, organized the petition drive amid national racial unrest after the May 25 police killing of George Floyd. House, who recently served two years as a Christian volunteer working with Muslim refugees in Greece, voiced disappointment with McLarty’s decision.

“The University’s statement minimizes the concerns of students and alumni by referring to this effort as ‘(wrestling) with the difficult issues of our time’ and saying ‘the primary distinction’ in determining someone’s position on the issue is whether or not they ‘first knew George Benson as a living person or they first encountered him as the object of a petition and the subject of a newspaper article,’” House said.

“It is irrelevant whether someone knew Dr. Benson,” said the 28-year-old alumnus, who earned his Master of Divinity degree from Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., in 2018. “We have to deal forthrightly with what he believed and taught about race.”

In a Facebook post, leaders of Harding’s Black Student Association said: “Symbols hold great meaning, and while the goal of educating the student body and others of Harding’s history with race is a noble one, it cannot be done as long as we continue to worship daily in a building that bears (Benson’s) name.”

Walter Buce, a 1981 Harding alumnus who was critical of the petition effort, praised McLarty’s decision.

“Dr. Benson deserves prominent recognition on the Harding campus,” said Buce, a member of the Saturn Road Church of Christ in Garland, Texas. “Dr. McLarty’s decision hit the proper balance by totally documenting the full picture of Dr. Benson’s life — warts and all.

“His contributions to Harding, to free enterprise and freedoms education, his humanitarian efforts around the world, his assistance to competing Christian colleges and his evangelistic efforts in Africa are legendary,” Buce added. “When I was at Harding, long after he stepped down as president, George S. Benson was known for two things: his lousy driving and his laser-like enthusiasm for education and evangelism in Zambia.”

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON BENSON
The petition cited a 2012 Arkansas Times article, which said the forthcoming Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964, “changed the financial calculus of segregation. When the bill passed, Harding would be required to desegregate to continue receiving federal funds.”

“The first Black students were admitted for the fall semester of 1963, but they were not allowed to live on campus,” Barclay Key, author of the new book “Race and Restoration: Churches of Christ and the Black Freedom Struggle,” told The Christian Chronicle.

“In a 1966 sermon that I found, Benson still maintained, ‘There is no reason to think the Lord wants a mixing of the races and the creating of just one mongrel race.’

But Rayton Sianjina, a native of Zambia, paints a different picture of Benson, who was active in African mission work.

Sianjina said he was 10 years old when he first met Benson in his home country in 1972. Later, after Sianjina came to study at Harding in 1980, Benson served as a mentor to him, said Sianjina, who earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the university.

Sianjina said he spent a great deal of time with Benson in his later years and visited him in the hospital before the former Harding president died in 1991 at age 93.

“He took his last breath as I was holding his hand,” said Sianjina, now a higher education administrator in Georgia. “The last person he saw on this earth was a Black man as he parted this life to see the face of God. From seeing a Black man to seeing Christ Jesus is a testament to the redemptive story of his life.”

By the end of the 1960s, Harding had only 20 Black students out of a total enrollment of almost 2,000, Barclay reported in his 2007 doctoral dissertation at the University of Florida. Today, minority students comprise about 15 percent of Harding’s student body, according to the university.

Benson also served as chancellor of Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City from 1957 to 1967. Oklahoma Christian, which also is associated with Churches of Christ, recently removed Benson’s name from its administration building after a half-century.

“Removing the Benson name was proactive on the part of leadership as the next right step in the work we’ve been doing over the last several years to make sure our campus reflects our values,” Oklahoma Christian President John deSteiguer said in an email to the university staff in June. “This is the right thing for OC.”

RECOGNIZED A MAJOR OVERSIGHT
As a result of the recent discussions, McLarty said, Harding “recognized a major oversight”: the lack of any buildings or landmarks on campus to recognize the contributions of its African American alumni.

“That must change,” he said, announcing the creation of a task force to identify “the most meaningful and appropriate things that Harding can do to memorialize and celebrate the history and the presence of African-Americans at Harding.”

The petition had recommended that Harding change its auditorium name to honor Botham Jean, a 2016 Harding graduate. Jean, who was Black, was shot to death in his Dallas apartment by a White police officer on Sept. 6, 2018. McLarty knew Jean well and delivered the closing prayer at the beloved Dallas West Church of Christ member’s funeral.

“Botham will be honored in his own unique way on our campus,” McLarty said. “This could be with a bronze statue of Botham leading singing or it could be the naming of an academic program in his honor. That remains to be determined, but the name of Botham Jean will be prominently and permanently placed on ... campus during the coming school year.”

Jean’s sister, Allisa Charles-Findley, had supported the petition drive. “In my opinion, what better way is there to stand up against racism than by taking down the name of someone who stood for segregation and replacing it with a student who was loved by everyone and who was killed because of the color of his skin?” Charles-Findley said in response to McLarty’s announcement.

“I hope Harding does honor Botham in an impactful way that will last a lifetime, just like they did with the Benson Auditorium,” added Charles-Findley, president of the Botham Jean Foundation, a charity formed in her brother’s memory.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE
Kevin Redd, a 2004 Harding alumnus, said McLarty’s statement left him hopeful about the future.

“I would hope that everyone can resolve to keep an open mind as this is very early in the process of neutralizing decades of discrimination and bias,” said Redd, minister for the Millington Church of Christ in Tennessee. “Changing it won’t happen overnight. It’s got to be done correctly so that we move forward at the right pace with the right goals, and ultimately, God is glorified in what we do.”

McLarty said Harding should be “a place where racism is always identified as evil and where people of all races are confident that they are valued and esteemed as children of God.

“I believe we have made great progress in this direction, but I acknowledge that we still have far to travel to reach these goals,” the university president said.

“We commit ourselves today to following in the steps of Jesus who ‘has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility’ and who now shows us the way ‘to bear with one another in love.’”

RELATED VIEWS, Page 33
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schedules are subject to change. Please contact event organizers for updates.

July 31-Aug. 1 Widow/Widower Retreat. LaVergne Church of Christ, LaVergne, Tenn. (731) 656-4233. See widowhoodworkshop.com.
Aug. 2, 30 and Sept. 6, 27 Senior Singles Event. Bayview Church of Christ. San Francisco. Email Allen at: lln_mcf@nd@yahoo.com.
Sept. 20 Centennial Anniversary, Central Church of Christ. Moore, Okla. (405) 794-4493. See moorecentral.org.

FULL CALENDAR: www.christianchronicle.org.

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Contact tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org
Memorials

Ermal Eugene Catterton
1927 – 2020

Ermal Eugene “Gene” Catterton, age 92, passed away May 4, 2020, in Fort Myers, Fla., with his wife, Barbara, by his side. He was born on Sept. 8, 1927, in Indiana to Ermal Dale Catterton and Robbie (Smith) Catterton. The family soon moved to Arkansas where his parents were schoolteachers and farmers. He served in the Navy at the very end of WWII in the Philippines. He married his high school sweetheart, Fayrene Imboden in 1947.

Gene graduated from Harding University with a bachelor of science in 1950; Arkansas State University with a master of science in 1953; and the University of Arkansas with a master in education in 1954; Arkansas State University with a bachelor of science in 1947.

He was invited to participate in a post-graduate summer program at Stanford University in 1962, and he directed the writing of two high school math books in the late 1960s. Gene taught math and science for thirteen years in Weiner, Hickory Ridge, and Wynne, all in Arkansas. Then he moved into administration for his remaining years, retiring in 1987.

Gene and Fayrene lived in Wynne, Ark. for 42 years, where he was active with the Kiwanian Club; he chaired the Red Cross blood drive for seventeen years, and Fayrene volunteered; Gene was Wynne’s Distinguished Citizen in 1984. He lived in Gainesville, Fla. from 2002-2008, then in Mayfield, Ky., until his death.

His deepest love was for God. He ministered as an elder at the Wynne Church of Christ for nearly three decades and for four years at the University City Church of Christ in Gainesville, Fla. Gene and Fayrene loved to travel, and in their retirement years they visited 49 states and several foreign countries, mostly during their years with Sojourners, a Christian service organization. After 58 years of marriage, Fayrene died in 2005. In 2008, Gene married Barbara Holland and continued his love for travel and serving God as he and Barbara also participated in Sojourners.

Gene is survived by his wife, Barbara, of Mayfield, Ky.; daughters Judy Thomas of Gainesville, Fla., Holly (Leonard) Allen of Nashville, Tenn., and Gena (Stan) Granberg of Jonesboro, Ark. He had nine much-loved grandchildren and twenty-two great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at the Wynne Church of Christ in Wynne, Arkansas, when it is deemed safe to do so. Memorials may be directed to: Paragould Children’s Home, 5515 Walcott Road, Paragould, AR 72450, to or to Sojourners at https://sojourning.org/

Vera Jeanne Carrizal
1941 – 2020

Vera Jeanne Petty Carrizal of Round Rock, Texas, passed from this life on Wed., June 10, 2020, at the age of 79.

She was preceded in death by her parents Gene and Mabel Petty; her brother, Jim Petty; and her grandson, Thomas Wiginton. She is survived by her husband Steve Carrizal; brother and sister-in-law Charles and Oline Petty, sister and brother-in-law Janice and Glenn Wall, sister Kathleen Judd, and sister-in-law Kay Petty (wife of Jim Petty); son and daughter-in-law Steven and Debbi Carrizal and daughter and son-in-law Janice and Chris Wiginton; grandchildren David (Lauren) Carrizal, Rebecca Carrizal, Kaylee Wiginton, Tyler Wiginton, Anna Carrizal, and Ali-

Milestones

Showcasing the moments of your life and the lives of loved ones. (starting at $25)

Birthday

Mary Bruce
100 years

Mary Avella Wallace Bruce will celebrate her 100th birthday on August 18.

Raised in a Tennessee Christian family, she was baptized when almost 15 and was soon teaching Bible classes. She said of her late husband of 54 years, E.R. Bruce, “I didn’t marry a preacher but after moving to Michigan, where congregations were small, few and far between, so were preachers, so he was encouraged to speak and he became a preacher. I became a PW and raised a family of PKs.”

For 54 years she taught Bible correspondence courses to thousands of students worldwide. Still an active member of Exchange Street Church of Christ, she helped begin their Meals on Wheels, and from age 75 to 90 was a World Bible School ministry leader. At 92, she began a benevolent sewing club in her home and at 95 she began a weekly ladies’ Bible study in her home, both of which continue at the church building.

Her children are Dona (Leonard) Blake, Leecia Penrod, Stella (Keith) Kreh, Jim (Karen) Bruce, Ethelene (Roy) White, and Gary (Jan) Bruce.

continued on page 29
She is blessed with 18 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren, and two great-great granddaughters. Happy Birthday, Mary!

Cards may be sent to Mrs. Bruce at 718 Pierce St., Union City, TN 38261.

Anniversary

Floyd and Juanita Davis

70 years

Floyd and Juanita Davis of Shawnee, Okla., celebrated 70 years of marriage on June 25, 2020. Floyd was a deacon and regular song leader for the East Main congregation in Shawnee, led singing for gospel meetings in the area, and conducted congregational singing classes for many years. Juanita was a faithful teacher of God’s word in Sunday school, VBS and personal Bible studies.

Their children are Steve Davis (deceased), La Nita Lough and Melody Winn. They have seven grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.

Floyd and Juanita worship with the Highland Church of Christ in Tecumseh, Okla. Congratulations, Floyd and Juanita!

With Appreciation

The Christian Chronicle appreciates and acknowledges generous gifts received in honor of Dale “Chip” and Connie Bettes and Lynn McMillon and in memory of Johnnie Sanchez.

Submit tributes to milestones@christianchronicle.org. Submissions start at $25.
Minister Search - Garden City, Kansas

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

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

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

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

FACULTY POSITIONS AVAILABLE

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

Initial application should include a letter of interest and curriculum vitae. To complete the application, three church references, three professional references, and a transcript of the highest degree are required. Salary and rank are determined based on credentials and experience.

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES. Seeking full-time, nine-month faculty member for new innovative nutrition and dietetics graduate program beginning 2021. Successful candidates must have a minimum of a master’s degree in nutrition/dietetics or a related field and currently be a Registered Dietitian/Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. Upon hire, the faculty member will be expected to become licensed in the state of Arkansas. Preference will be given to a Ph.D. in nutrition/dietetics or a related field. Experience in clinical care, teaching in higher education, and familiarity with the requirements of the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics is strongly preferred. Optional summer teaching is under separate contract.

Submit application materials to Brittany Blake, department chair, at bblake2@harding.edu or HU Box 12233, Searcy, AR 72149.

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION. Seeking adjunct graduate faculty to teach online courses in the new Master of Science in Information Systems. Qualifications include an earned terminal degree (ABD considered) in information technology, information systems, cyber security, computer science, data analytics, information assurance or a closely related field. Online instruction experience required. Course design experience preferred.

Submit application materials to Dr. Allen Frazier, dean, at afrazier@harding.edu, or HU Box 10774, Searcy, AR 72149.

Please visit harding.edu/hr for further information on these positions and to learn more about open staff positions.

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Word Find: Paul’s letter to the Romans

By Betty Hollister | For The Christian Chronicle

Find the following words from the book of Romans.
They can be forward, backward, up, down and diagonal:

- ACCEPTABLE
- ACKNOWLEDGE
- ADOPTION
- BAPTISM
- BOAST
- COMPASSION
- COVENANT
- DESIRES
- DEVOTION
- EFFORTS
- ENDURANCE
- ETERNAL
- EXPRESS
- FAITH
- FAMINE
- FAVOR
- FEARFUL
- FRIEND
- GENEROUS
- GENTILES
- GLOrious
- GROANS
- HARDENED
- HARMONY
- HUMAN
- IMPARTED
- INSTRUCTED
- JUSTIFICATION
- LOVING
- NATURE
- NULLIFY
- OBEDIENCE
- OFFERED
- PATIENCE
- PEACE
- PERSEVERANCE
- POWERFUL
- PRAYERFUL
- RAISED
- REFLECTION
- REJOINING
- RESTORATION
- RIGHTeousness
- SUFFERING
- UNCLEAN
- WEARY

A righteous addition to the Chronicle

Betty Hollister, a loyal reader of The Christian Chronicle in Oregon, has a knack for making puzzles. She shared a few with us. If you would like to see this as a regular feature, email letters@christianchronicle.org.

This puzzle includes words from the book of Romans. “The emphasis here is God’s righteousness,” Hollister said. Regardless of the things we let divide us, Jesus’ blood justifies us all.

The apostle Paul sets out that theme in Romans’ first chapter, said Bledi Valca, minister for the Tirana Church of Christ in Albania.

“Throughout the book, Paul will trace the state of both Jews and Gentiles as he builds his case for God’s righteousness,” Valca said.

“God’s righteousness should be the basis for this divided group of believers to live together in harmony.”
The Christian Chronicle Crossword

By Myles Mellor | www.ilovecrosswords.com

ACROSS
1. Subject of one of the Bible accounts of a miracle of Jesus, three words.
10. Surprised cry.
11. “Kneel at the _____."
12. “When you give to ___ don’t even let the left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:2-4).
14. “Indeed I am not ___ to carry his shoes” (Matthew 3:10-12).
15. One billion years.
16. Day of rest.
19. “A bruised ____ he will not break” (Isaiah 42:3).
21. “And he is not able to give healing to you, nor doth he remove from you a ____” (Hosea 5:13).
25. Circle ratio.
28. Electric current measurement.
30. “For he makes the ____ rise on evil men as well as good” (Matthew 5:43-45).
31. “Accept the responsibility of looking after them ____ and not because you feel you can’t get out of it” (1 Peter 5:1-4).
34. Roof coverings
37. What Saul did before he was crowned.
38. Lady referred to.
39. Third son of Adam and Eve.
40. “I take no special ____ in the fact that I preach the Gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).
41. Street, abbr.

DOWN
1. He fell from heaven (Isaiah 14:12).
2. Followers of Jesus.
3. Resurrection day.
4. Rising of Jesus’ body to heaven.
5. Salty waters mentioned by Ezekiel, two words.
6. Third in the family.
7. Manger material.
8. What?
9. The wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac.
13. Place for a bath.
17. It indicates the author.
18. Gabriel was one.
22. “and then he will ___ every man for what he has done” (Matthew 16:27-28).
23. He was slain by David.
24. Blessed with oil.
25. They shepherd.
27. “you will not go in yourselves neither will you ___ those at the door to go inside” (Matthew 23:13-14).
29. Motivation.
31. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every ____ that

BIBLE BOWLING

Shameful shaving

Questions from 2 Samuel 10:
1. Who was the new king of the Ammonites? A. Talmai, B. Zobah, C. Rehob, D. Hanun.
2. Why did King David send men to see this new king? A. To spy out the Ammonites’ land, B. To express sympathy, C. To steal their grain, D. To kill the new king.
3. What did the commanders tell the king about David’s men? A. They were attacked, B. They feasted with the king, C. Their beards were shaved half off, D. They were given new robes.
4. What happened to David’s men? A. They were attacked, B. They feasted with the king, C. Their beards were shaved half off, D. They were given new robes.
7. After the Arameans lost, where did they regroup? A. Helam, B. Hebron, C. Ziglag, D. Beersheba.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION and Bible Bowling answers on Page 34. Questions by Cindy Smathers. To sponsor this page, contact tonya.patton@christianchronicle.org.

proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

WANTED: Curious Minds.
A popular internet meme includes a fake quote from Abraham Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln, America’s 16th president, had an extensive knowledge of Scripture. Raised in a home where the Bible was taught and church attendance was compulsory, Lincoln often referred to certain passages and spoke reverently of God.

Yet more than 135 years after his death, historians and religious scholars continue to debate his views and the events that shaped and defined them.

Lincoln was a work in progress until the end of his days. He spent his life well-read, brilliant and flawed. Human.

Much can be learned from what we know of Lincoln’s years in public life, especially his leadership opposing slavery. More can be gleaned from looking deeper into his 56 years and the events that shaped and defined them.

The same is true for any subject, of course. We have at our fingertips countless books containing more information than ever before in history — vast amounts of it for free through partnerships with libraries and universities. Digitally, we can access credible, sourced research materials worldwide and delve into any area that interests us.

Yet our collective attention span is short — so much so that we consider memes on social media educational and turn on cable news in the name of information-gathering. We cherry-pick the best jabs and freely share those as our new points of view without any humility or kindness, hoping for maximum impact. No verification or citations? None required, apparently.

In other words, we propagate what is catchy and clever. Anything that propels our views, incites fear or promotes our politics really gets people talking. After all, we know best, and it is our duty to share and educate others.

In actuality, we’re being used, and we’re educating no one — least of all ourselves. We simply are the conduit. It is those with an audience and reach who are profiting, and we’re doing them a favor by parroting their platform to those in our circles of influence.

A Pew Research Study released in 2019 found that more than a quarter of adults in the U.S. hadn’t read a book on any subject, in any form, in the previous year. This is troubling from many angles. As Christians who believe one book is our guide, however, this statistic should be our call to action.

Make the rest of 2020 a time to read, think and learn. Rather than relying on social or broadcast media, make the conscious choice to pick up or download a book (and don’t forget to spend plenty of time in the Book). Look for credible material authored by those with knowledge and expertise in the field. If the work is science- or medical-related, choose peer-reviewed articles printed in journals or publications respected in those areas.

Sharing these ideas later is optional. Lincoln managed to leave a legacy without social media followers. Any minds he changed in the course of his life’s work were managed because he treated people with kindness and respect and made personal connections with as many as he could.

Reactions mixed to petition story

I am disappointed the article about Harding University and renaming the Benson Auditorium was made such a big deal (“Petition to rename Harding auditorium gains support,” Page 24, July). Those who want to rename the building did not know George S. Benson.

No, he wasn’t perfect, but humans are not perfect. I knew Dr. Benson quite well. He frequented my parents’ home and officiated my wedding. We vacationed together in Hawaii, and I worked for his granddaughter’s husband for more than a decade.

Dr. Benson was a great leader, and I was proud to walk across the stage in a building named after him when I graduated from Harding University.

ELIZABETH CANNON MUSICK | Searcy, Ark.

The best way to attack racism and injustice is to publicly honor Botham Jean as the new heartbeat of righteous change at Harding. The Black Churches of Christ are planning meaningful actions to tackle racism in the church today. Let us love the brotherhood! 1Peter 2:17.

KEVIN BETHEA | Baltimore
**The George Benson I knew**

My name is Rayton Sianjina, son of the late Bicycle Sianjina, a former minister of the gospel who in his lifetime, planted 17 Churches of Christ in our home country of Zambia. Our story is deeply entwined with the legacy of George Stuart Benson.

I met Dr. Benson in June 1972 when I was 10. He and Mr. George Triplett, another missionary, drove their rugged Land Rover to my home 50 miles away from the closest town to pick up my dad, who would accompany them into remote locations to minister to the Simalundu villagers. I was invited to accompany them.

The people in those remote areas were severely poor. Many suffered from diseases including leprosy. I recall vividly my surprise that these two white men mingled so freely among the crowds, shaking hands deformed by leprosy and sharing a common drinking gourd of contaminated water in cooperation with the local customs.

Dr. Benson routinely came to Zambia and to our home year after year to go into various villages with my dad. They preached the gospel, winning and baptizing countless souls. Dr. Benson also worked with Namwianga Mission, which was established in 1932 in Kalomo, Zambia, by Churches of Christ. When I was of age I attended Namwianga Christian Secondary School. Dr. Benson was heavily involved in building and expanding the school.

His vision seemed to never end. He wanted a multitude of Zambians to receive an education where they would get to know Christ as their personal savior. Often he met with Namwianga graduates wherever they worked or planted churches. He asked them to assist and support the expansion of the school. Many graduates held government jobs, and through them Dr. Benson was invited to meet with top government officials who, through his persuasion, became heavily involved in the work of Namwianga.

As one of his goals, a college was founded. Rightly so, it was named George Benson Christian College a three-year school that trains students to teach at the secondary level. It also offers training in ministry and Christian leadership development. In 1980 I came to America to attend Harding University. My dad had committed his farm as collateral to secure payment for my tuition, room and board.

Soon after my arrival on campus I was invited to meet with Dr. Benson. Over a welcoming lunch in the Heritage Hall, he spoke firmly about the criteria for my success — the need to focus on my studies as my future and my father’s farm were at stake. During my four years at Harding, Dr. Benson played a significant, hands-on role. He demonstrated great care, love and concern for my well-being and success.

The major cultural change from rural Zambia and all that was familiar to the halls of Harding University was major — cognitively and emotionally. Words cannot adequately convey the significance of the support I enjoyed from Dr. Benson. I witnessed him guiding and helping many young black men.

I consider myself to have been blessed with two earthly fathers, Bicycle R. Sianjina and George S. Benson. These men touched many lives — white, black, Chinese, Japanese and most certainly others.

I spent a great deal of time with Dr. Benson over the years including the last days of his life. In 1991, I sat alone seeing after him at the White County hospital.

He took his last breath as I was holding his hand. The last person he saw on this earth was a Black man as he parted this life to see the face of God. From seeing a Black man to seeing Christ Jesus is a testament to the redemptive story of his life.

And yes, this is what the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is all about — redemption! It is my firm belief that Dr. George Stuart Benson redeemed himself in the eyes of our Lord from the wrongs he had done. The George Benson that I knew knew from the wrongs he had done. The George Benson that I know labored much in his later life for the advancement of the gospel, the good and redemptive news.

What a redemptive effort of one’s own life and legacy. I choose to honor him!

In reflection of John 8:7, I am sorry, but I have too much baggage of sins to cast the first stone. Don’t you?

RAYTON SIANJINA earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Harding and a doctorate from the University of Mississippi. He is Director of Assessment and Student Outcomes for Fort Valley State University in Georgia. He and his family worship with the Warner Robins Church of Christ.

**As Harding University debates the legacy of its former president and race relations, an African Christian shares about the man he considered to be his second father.**

**Baptist studies at Abilene Christian?**

**FORMER PRESIDENT SAYS** it isn’t a theological drift. It’s about being a good neighbor.

**ABILENE, Texas**

‘**Baptist ministry classes find home at Abilene Christian University,**’ read a recent headline in the Abilene Reporter-News, drawing notice by Christian Chronicle readers. Here, a former president of the university, associated with Churches of Christ, explains the decision.

For 115 years, Abilene has been home to Abilene Christian University. Higher education is prominent in this West Texas city of 120,000 people.

Hardin-Simmons University, a Baptist-affiliated institution, is only a mile from the ACU campus. Across town is McMurry University, a Methodist-supported school.

Public-sector education is represented by several Texas Tech University graduate campuses in addition to other undergraduate and specialty trade schools.

We work together in the life of the city — serving United Way, on nonprofit boards and as community volunteers. We even share a library consortium with Hardin-Simmons and McMurry, where our various branches are connected electronically. For several years, we shared a nursing school consortium.

We are accustomed to working together, as the entire ACU community is vitally engaged in the life of Abilene with our neighbors.

All of higher education, whether public or private, is under crushing demands to cut costs. Not long ago, Hardin-Simmons administrators and its board decided they could not afford to continue their Logsdon School of Theology, and it would close.
ACU: How Baptist studies program came to be

FROM PAGE 33

Logsdon and ACU’s Graduate School of Theology share a special accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools.

In the U.S., six of our sister schools affiliated with Churches of Christ also have this status.

Interestingly, there are only two ATS-accredited theology schools west of Interstate 35 in Texas — ACU and HSU — and they are one mile apart. For years, our two facilities have met together to discuss various theological issues as seen from each group’s perspective. We have common, deep, historical roots in the Restoration Movement. They are our friends and neighbors.

We started receiving inquiries from Logsdon students about transferring to ACU’s Master of Divinity program, one of six master’s and doctoral degrees we offer. Since we require no specific creedal belief before admission, we told the students they were welcome. We are able to do certain things on the graduate level with mature, independent-thinking students that we would never do with our undergraduates. Theological education on the graduate level relies heavily on that assumption.

We were then approached by some of the Logsdon faculty about creating a special track for their students in our 72-credit-hour M.Div. program, with two elective courses inserted for them on Baptist History and Baptist Polity, both required for Baptist pastors. A Baptist professor who would teach these two courses would also oversee his students’ supervised internships, which is a requirement of all our M.Div. graduates. In a very kind gesture, Baptist leaders throughout Texas said they would financially underwrite the expenses associated with teaching and scholarships. To accommodate gifts to this restricted program, a Baptist Student Center concept was formed.

The reasoning of ACU’s leaders led them to conclude, “Why would we not seize this opportunity? We should be flattered our Baptist friends in West Texas think highly enough of ACU to give us this opportunity to educate their young ministers.” This in no way signals a drift or departure from ACU’s historic role in higher education among Churches of Christ. On the contrary, if students from other Christian traditions can benefit from our offerings, all the better.

In the mid-1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, the very existence of Abilene Christian College was in question. John G. Hardin, a philanthropic Baptist from Burkburnett, Texas, whose first wife had been a member of the Baptist Church, gave an annuity to two local colleges — Abilene Christian and Simmons. His gifts made a life-saving difference in the continued existence of these two institutions, which have served their own traditions and the broader ecumenical world for a total of 243 years and counting. Both universities welcome students from all faith groups while remaining true to their own mission and heritage.

The former Simmons College is now Hardin-Simmons University, which has an enrollment of about 2,400 students, is one mile from the campus of Abilene Christian.

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Racial reconciliation: Now what?

AS CHRISTIANS PONDER the way forward, these books provide readers of all ages with new perspective.

BY LAURA AKINS | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

I am a White woman.

I have never worried about looking suspicious as I walk home from a convenience store, like Trayvon Martin. I don’t worry that the police will break in my house and shoot me in my sleep, like Breonna Taylor. I wouldn’t worry about wearing a ski mask in public if I were cold, like Elijah McClain.

And it’s easy for me to assume that I won’t ever watch my White children beg for their lives as a knee presses into their necks for 8 minutes, 46 seconds, like George Floyd.

But our Black brothers and sisters do worry about these things every single day. And, honestly, I was only vaguely aware that these were things anyone had to worry about until recent events.

I am naive. I am privileged. And I’m so sad.

In the pages of this newspaper we’ve read about protests, petitions and prayers all in the name of racial injustice. But now what? As Christians, we can no longer hear these stories and sit idle.

So I’ve asked friends, strangers, librarians and teachers for book suggestions about race and injustice. Let’s learn each other’s history — the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful. Let’s read and learn and weep. And then, take action.

FOR CHILDREN

“I think it’s incredibly important to read books about racism and educate yourself,” wrote Laura Louda in a recent Facebook post. “I also think it’s important to surround yourself with books written by diverse authors and illustrators.”

What books are you buying for your children? Are you introducing them to people who don’t look like them? Do you celebrate other cultures and differences? Does your bookshelf reflect the diverse world we live in?

These are questions that Louda, who works in book publishing, asks herself, even though she doesn’t have kids. Here are her top picks:


“Imagine learning to read at the age of 116,” the goodreads.com book summary says. “Discover the true story of Mary Walker, the nation’s oldest student who did just that” (ages 2-5).


“This poem is a love letter to Black life in the United States,” according to goodreads.com. “It highlights the unspeakable trauma of slavery, the faith and fire of the civil rights movement and the grit, passion and perseverance of some of the world’s greatest heroes.”


Little Leaders educates and inspires as it relates true stories of breaking boundaries and achieving beyond expectations,” the goodreads.com summary said (ages 6-12).

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS


Dara Tinius, a librarian and mother to two middle-grade daughters, recommends “Stamped,” an abridged version of “Stamped from the Beginning.” Tinius said Renyolds adapted this brilliant history of race in America and made it accessible for middle schoolers.

This book takes the reader on a race journey from then to now, shows why we feel how we feel and why the poison of racism lingers, according to goodreads.com. “Stamped” inspires hope for an anti-racist future.


“New Kid distills the prejudice and discomfort that many black and brown kids encounter when they are one of the faces of color in predominantly white spaces,” Tinius said.

From the author’s website: “New Kid” is a timely, honest graphic novel about starting over at a new school where diversity is low and the struggle to fit in is real.”

FOR ADULTS


In 2016, Morrison visited Rwanda and spoke on reconciliation.

“Morrison shared how one of the most racially divided institutions is the church. And my heart broke,” said Jamie Boiles, a friend of mine who moved to Kigali, Rwanda, nine years ago to work as a missionary. “If you are ready to start your journey of breaking through the racial divide, this is definitely the book.”


Theologian Douglas’ work helped Ben Lewellyn-Taylor, a friend of mine who teaches in Dallas, understand the link between the murder of Trayvon Martin and the American idea that casts White bodies into heaven while demonizing and dehumanizing Black bodies.

“Douglas invites readers to develop a moral imagination that moves us to see Trayvon and other Black bodies in the likeness of Jesus,” Lewellyn-Taylor said. “This is the most important theological book I read (during ministry training), and I think every Christian will be changed by reading it.”
FOR CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Finally, here are some books related to the history of race issues in our fellowship.

These suggestions, far from an exhaustive list, come to mind:


NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

WOMEN AND THE CHURCH


This book challenges the serious Bible student to open the topic of what women may do in worship assemblies and beyond. It provides a fresh examination of relevant biblical passages without the baggage of centuries of unquestioned interpretations or the contamination of reading our world into that of the Bible. On the principle that a correct understanding of the original writer's words in context is the underpinning of contemporary application, the book seeks to assist the modern reader with this current application by providing conclusions about the early church's practice arrived at through careful examination of the biblical text.

The first three chapters lay the foundation for the study, especially in proposing a healthier methodology for Bible study than has been common in many treatments of this topic. It then examines the Genesis creation narrative, both in its own right and as interpreted in the New Testament. Finally, because the Christian faith begins with Jesus, not Paul, the book treats Jesus and women in two chapters before concluding with four on Paul.

The author believes that under the influence of longstanding traditional interpretations, poor interpretive methods have misconstrued relevant biblical passages, with the unfortunate result of placing unwarranted restrictions on women in the modern church.

This puts the church unnecessarily at odds with its culture, alienates its young people, squelches the enormous spiritual energy of its women, and has become an obstacle to the reception of the Gospel.


This is the second of Burke's books on the subject, the first (God's Woman Revisited: Women and the Church) being a much longer version. The current Pocket Edition mirrors the first book but is written for the average church member who is not interested in all the footnotes, extensive bibliography, and other details of the first. At thirteen chapters and a manageable length, it is well suited for use in Bible classes and small group settings.

ON MARRIAGE


This book is written by Henry O. Adkins, Associate Minister of Cedar Crest Church of Christ Dallas, Texas, who is married to his college sweetheart Sue for 53 years and still dating for 57. Adkins tells stories of early marriage challenges, marriage after children, the commitment of being a 17-year caregiver to his wife's mother, and finding ways to keep the love light shining bright in the midst of their full, busy life. It's just Common Sense.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Ernest Leon Burse. The Burning Fire Within My Soul. Self-published, 2018. 105 pages, Paperback $20.00. Order from the author at (318) 251-8321 or ebjtb@suddenlink.net or e-Book: Amazon Kindle.

Injustice, prejudice, segregation, racism, and violence are wrong. All require changes—changes in the way we think, in the way we act, and in what we believe. It is time we do something about this, for it is in the church and in society. It has been going on for generations.

My book addresses the root of these problems and not the symptoms. Unless we tear down these walls completely, there can be no lasting justice and no lasting peace.
Who needs a cathedral? Inspiration comes from an ancient hymn sung in a stairwell

Why learn a living language when you can study a dead one?

That must have been what I told myself in high school because somehow I ended up taking three years of Latin.

I wish I could say it helped me with my SATs. Maybe it did. All I can remember is translating sentences that read, “The good farmer gives much grain to the senator” and the like. Plus semper ubi sub ubi. Look it up. It’s sound advice.

I once attempted to translate Pliny the Younger’s account of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. One sentence was supposed to read, “The young man brought a word of warning to the Greeks.” I translated it, “The young man brought firewood to the Greeks.” I guess he thought, “Well, we can’t stop this thing so let’s just lean into it.”

The eruption happened in 79 A.D., which, coincidentally, was my grade on the assignment.

There are lots and lots of beautiful hymns written in the mother tongue of the Romance languages. I recently came across a good one by a Dallas-based group called King’s Return. The song is “Ubi Caritas.” I think that means “Where There is Charity.”

But remember, I got a C.

“Our name reminds us to be our brother’s keeper and to pay homage to our King, Jesus, who has himself promised to return,” the vocal group says on its Facebook page. The song itself has been sung in cathedrals around the world. But the quartet shows us that, when you can’t find a cathedral, a stairwell does just fine.

The words of the hymn are particularly relevant in our current, divided culture:

Where charity and love are, there God is. The love of Christ has gathered us into one. Let us exult, and in Him be joyful. Let us fear and let us love the living God. And from a sincere heart let us love each other (and Him).

Where charity and love are, there God is. Therefore, whenever we are gathered as one: Lest we in mind be divided, let us beware. Let cease malicious quarrels, let strife give way.

The emphasis there is mine. The translation is not. I looked it up. Thus the lack of firewood in the lyrics.

We need more charity and less division these days. We need to stop growing at each other and figure out how to be our brother’s keeper in these challenging times.

This hymn is believed to have been written in 796 A.D., which tells me that truly there is nothing new under the sun.

I pray that the counter-cultural voices of our unity will ring out from the stairwells of our angst and isolation, turning hearts back to God, bringing peace to madness. I leave you with the final verse of Ubi Caritas.

And in the midst of us be Christ our God. Where charity and love are, there God is. Together also with the blessed may we see, Gloriously, Thy countenance, O Christ our God: A joy which is immense, and also approved: Through infinite ages of ages. Amen.

—Erik Tryggestad
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We are so encouraged by your support for real news that honors God — even when the subject matter is difficult, even when our society seems so divided. We’re also encouraged by the response we’ve received to our COVID-19 appeal. Brothers and sisters everywhere are stepping up!

But we’re not out of this yet! Nearly five months into this pandemic, we continue to experience losses in our advertising revenue. You still can make a difference! If you haven’t yet contributed to the Chronicle, I ask that you prayerfully consider a $36 voluntary subscription gift. If you can do more, please consider becoming a Keeper of the Chronicle by committing to make a monthly gift of $10 or more.

If you’re not able to contribute right now, please commit to pray for this ministry. We’ll keep sending you the print edition. Your prayers are blessings.

Go to christianchronicle.org/covid19 or fill out the above form. Once again, I thank you.

— Erik Tryggestad, president and CEO

Seeking Full-Time Minister - Cortez, Colorado

The Cortez church of Christ is located in the beautiful Four Corners area of Colorado. We are a loving congregation of 80+ members who want to grow. We are involved in community service, mission work, Leadership Training for Christ, and a local youth camp. We provide a competitive salary and a nice, four-bedroom home.

If interested, send a detailed resume including references and information about yourself and your family to: cortezcofc@live.com.

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Seeking Full-Time Minister - West Olive, Arizona

The Church of Christ on West Olive in the west valley of Phoenix, Arizona, is seeking a full-time pulpit minister to serve alongside our two ministers and an eldership of five. We are a congregation of 450 members in a growing community west of Phoenix. (www.WestOlive.com)

The ideal candidate should be a married man with at least ten years of experience. He should be of strong personal faith and be doctrinally sound and well grounded in the Scriptures.

How to Apply:
Those interested in applying should mail/e-mail and include a copy of their resume with picture and links to recent sermons.

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