

# December 2022 edition

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Healing Hands fundraiser in Tennessee raises \$60,000 to build water wells around the world.

### Serving after the storm

When a tornado struck its area, an Oklahoma church stepped up to serve in a major way.

### Ministry goes bankrupt

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Real news that honors God  
Vol. 79, No. 12 | December 2022



# The Christian Chronicle

An international newspaper for Churches of Christ  
[www.christianchronicle.org](http://www.christianchronicle.org)

## All in the plan: Church helps after tornado

BY AUDREY JACKSON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

**IDABEL, Okla.** When a tornado struck this southeastern Oklahoma town on a recent Friday, the Bypass Church of Christ served the community as a shelter. The 100-member congregation opened its doors almost immediately to help — as the American Red Cross and news stations spread the word. The church's quick action marked the fulfillment of a commitment members made more than two decades earlier. After an ice storm left Idabel residents without electricity for up to 15 days in 2000, Bypass leaders decided to build a new family life center that could function as a shelter — complete with showers, a kitchen and the ability to run on generators. "This church came to us that spring and said, 'We're building a new fellowship center. We want to know what we need to put in it to make it a shelter available for our community in McCurtain County,'" recalled Dee Wilson, an American Red Cross financial and statistical manager. "We told them what we needed. They checked with a couple of other agencies ... and then they built it." See IDABEL, Page 12



The Nov. 4 tornado ripped the roof off a home in Idabel, Okla.

## Walk4Water in the rain

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BY TED PARKS | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

**SMYRNA, Tenn.** Feet splashed in puddles on a rainy Sunday afternoon as almost 1,000 people came together in this Middle Tennessee town. They were focused not on water from the sky but on raising money to build wells for developing nations around the world. Along the way, they set a record. The rainbow assortment of church members and community guests who trod the slippery streets of Smyrna — a community of 56,000 about 20 miles southeast of Nashville — raised \$60,000 for



Participants trek through the town of Smyrna, Tenn., as part of a Walk4Water fundraiser for building water wells.



PHOTOS BY TED PARKS

Rain falls on church members and community guests during the event.

Healing Hands International. The recent fundraiser drew the most participants ever for a Walk4Water event benefiting the Nashville-based humanitarian aid organization, which is associated with Churches of Christ. Greater Together, a group of Nashville-area congregations that organized four rousing multi-congregational worship gatherings last summer, coordinated the Walk4Water. The event followed a similar format to Healing Hands fundraisers hosted by churches across the country. Walk4Water raises awareness about people in other nations who travel on foot nearly four miles to get water, explained Healing Hands coordinator Sean Judge. Walkers make donations and inspire others to give to the ministry of drilling wells. See WALK4WATER, Page 14

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See **IDABEL**, Page 12



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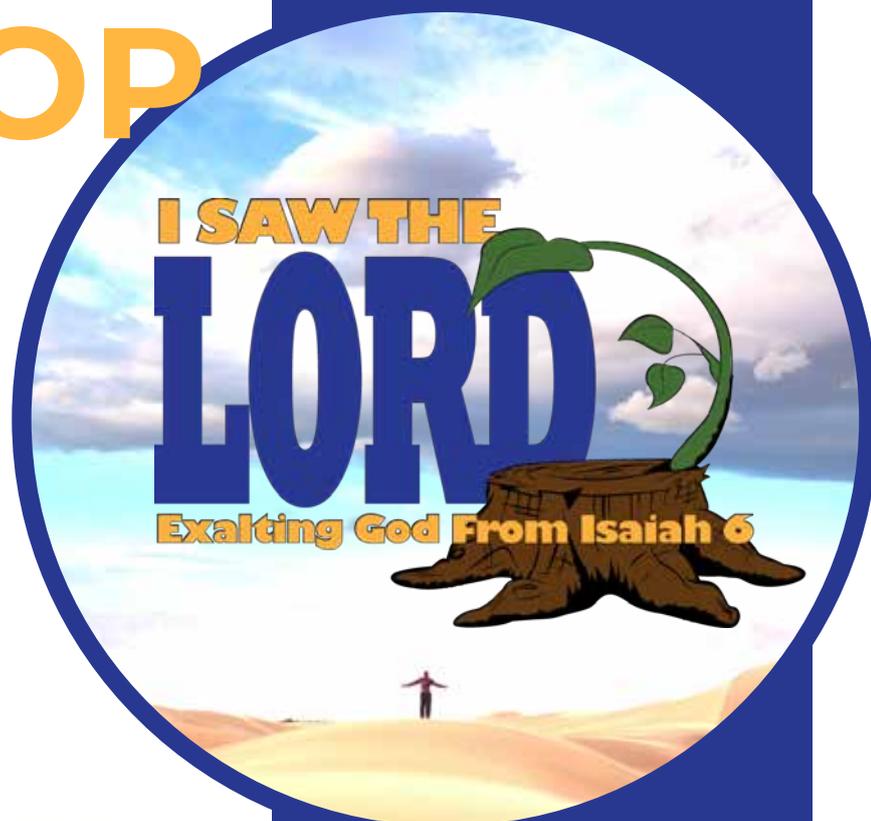
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See **WALK4WATER**, Page 14

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JEFF WALKER

JOE WELLS

GREG WATSON

RALPH GILMORE

CHRIS MCCURLEY

DARRIUS WOODS

PAUL DOWELL

BILL WATKINS

BILLY MCGUIGGAN

**...I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne (v.1). ...As the terebinth and the oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land (v. 13).**



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## A first-timer's lessons learned on a cruise ship

COZUMEL, Mexico

God's creation is amazing and even breathtaking.

That's true all the time.

But sometimes I need reminding.

My wife, Tamie, and I recently

### Inside Story



Bobby Ross Jr.

joined our son Brady, daughter-in-law Mary and grandchildren Bennett, 4, and Norah, 1, on a Caribbean cruise.

In my 55 years, I've helicoptered across Israel, ridden a train through Europe and driven past "Moose Crossing" signs — and even stopped to snap a photo of an actual moose — in Alaska. As a kid, I enjoyed donning an orange life jacket and fishing from my grandfather's motorboat on the Mississippi River.

But the closest I ever came to a ship was watching reruns of "Love Boat," the popular TV series that aired from 1977 to 1987.

We boarded the Grandeur of the Seas — owned and operated by Royal Caribbean International — in Galveston, Texas. The first thing that struck me was just how big the ship was. It's 916 feet long with 11 decks and room for 2,446 passengers, according to an online profile.

For any experts reading this, I realize (thanks to my wife) that Grandeur, built in 1986, is actually Royal Caribbean's smallest

See **CRUISE**, Page 4



BOBBY ROSS JR.

Kristen Mazza visits with Charlotte Ervin at Christian Care Centers' campus in Mesquite, Texas.

## CEO leads ministry through bankruptcy

**AMID FINANCIAL TROUBLES,** *Christian Care Centers Inc. in Dallas-Fort Worth area sold to new owners.*

**BY BOBBY ROSS JR. AND NATALIE WALTERS**  
THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

### MESQUITE, Texas

In telling her life story, Sabrina Porter starts with her troubled childhood.

She recounts the sexual abuse she endured from age 4 until she turned 11.

"I didn't know God," she said. "I grew up in a Catholic church with the man sitting right next to me who was my perpetrator. So I didn't believe that God was there."

Porter, now 59, relates her personal trauma as she reflects on why her latest challenge — leading Texas-based Christian Care Centers Inc. through bankruptcy and a sale to new owners — does not faze her.

She's focused, she said, on helping the 75-year-old ministry, which has been associated with Churches of Christ since its start in 1947,

See **CHRISTIAN CARE**, Page 24



BOBBY ROSS JR.

Sabrina Porter, president and CEO of Christian Care Centers Inc., at her office in Mesquite, Texas.

## Enrollment outlook: It's complicated

**FOR CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES,** latest figures reflect positive and negative trends.

**BY CALVIN COCKRELL | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE**

Are Christian universities in trouble?

Yes — and no. In terms of keeping their overall numbers up, they're doing OK. In terms of bringing in students from Churches of Christ — not so much.

Twelve universities from nine states make up Trace Hebert's list of higher education institutions associated with Churches of Christ.



Hebert

Hebert — associate provost for research and graduate studies and director of the doctoral program in education at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn. — has published an annual report on enrollment trends to the presidents of those schools for a decade.

Prior to the closing of Ohio Valley University in Vienna, W.Va., last year, 13 institutions met his criteria. Some don't because of their specialized nature or lack of residential campus — like Heritage Christian University and Amridge University in Alabama. Additionally, Southwestern Christian College, a historically Black college in Texas, has chosen not to participate in Hebert's research.

Specifically, Hebert tracks the number of FTIACS — first time in any college students. The acronym, put plainly, is the

See **ENROLLMENT**, Page 26

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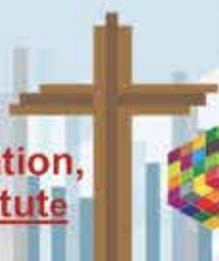
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BOBBY ROSS JR.

Tamie Ross watches the sunrise on a recent Caribbean cruise with her family.

## CRUISE: Experience provides reminders

FROM PAGE 3

vessel and its oldest still sailing. Nonetheless, it sure impressed me! The cruise experience itself provided a few important reminders:

- **Embrace the beauty of everyday life:** Every morning, Tamie and I got up before sunrise and took an elevator to an upper deck.

As the wind blew our hair, we stood in awe, surrounded by water as far as we could see.

We watched as the darkness in the distance turned to a beautiful horizon of orange, yellow and purple. The morning rays slowly revealed a blue sky and patches of white and gray clouds.

The sun rises and sets even when I'm on dry land. I need to stop and marvel at God's creation more often.

- **Show love and kindness to others:** I know the ship crew members depend on tips, so treating passengers well is crucial to their livelihood.

Still, I wonder what might happen if we Christians worked as hard to connect with strangers as our cabin steward and waiters did.

Verda, the crew member who stood at the door to the dining room where we ate lunch the first day, greeted us with a smile and cheerfully asked our names. The next day — after interacting with hundreds of other passengers — she remembered our first names. No, we were not wearing name tags.

- **Remember to be present — really present — with loved ones:** After leaving the harbor in Galveston, the ship had no cell phone service. Passengers could buy access to WiFi, but the price

was exorbitant (full disclosure: I paid it). Even then, the signal was spotty (meaning I had no choice but to unplug most of the time).

The lack of online connections meant families such as ours actually paid attention to each other when we gathered for meals. Without constant techno-distractions, we talked and laughed without interruptions (except for the waiter bringing dessert, and we welcomed that).

The final morning, the ship arrived back at the harbor for disembarking. I couldn't help but notice the difference at breakfast. With 5G service returned, the normal chatter gave way to tables full of silent people holding forks in one hand and smartphones in the other. Everyone's head seemed to be pointed down at a screen.

That change did not seem like an improvement.

- **Take time to rest:** We live in a world that tends to *go, go, go* and never slow down. But Jesus taught us the importance of rest.

In fact, I seem to recall our Lord and Savior taking a nap on a boat (see Mark 4). So, it appears, going on a cruise is biblical.

Seriously, we lounged by the ship pool and enjoyed relaxing excursions to two Mexican tourist spots. We took advantage of all-you-can-eat soft-serve cones and enjoyed listening to live music.

We returned home refreshed and rejuvenated and more mindful than ever of God's amazing and even breathtaking creation.

**BOBBY ROSS JR.** is editor-in-chief of *The Christian Chronicle*. Contact [bobby@christianchronicle.org](mailto:bobby@christianchronicle.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@bobbyross](https://twitter.com/bobbyross).



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6. Strengthen and enhance church relationships.

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# Churches embrace hope, change

**THE KINGDOM WILL SUSTAIN** *as congregations adapt and cooperate with others.*

BY CHERYL MANN BACON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

## ABILENE, Texas

**T**he church is in jeopardy, but the kingdom is not in question.”

My friend Randy Harris, author and professor emeritus at Abilene Christian University, told me that several months ago as we talked about how the church we love is shrinking, merging, closing, struggling, changing.

He was paraphrasing theologian James Bryan Smith, who often says, “The kingdom is not in trouble, and neither are you.” But I liked Harris’ version better, because I’ve spent most of a year talking to people at churches in jeopardy.

## Perspective



Cheryl Mann Bacon

Harris’ words stayed with me as I crisscrossed the country visiting congregations that were experiencing those transitions. Churches that had closed or merged or fought and failed to reinvent themselves. And churches that succeeded in finding a new way.

“The kingdom is not in question.”

That seems to be the thrust of Jesus’ parables in the Sermon on the Mount.

*The kingdom is like a mustard seed.*

*The kingdom is like yeast.*

*The kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field.*

Members of Churches of Christ sometimes view church history as something that happened in the first century and resumed with the Restoration Movement. But the church persisted in the 1,700 years in between, consistent with God’s promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

So where have all the churches gone?



The outside of the Skillman Church of Christ building in Dallas. The sanctuary at the Skillman church has not been used for worship for over two years.

## SOME STRUGGLE, OTHERS FIND HOPE

Readers have asked what has happened to congregations in the series. Perhaps they thought those stories foreshadowed their own.

A couple of the congregations — the Ragsdale Church of Christ in Tennessee and the Peabody Street Church of Christ in Edna, Texas — no longer exist. The Peabody property was taken over by another local congregation that in turn sold it to one of its elders, who plans to lease it.

The Ragsdale congregation in Manchester, Tenn., conducted its last service in March. That building will be torn down and returned to farmland. For now it still stands, vacant. Kenny Smartt and his mother, whose father gave the acreage for the building

more than 70 years ago, now attend the nearby East Main Church of Christ. He said the last handful of former Ragsdale members scattered to different locations.

“We run into each other ever so often,” Smartt said.

Some congregations are still struggling. Others believe they’ve found new direction.

The Highland Oaks Church of Christ in Dallas sold its building and bought a smaller one just half a mile away. While it’s being renovated they meet each Sunday in the fellowship hall of their old, massive facility, renting it for \$1 a month from the

new owners. Attendance is down a bit, according to elder Barry Packer. Some of that, he said, may be attributed to the congregation’s



PHOTOS BY CHERYL MANN BACON

Members of the Ragsdale Church of Christ in Manchester, Tenn., stand outside before their final service.

decision to fully include women in worship and leadership. Maybe not.

Regardless, after debts were paid, the new building purchased and funds allotted for its renovation, a \$4 million endowment was created. Packer said endowment earnings will be used to expand the congregation’s caring and sharing ministries beyond the regular budget.

He hopes other congregations facing similar transitions won’t see them as negatives: “We have been able to see them as ways in which God has reinvented a very hopeful future for us. We’re leaning strongly into what God is doing in the midst of this.”

Mergers have helped some congregations survive and even thrive.

In Nashville, the Otter Creek Church of Christ now meets in two locations. The shrinking West End Church of Christ formally became part of Otter Creek about two years ago, but the merger prompted legal

See **CHURCHES**, Page 8



# CHURCHES: Hope and a future are promised

FROM PAGE 7

issues resulting from deed restrictions on a portion of the West End property dating back to the 1940s. Preaching minister Josh Graves said those matters are now close to resolution.

“We are now one church with two campuses,” Graves said. “This means we have one vision, one eldership, one ministry staff, etc.” Otter Creek is in suburban Brentwood, south of Nashville. West End is near Vanderbilt University, about 10 miles away.

The two campuses draw about 1,250 worshipers to three Sunday services and host a combined 13 recovery groups during the week. Both have thriving preschool programs with about 250 students representing eight languages.

Graves encourages congregations facing similar transitions to be bold and gracious.

“Don’t let the voices of fear make decisions for the future of your church,” Graves said in an email. “Jesus lived with incredible courage, but many of our churches live in fear and timidity. The United States is now a post-Christian (secular-ish) culture. New times call for new ways of living the old and beautiful Jesus Story.”

Two small, predominantly Black congregations in Cincinnati merged to form the Church of Christ at Kennedy Heights.

Minister Greg Jasper said attendance has averaged about 80 since the unification in March. “We are slowly seeing the numbers tick upward as time moves on,” Jasper said, “and I am optimistic the trend will continue.”

He encouraged struggling congregations to consider unification.

Jasper said it helps to not officially close churches but instead bring them together to pool resources, gifts and talents, which can ultimately build the kingdom of God.

“It just takes hard work and a willingness to step out of one’s comfort zone,” the minister said.



CHERYL MANN BACON

Graham Clifford, minister for the former La Mesa Church of Christ, with wife Brianna.

The Skillman Church of Christ in Dallas considered becoming a satellite of The Hills congregation in suburban Fort Worth but couldn’t move beyond its comfort zone. A merger that required a two-thirds majority failed by two votes on June 12.

Skillman’s attendance has dropped about 20 percent since then, according to elder David Williams, but about 10 percent of those present on Sundays are visitors looking for a church home.

Of the 80 or so who remain, some are searching for the more contemporary worship opportunities that would have accompanied a merger, Williams wrote in an email, and others are looking for a congregation with children.

“Some are disappointed and hurt by the way members treated each other,” he said. “And some are continuing to grieve for the past.”

Don Hebbard, author of “Healing Hurting Churches,” has been retained to work through what Williams calls “an intentional healing transition.”

Hebbard, a marriage and family therapy professor at the online Amberton University, has a private

consulting practice and also partners with ACU’s Siburt Institute and the Hope Network, organizations that help struggling churches. His special niche, he said, is churches “that are in really bad shape.” When he signs on, it’s for the long haul, often two years or more.

In addition to talking with leadership and members, Hebbard preaches at Skillman. He describes his sermons as storytelling, healing-oriented messages.

Hebbard said the wounds churches suffer — things like exhaustion, incompetence, narcissism and sexuality crises including predators or affairs — are not limited to any one type of congregation. The wounds span all church types, any denomination, any style, any niche on the progressive to conservative spectrum.

“It’s just people,” he said. “It’s human beings.”

Of all the churches I visited, the La Mesa Church of Christ in San Diego has undergone the most dramatic transition. On Aug. 28 it celebrated its 83rd anniversary in the small community center where members have worshiped since selling their large building over a year ago. The next week they met for the first time as Kindred Church in the small office and community center they’ve purchased and renovated in the heart of La Mesa’s downtown business district.

Selling the old building enabled a partnership with Heritage 21 and other foundations to support church planting and rejuvenation in San Diego County for years to come, said Graham Clifford, minister at La Mesa.

“Even without the pandemic’s help, we were facing a slow death,” Clifford said. “We were in debt beyond our means. Our aging building needed constant major repairs. And worst of all, we weren’t connecting with the community.

“But God spoke clearly to us ... and we decided it was better to go down fighting for the cause of Christ in our community,” he added. “This new vision brought us hope.”

**‘God spoke clearly to us ... and we decided it was better to go down fighting for the cause of Christ in our community.’**

Graham Clifford, about the decision to sell the church building but remain a congregation.

## COLD WATER REALITIES

Christians today indulge in hyperbole if they insist declining attendance is evidence of persecution by the world. American Christians have no valid claim to persecution compared to the first century martyrs or the 21st century imprisonment and torture of Christians in Sudan and

elsewhere. Nevertheless, Christians in today’s culture often feel like strangers in a strange land.

The prophet Jeremiah was writing to children of Israel exiled in Babylon when he sent a word from the Lord that’s apt for today’s wanderers:

*“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and*

a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you.”

To engage that hope, today’s churches must embrace some jarring, cold water realities.

1. The pandemic didn’t cause this. Not a single church featured in this series could say its decline began in 2020. Indeed, most had been declining for decades. The pandemic didn’t help. But blaming COVID-19 for the decline of local congregations is scapegoating a virus.

2. Similar churches are different, but they have common problems. Frequent but simplistic explanations — “The church became too progressive” or “The church became too conservative” — are just wrong.

Progressive and conservative labels vary so widely from place to place they border on meaningless anyway. I’ve encountered instrumental worship in churches with very conservative ideologies. And I’ve talked with churches who treasured their traditional, non-instrumental worship but installed women as elders. The differences in leadership structures between Black and White churches have existed for decades. The list goes on.

We are a fellowship that has fought battles and divided congregations over kitchens, Bible translations and the Holy Spirit. We’ve never all been alike. Do we really imagine the Jerusalem church bore much resemblance to the one in Corinth? Yet, they were the body of Christ, differences and all. He’s that big.

3. We are not alone in this, and we can learn from others. Within our own borders, numerous organizations exist to help struggling congregations find their feet or find a way to close their doors but preserve their legacy. No congregation has all the answers. Failing to get help is a mark of pride, not autonomy.

We can also learn from other believers facing similar struggles. Pew Research says the U.S. is mov-

**‘No congregation has all the answers. Failing to get help is a mark of pride, not autonomy.’**

**Cheryl Mann Bacon**, about the reality of church closures.



CHERYL MANN BACON

Members of the Kennedy Heights Church of Christ in Cincinnati gather to worship.

ing steadily toward Christianity being a plurality, not a majority. Churches of Christ are not the only ones bailing rising water. Episcopal and Methodist churches have divided over LGBTQ issues. Catholics and Southern Baptists have been traumatized by sexual scandals at the highest levels of leadership. We can learn from their mistakes and their successes as they have sought ways to heal, move forward and serve.

Jesus said, “Whoever is not against you is for you.” It’s time to take him seriously.

4. Compromise is not a dirty word. Neither is cooperation. Of the many congregations

I talked with, all but one were in cities where neighboring congregations presented options to members whose preferences didn’t align with the direction of the church they were attending, making it easier to pull up stakes rather than do the hard work of compromise and cooperation.

A struggling congregation in the Midwest closed because the only other nearby Church of Christ declined to fellowship with them

when they couldn’t agree about every item on a list of doctrinal and practice particulars. So, for lack of compromise, a congregation closed, and members sought church homes with other fellowships.

The apostle Paul knew something about adapting to different cultures and different people when he wrote, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”

5. Focusing internally instead of externally will never yield growth. Jesus said, “Go into all the world,” not “Go to the elders and complain.”

An external focus will not look the same for every church. Perhaps door-knocking is still an option somewhere, but if I don’t open the door of my home to unknown solicitors, why would I expect someone to open their door to me? Outreach in the 21st century may mean social media evangelism or a soup kitchen or a preschool or a fall festival or a laundromat ministry.

Creatively sharing the love of Jesus is an endeavor with infinite potential.

#### HOPE IS REQUIRED

Throughout this year I talked to experts, ministers, elders, academics and lots of sad, grieving churchgoers. None would guess what the

church may look like in a decade, much less 50 years or beyond. Some doubt it will exist.

I disagree. Tomorrow’s church may not look the same, but it will sustain.

For 2,000 years the church has met in homes and in hiding, in blond brick buildings, roadside chapels and sprawling multi-structure campuses along city freeways. Jeff Childers, director of the Center for the Study of Ancient Religious Texts at ACU, said the earliest architectural record of a church building dates to around 250. Before that, Christians met in house churches and synagogues.

“The gathering space often symbolizes something deeper about what is happening in terms of community formation and missional impact,” Childers said.

Yet church buildings of this century and the last — both simple and splendid — stand empty or welcome a handful of worshipers to sanctuaries that once greeted hundreds or thousands. The trend is not in dispute. Perhaps it’s time for a different kind of gathering space.

Readers of a certain age may hear a melody in the name of the series. The 1960s folk tune made popular by Peter, Paul and Mary begins its cultural morality tale with, “Where have all the flowers gone?”

To young girls, who went to husbands, who became soldiers, who died and went to graveyards that gave way to flowers.

“When will they ever learn?” the chorus repeats. “When will they ever learn?”

When Jesus comes.

We’ll learn the answers when Jesus comes.

“The Kingdom of God survived the Roman Empire and everything else that’s come along, and it will still be around when the world comes to an end,” Harris told me. “It’s sustained by God, not by humans.”

Hope is required of us, and hope is promised.

Hope and a future.

**CHERYL MANN BACON** is a *Christian Chronicle* contributing editor who served for 20 years as chair of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Abilene Christian University. Contact [cheryl@christianchronicle.org](mailto:cheryl@christianchronicle.org).



## Cancer Touches Africans, Too

CANCER IS FRIGHTENING in any culture but is often a death sentence in Africa, where treatment is limited. While some basic cancer treatment has been provided, missionary OB-GYN Dr. Bob Whittaker is now able to do more to help women at the Mathangeni Church of Christ Clinic in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland).

- Screenings for African women dealing with "female cancers"
- Performed 47 colposcopies/biopsies and 9 Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedures in one month alone
- Unfortunately, the cost affects the number of people able to be served, limiting care
- Equipment needed to treat is expensive

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# Mid-Atlantic leaders meet to craft ideas for growth

**'GOD ALWAYS RAISES** men in perilous times to lead his people,' one Maryland minister declares.

BY HAMIL R. HARRIS | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

COLLEGE PARK, Md.

Nearly 200 leaders and members of Churches of Christ gathered at the University of Maryland College Park to exchange ideas about growing congregations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Attendees represented 23 congregations stretching from Virginia to Connecticut and New York. The recent event, "Leadership In Perilous Times: Let Us Wake Up and Strengthen What Remains!" was organized by ministers from Maryland and several Mid-Atlantic states and led by Tony Roach, evangelist for the Minda Street Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas.

Willie Hubbard, minister for the District Heights Church of Christ in Maryland, said, "The purpose of the Mid-Atlantic Leadership Conference is to be refreshed, revived and restored so that we may strengthen that which remains."

Hubbard said everyone was negatively impacted during the pandemic, leaving many church leaders wounded and ministries brought to a halt or crawl. He said leaders were left asking, "How do we proceed?" and "Where do we go from here?"

"God always raises men in perilous times to lead his people," Hubbard said. "We are dealing in a counterculture right now, and the world is calling for the church to stand up. But the church can't do what it's supposed to do until its leaders turn back to God."

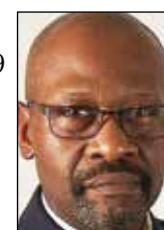
The nine-hour event Oct. 29 began with a breakfast panel discus-

sion moderated by Roach. The panel featured ministers from three Maryland congregations: Ed Maxwell of the Clinton Church of Christ, Willie Rupert of the Central Church of Christ in Baltimore and Kevin Bethea of the East Baltimore Church of Christ.

Maxwell told the audience that COVID-19 brought a faith challenge to churches, and Bethea said, "COVID opened the eyes to the frailty that existed in the church."



Roach



Hubbard

Rupert agreed. "It challenged our values and beliefs," the Central congregation minister said. "For those who were strong in the faith, COVID made them stronger. And for those weak in the faith, COVID made them weaker." Church leaders and spouses later broke into groups. In one session, Bruce McClure, a licensed counselor and minister for the Prince George's Church of Christ in Landover, Md., said many church leaders have become wounded or burned out after years of ministry.

"The challenges that we have experienced over the past two

**'The challenges ... have placed a great stress on church leaders and their ministries.'**

Bruce McClure, licensed counselor and minister

years have placed a great stress on church leaders and their ministries," McClure said. "Each leader has personally faced the challenges of his spiritual and physical health as well as his mental health, the safety of his family and the church

family, personal finances and the question of what and who to believe?"

"We were unprepared for many of those trials," he added, "and because of those challenges, we all lost something. Those experiences wounded us with the symptoms of grief — sorrow, distress and anxiety."



BONNIE HOWARD

## Oklahoma congregation celebrates a century of serving its community

Nearly 1,100 current and former members of the Edmond Church of Christ in Oklahoma pray during a Nov. 6 assembly marking the congregation's 100th anniversary. Preaching minister Randy Roper's sermon focused on the "Deep Roots, Wide Reach" of the church north of Oklahoma City. Executive minister Kent Risley announced the congregation's latest plan to serve its community: construction of a \$1.6 million gathering place with amenities including a walking trail with a meditation station and a pavilion with an amphitheater. Former Edmond ministers David Duncan, Alan Martin, Jake Perkins and Bob Young taught special adult Bible classes.

### KENTUCKY

**LOUISVILLE** — The Midwest Church of Christ encouraged its neighbors to take care of their physical wellness by hosting an annual health screening day.

In one group, Christians and community members gathered recently in the church's gym to focus on various types of wellness. Women and children carried hula hoops to participate in a free physical fitness class. In another, visitors enjoyed healthy food while learning about nutrition. Booths on health education lined the walls of the room.

Healthcare providers also transformed classrooms into vaccine and cholesterol testing clinics. Outside, the Norton Mobile Unit offered free mammograms to women over 40 years old.

The following Sunday the church addressed spiritual health — while wearing pink to raise awareness about breast cancer.

### OHIO

**ALBANY** — The Airline Church of Christ is serving those who have served. Members recently sponsored "Boxes for Vets," which is an outreach that encourages veterans in long-term care facilities at the Chillicothe Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

The Airline congregation has worked with organizations to provide care packages for four units at the hospital, the *Athens Messenger* reported. The care packages contain items ranging from personal hygiene to puzzles and books.

Veterans in attendance at the Airline church were also honored during a recent Sunday morning service. They received gifts from the congregation afterward.

### TEXAS

**TEXARKANA** — Two Texas congregations recently worked together to pack over 200 boxes of food for their community.

The Walnut Church of Christ and the Westside Church of Christ jointly hosted the distribution at the Westside building. Packages with cans of vegetables, meat, rice, pasta and other nonperishable food items were made available to the community at no charge.

The Westside church's food pantry ministry began over 20 years ago to meet the needs of families in Texarkana. The congregation also boxes and distributes food monthly.

### WEST VIRGINIA

**ROCK** — The Duhring Church of Christ celebrated its 154th homecoming recently with a special Sunday service and a fellowship dinner for the members.

"Tomorrow is our 154-year homecoming for a church that's had many great worship services, many great people that have walked through these doors and wonderful fellowship," the church shared on its

Facebook page.

Founded in the 1800s, the Duhring church survived the collapse of its building in an early 1900s storm before being repaired and moved to its current location by horses and wagons, according to the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*.



PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK.COM/BAKERDIANNA

The Duhring Church of Christ building.

# IDABEL: Testimony and tears

FROM PAGE 1

After the Nov. 4 storm, the building became the base of Red Cross operations.

The twister destroyed or damaged at least 228 homes, according to Cody McDaniel, McCurtain County's emergency management director. It also destroyed the Trinity Baptist Church and damaged the Kingdom Hall Jehovah's Witness sanctuary.

Another tornado that night killed a man in the Pickens area of McCurtain County, about 36 miles north of Idabel.

Red Cross administrators called Bypass leaders after the storm passed and moved their operations into the center that Saturday morning.

"Our (county's) emergency manager actually put this building on top priority because we are a shelter," said Jerry Falling, Bypass youth minister. "So he made sure they came in here and got our electricity up and running as soon as they could."

But this wasn't the first time the church partnered with the Red Cross.

When a women's addiction treatment center flooded a few years ago, patients were brought to the Bypass church for overnight shelter. In 2021 the Red Cross used the church building and parking lot as a COVID-19 vaccine clinic site.

"When we have anything that needs shelter here in McCurtain County, this is our first frontline place to come to," Wilson said. "Unless, of course, it's at the north end of the county or something to that effect."

"The graciousness of the church to provide this building has been absolutely wonderful for this county," she added.

## 'WE KNEW IT WAS COMING'

Hours before the Red Cross arrived that Saturday morning, Bypass minister Rodney Watson, Falling and several other church families sought shelter themselves in the building, listening to the storm raging outside.

"We were watching," Watson said. "We knew it was coming. We knew it was going to be bad. We knew that we might take a direct hit. ... We could hear the tornado. We could see power flashes in the distance. We knew it was getting close."

Then the tornado turned less than a mile from the Bypass church, moving away from the auditorium and into the

surrounding neighborhoods.

"Everybody in our congregation knows somebody who has experienced some damage," Watson said.

Falling joined Jesse Phipps, a Bypass deacon who is the chief of the Ringold Volunteer Fire Department, about 32 miles northwest of Idabel, for search and rescue after the tornado.

Following Idabel's path of destruction, the fellow Christians worked their way through the neighborhoods — by vehicle and on foot when trees blocked the road.

"My heart skipped about four beats as we went south, to the road that you turned to go to my house," Falling recalled. "The houses on either side, I mean, just obliterated."

Jon Hilton's house was one of those Falling saw. Hilton had been at home with his family, three dogs and several friends when the tornado hit, pinning them for several seconds in the main hall before tearing off the roof.

"My brother and I actually watched the roof just disappear above us," Hilton said. Yet, despite the structural damage, everyone inside was unharmed.

The community has rallied to help Hilton's family since the disaster.

"We've had the Red Cross come out, and they've given us some tarps and have helped with that," Hilton said.

"Across the street, my neighbor, he's been bulldozing stuff, moving stuff, trying to help out. The entire community has really kind of come together and tried to help each other."

"Whether they go to church or not, everybody is saying, 'I just thank God,'" Falling said. "With sudden disasters like this, there seems to be a faith to it."

That was evident that Sunday at the Bypass church. Members came together to worship — and cry — after spending the weekend helping with relief efforts.

"Instead of a regular sermon, we had a sharing time when folks gave testimony of how the Lord protected them and really how they had seen God at work in the midst of this," Watson said. "We had tears. We had some laughter. It was a time in which we honored the Lord and were able to thank him for his protection."



Jon Hilton stands on the ceiling crossbeams of his house during sunset on Nov. 6.



Jesse Phipps, chief of the Ringold Volunteer Fire Department, organizes groups of volunteers on a whiteboard in the Bypass Church of Christ lobby.



Electrical teams work through the night in Idabel, Okla., after a Nov. 4 tornado left the rural community without power.



Falling



The interior of a bedroom in Jon Hilton's home is exposed to the outdoors after a tornado ripped the roof off during a weekend storm in November.



PHOTOS BY AUDREY JACKSON

Dee Wilson, center, coordinates disaster relief at the Bypass Church of Christ building.

### Full-time Youth Minister - Ovilla, Texas

The **Ovilla Church of Christ** is seeking a full-time Youth Minister with a passion for discipling young people with the gospel. The young adult male candidate needs to have a heart for working and relating well with youth between the ages of 12 to 18, their parents, and other adult volunteers in the church. We are seeking someone who has an excellent knowledge of the scriptures and is able to teach the young people God's Word and how it relates to them in their lives. A degree from a Christian university is preferred but not required. Ability to lead singing is a plus. We are a congregation of about 125 families with an active youth group of about 25 teens. We are a "bedroom" community in the DFW area, about 25 miles south of Dallas, Texas. Interested applicants should contact:

**Michael Elrod, Minister • Cell: 972-515-9689 • Email: melrod55@gmail.com**  
or contact one of the elders: **Steven Grosshuesch, Huey Hamilton,**  
or **Johnny Knight** at the church: 972-617-7447

### Pacific church of Christ - Minister

**Our Congregation:** The Pacific, Mo., church of Christ is looking to hire a full-time minister. Established in 1955, our average attendance is around 60 on a Sunday morning, of which 20 are school age or younger. Our congregation is led by the men as we strive to love and serve God as well as love and save our neighbors. Jerrie and Gail Barber have been working with us for the last year.

**Our Future Minister:** Our future minister will be enthusiastic for the Lord. He will project as well as live out a sound doctrine. Our minister will have a desire and commitment to work under the oversight of the men of the congregation. He will serve as a preacher, teacher, counselor, and comforter to the members of the congregation as well as to the local community. With love for people and excellent communication skills, he will enjoy working with our kids and their families and will have a passion for reaching out to the community to make disciples for Christ.

**Our Community:** The City of Pacific, Mo., located in both Franklin and St. Louis Counties, has approximately 7,500 residents. Pacific is located along Historic Route 66 with the Union Pacific and the Burlington Northern Railroads running through our city. St. Louis lies to the northeast, reachable via U.S. Interstate Highway 44. The St. Louis area is home to Cardinal baseball, Blues hockey, Six Flags, the St. Louis Zoo, and the Gateway Arch.

**Our Consideration:** To receive our consideration for this position, please forward your resume, links to three sermon videos, and three letters of recommendation with their phone and email contact information to one of the addresses below. A complete job description will be sent upon receipt of the requested information, or contact us for details.

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# WALK4WATER: Event grew out of Greater Together

FROM PAGE 1

in Africa and other continents.

At the Smyrna event, participants could walk a full four miles or opt for shorter courses.

“Welcome to the largest Walk4Water in the history of Walk4Water,” Judge told cheering participants in the Smyrna Church of Christ parking lot.

The biggest walk before Smyrna took place in 2015 in Paducah, Ky., as 677 people participated. The Greater Together walk broke the record with 933 people, Judge said. Healing Hands began Walk4Water in 2007.

“This is what we want to see across the nation,” Judge told the exuberant crowd. “We want people coming together not only to make a difference for lives around the world but to show that we are one community.”

The Smyrna event far exceeded the initial goal of \$15,000 and two wells. The \$60,000 raised will fund eight wells.

Aaron Tremblay, minister for the Smyrna Church of Christ, described the walk as the next step in the growing collaboration by six Nashville-area congregations.

“All of our elderships and us as ministers, we all agreed that this needs to continue. ... We need to kind of ride the wave,” Tremblay said. “What could we engage in together that would have a tangible result and would involve all of us? One of the first things that came up was Walk4Water.”

Eager to choose the best site, the ministers picked Smyrna — centrally located for many of the walkers and an easier site to organize a walk than Nashville, the leaders said.

Tremblay praised his fellow preachers’ spirit of cooperation. There were no squabbles over location or who would get the glory.

“We don’t care whose church it’s at,” Tremblay said. “It’s not about churches getting the credit. It’s about God getting the credit.”

With the group’s decision made,



TED PARKS

Despite the rain, participants smile as they make their way across Smyrna, Tenn., during the Walk4Water event. Greater Together, a collaborative effort that began with five Nashville-area churches, coordinated the event.

the Smyrna minister met with town officials to determine the route. While Walk4Water events often take place inside parks or in wooded areas, Tremblay said, he wanted a more central location.

“I wanted to push for a ... gathering that would have more visibility,” he said. “I wanted to do that ... for the community outreach aspect because I didn’t want the community to feel like this is just a Church of Christ thing. I wanted the community to feel like this is a community thing.”

## ‘THIS IS A COMMUNITY THING’

Tremblay proposed a route to Smyrna town manager Brian Hercules that would begin and end at a prominent park, not the church, hoping to avoid the impression that the walk was just for church members.

Hercules rejected the proposal, concerned that using the public park would set an unwanted precedent, Tremblay said. But the town manager came up with an alternative.

The Smyrna official did more than help plan the walk. He attended.

“They trusted me ... and it worked out very well, and here we are at their church,” Hercules said. “It’s a great event. ... Look at this crowd and the diversity of our community coming together.”

Town officials were not the only people Tremblay found supportive. He did a 45-minute interview about Walk4Water with a local radio station and spoke about the event at the Rotary Club. The Junior ROTC program at nearby LaVergne High School furnished cadets to help police with traffic control.

Local businesses displayed posters, and some signed up to participate. One convenience store put the Walk4Water flyer right under a beer sign.

Growing out of informal meetings among ministers, Greater Together originally included four Churches of Christ besides Smyrna: Antioch, Tusculum and Rural Hill, all southeast of Nashville, along with the Jackson Street congregation in Nashville. A sixth congregation, the Una Church of Christ, which is in Nashville but near Antioch, recently

joined the effort.

Antioch and Rural Hill have significant percentages of White, Black and Hispanic members. Jackson Street is predominantly Black.

Smyrna’s Tremblay, Antioch minister Patterson Morgan, Rural Hill minister Joshua Jackson and Jackson Street minister Christopher Jackson are relatively new to the area. Darrick Shepherd joined the Una church as its preacher on Sept. 1.

Tusculum pulpit minister Mark Adams grew up in Nashville but has only been at the congregation since January 2022 after moving back to Tennessee from Texas.

“All the rest of these guys are from other places, and none of us has been at our existing congregation for all that long,” Adams explained, “and so, for them, they don’t have any presuppositions or baggage about why we couldn’t do anything together.”

## LIVING WATER

Organizers viewed the Greater Together Walk4Water event not only as a way to bring awareness about water — but also to evangelize.



TED PARKS

Alex Morgan, left, enjoys the ride with her dad, Patterson, minister for the Antioch Church of Christ, as they accompany Emma Hobson and Jon Kincaid from the Smyrna congregation during the Walk4Water event.

“As Christians, it’s not just about doing good things in the world,” Tremblay said. “What we’re really after is having opportunities to share the Gospel with people. ... This whole Walk4Water thing ... it’s really just creating a platform for us to bring the community together. But then we get to present them with the Gospel.”

“The people ... that we’re trying to reach who don’t necessarily go to church, or who haven’t been to church in a while, or who have no desire to go to church, they wouldn’t necessarily be opposed to coming out and walking,” said Rural Hill’s Jackson. “So it opens it up for the community to participate and not just the church to participate.”

A brief worship service followed the walk and preceded a cookout at the Smyrna church. In a brief message, Anthony Walker, minister for the Highway 231 Church of Christ in Murfreesboro, brought together the afternoon’s themes.

“I want to tell you ... about a woman who actually in the Bible walked for water,” Walker said, turning to the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

He pointed out that Jesus and the woman talked about two types of water — the common kind that

quenches thirst and the spiritual kind that addresses people’s deepest need.

“I’m not a gospel preacher if I don’t tell you about some other water,” Walker said.

For Smyrna church member Maggie Sims, Walk4Water was about more than the satisfaction of completing the course.

“I feel great, but I’m more excited about the accomplishment of the ... wells,” she said after the walk. “There’s all these cars going by and watching, and it’s just a great ... message from Christ.”

Corey Spivey, the Jackson Street church’s assistant minister, almost headed home when he saw the cloudy skies. He was glad he stuck it out.



Spivey

“You see so many different nationalities of people. We don’t look the same,” Spivey said about the event

participants. “But we’ve got the same blood running within us. That’s the blood of Christ.

“I think it’s just a great representation that when we all come together, put all our differences aside ... just the amazing things we can do.”



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## BELIZE

**HATTIEVILLE** — This Central American town was directly in the path of Hurricane Lisa after the Category 1 storm made landfall Nov. 2.

At press time members of the Edgemere Church of Christ in Wichita Falls, Texas, were reaching out to Christians in Belize to assess needs. Missions teams from Edgemere work with Churches of Christ in Hattieville and nearby Burrell Boom. Sherwin Flowers, a leader of the Hattieville church, reported light damage, as did a member of the Burrell Boom church. Power was out across the region.

During a recent mission trip, Edgemere members and Belizean Christians distributed “blessing bags” of supplies to people in need and hosted youth events.

## HAITI

**CAP-HAITIEN** — “Pray for Haiti.”

That’s the resounding, urgent message sent by supporters of churches and ministries across the nation of 11.5 million people, beset by gang violence and inflation in the aftermath of a presidential assassination. Many hospitals are closed. Schools are on hold. Food is available but expensive, and gas is about \$14 per gallon.

“In all of this I hear no complaining from our brothers and sisters in Haiti,” said David Dirrim, American director for the Haitian Christian Foundation, a nonprofit that works with Churches of Christ and the Center for Biblical Training in northern Haiti. “Yes, they long for some relief, but the churches continue to function and spread the Gospel.”

One church in Cap-Haitien recently had four baptisms, Dirrim said.

“All my contacts continue to believe that God is ultimately in control,” he said, “and rest in that hope until he speaks a word of change.”

## NORTHERN IRELAND

**COLERAINE** — “Mixed marriages” are common in this part of the United Kingdom — that is, unions between people from Catholic and Protestant families. The two groups have divided (sometimes violently) over whether Northern Ireland should



FACEBOOK.COM/MITYANACHURCHOFCHRIST

## African church finds reasons to smile

In Mityana, Uganda, Brian Ngobi is all smiles as he becomes a new creation in Christ — while sporting new baptismal clothes provided by the Mityana Church of Christ. The small congregation has endured persecution in recent years, minister Michael Simbwa said. Small fetishes (statues used in animistic religions) were thrown at the church building’s foundation in 2016 while it was under construction. Since then the church has endured multiple disputes regarding its property but recently resolved the matter. “Now the church owns a permanent home,” Simbwa said. “God is good. No more evictions!”

join the Republic of Ireland or remain in the U.K.

As a result, many couples “cut the ties to any form of religion, forfeiting their privilege to the rites of the church such as the sacraments and burial,” said Bert Ritchie, minister for the Church of Christ in Coleraine.

So Ritchie works with grieving fami-



Ritchie

lies to help them have a “meaningful Christian service” for their loved ones. It’s a service that’s increasingly needed. The minister often conducts two or three services per week.

“Why do I serve this ministry?”

It is my conviction that there is no division, no prejudice or difference of opinion which excludes the compassion of Christ being ministered,” Ritchie said, “and if we, his people, cannot show it, then there is little hope for those who grieve.”

## SPOTLIGHT

### In Indonesia, Hope comes in degrees

**GUNUNGSITOLI, Indonesia** — She dug sand out of a riverbed and sold it to construction workers to pay for her school uniform.

Selin Samselinar’s story is common on the island of Nias, and is “an excellent example of why Jochebed’s Hope exists,” said Shawn Tyler.

Tyler, missions coordinator for the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas, recently visited the ministry, which provides housing and support for



Samselinar

Indonesian students to finish their studies. Its name comes from the mother of Moses, who made the heart-wrenching decision to hide her baby in a basket in hopes that he would live.

The ministry was born out of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and an earthquake that devastated Nias three months later. Relief funds sent by Churches of Christ were used to rebuild damaged church buildings and schools. Missionaries used the remaining funds to address the island’s long-term needs, including educational support. Scott and Tracey Cate oversee Jochebed’s Hope, which includes programs that serve orphans and the poor in Indonesia’s capital, Jakarta.

Samselinar completed her bachelor’s degree and found a job as a math teacher. Now she works with Jochebed’s Hope as an administrator.

“She understands the hardships of students who enter the dorms,” Tyler said. “She knows how to encourage the students, and she has passion to help.”

**WEBSITE:** jochebedshope.org

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**It's that time of year** when we all look forward to spending time with family and giving thanks for God's blessings in our lives.

**The time of year when GIVING is on our mind...** Yet there are places in this world where *Thanksgiving and Christmas* have no meaning... where the most innocent, some who have no family, are just wondering where their next meal will come from. And now global inflation has sent the prices of food, medicine and other essentials skyrocketing in the world's poorest nations!



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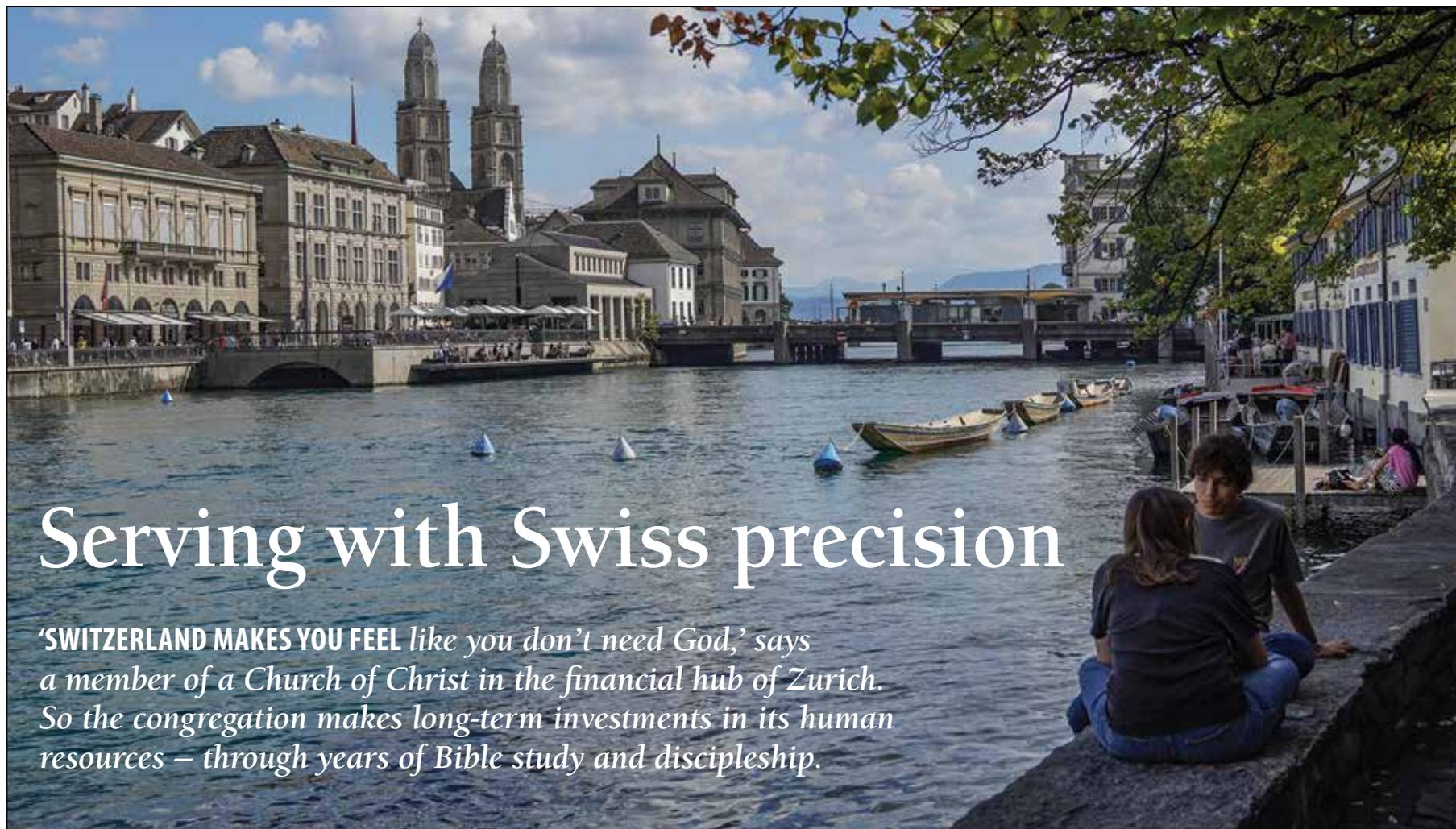
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# Serving with Swiss precision

*'SWITZERLAND MAKES YOU FEEL like you don't need God,' says a member of a Church of Christ in the financial hub of Zurich. So the congregation makes long-term investments in its human resources — through years of Bible study and discipleship.*

ERIK TRYGGESTAD

Zurich residents enjoy a warm Sunday afternoon along the banks of the Limmat River near a memorial for Anabaptists who were drowned for their beliefs.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

## ZURICH

Felix Manz died here in a watery grave.

He was drowned as punishment for his stubborn refusal to recant a belief deemed heretical — that only repentant adult believers, not infants, should be baptized.

“Faith baptism ... was something revolutionary at the time,” Olivier Cuendet, an evangelist for a Church of Christ in Switzerland’s largest city, said as he pointed to a plaque on the banks of the crystal-clear Limmat River. It commemorates Manz, who was cast into the icy water on Jan. 5, 1527, after he sang a full-throated rendition of Psalm 31: *“Into thine hand I commit my spirit.”*

Five centuries later, this hub of the Protestant Reformation — where minister Ulrich Zwingli condoned

the eating of sausages during Lent in defiance of the Catholic Church — is losing its faith.

Less than half of Switzerland’s 8.7 million souls identify as Catholic or Protestant, according to government figures. In the short two decades since the plaque recognizing Manz and five other martyred Anabaptists was dedicated in 2004, the percentage of Swiss over age 15 claiming no religion jumped from 11.4 to 29.5.



Cuendet

Now the pristine church buildings that line the Limmat — Grossmünster, Fraumünster, Wasserkirche — are destinations for tourists, not pilgrims. The city’s true cathedrals house its financial institutions, its world-renowned banks and multina-

tional corporations.

In a city once known for religious disputes — including a heated one between Manz and Zwingli on baptism, not sausages — “the biggest adversity here is a lack of dependence on God,” said Anina Good.

She worships with the Church of Christ, which practices adult baptism by immersion.

Five hundred years after Manz drowned for his belief, “most of us have so much, good jobs,” she said.

“Switzerland makes you feel like you don’t need God. This is what we fight here.”



Good

## 'FROM ONE CRISIS TO THE NEXT'

Missionary Clyde Antwine arrived in Zurich in the summer of 1959 — just in time to watch an angry man

storm out of Bible class.

“It was a confrontation about premillennialism,” he recalled. The Church of Christ (“Gemeinde Christi” in German) was just a few months old, planted by Jack McKinney, a former Navy sailor who served in the Pacific during World War II, and Swiss evangelist Heinrich Blum. Antwine and his wife, Gwen, studied at Abilene Christian University in Texas before following McKinney to Europe.

Swiss German, it turns out, was a bit different from the German Antwine had studied, so he caught only a few words of the heated debate over whether or not Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years.

But the tiff proved to be emblematic of the years to come.

“We seemed to live from one crisis to the next,” said Antwine,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



When asked to describe her congregation, Zurich church member Brigitte Muggler jotted down notes during Sunday worship: "Love each other. Care for your brothers and sisters. Learn from the wisdom of God."



The Swiss Alps provide a majestic backdrop for a farm near the municipality of Walenstadt in eastern Switzerland — close to the country's border with Liechtenstein. Erik Tryggestad shares insight from his visit to the tiny principality on Page 38.

# 'It's one of the larger and stronger churches in Europe'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19  
 who served in Zurich for seven years. "That's going to happen until you have that healthy nucleus. The wolves are going to come in."

## WHY IS THIS CHURCH DIFFERENT?

No wolves were apparent as the Gemeinde Christi gathered for Sunday worship — some 63 years after the Antwines left to serve in Augsburg and other parts of Germany.

More than 60 people smiled, hugged and exchanged stories in the church's meeting place, the bottom floor of an office complex. Though nondescript, the building houses the offices Swiss citizens must visit to get their passports, so giving directions here is easy.

Despite the city's declining church attendance, the congregation is a healthy mix of the gray-haired and the newly married. Young believers passed communion trays, checked audio levels and ran PowerPoint.

Slowly, the church is resuming



Berty and Wolfram Schrader stand near the "Gemeinde Christi" sign in the first sub-floor of Zurich's Sihl-Center.

in-person Bible classes that were curtailed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the congregation is the envy of many other European churches, which dwindled to almost nothing during the pandemic and are struggling to recover.

*The Christian Chronicle* asked members what makes this church different. What is the source of its longevity and vitality?

Whether they replied in German or English, their answers contained the same word — "Wolfram."

## GOING WITH GOD

That would be Wolfram Schrader, a German-born cook and guitar teacher who served as the church's longtime evangelist.

At age 85, he and his wife, Berty, still walk — at a brisk pace — from their apartment to the church building. After worship on a recent Sunday, as church members cleared away plates from their monthly potluck, he talked with



Church elder Chris Simeon met his wife, Marianne, at an Easter retreat in 1992. Between them is their daughter, Aruna.

*the Chronicle* about his journey to faith. He was interrupted throughout, as church members stopped to talk to him before leaving.

"This man who came to say goodbye, I studied with him for seven years," Schrader said, "and with his wife. A group of six young people, young sisters, I studied with them at least five years. The big guy who sat at the computer today, I studied with him. He was 18 years old when I started.

"This makes a big difference." Schrader's grandmother made a difference in his faith. She was a spiritual person who lived a difficult life, enduring two world wars. Her husband was killed in the first one, and her son, Schrader's father, served in the second. He was gone for three years, during which he was captured by the Americans and held by the French.

Despite the hardships she endured, his grandmother always told him to "go with God," Schrader recalled. He moved to Switzerland and trained



Dorothee Zehnder, 26, grew up in a Swiss Church of Christ. Her husband, Gabriel, 30, recently was baptized.

as a chef, specializing in expensive dishes with pheasant. He cycled competitively, until the wheel of his bike made contact with another cyclist's wheel. He was thrown to the street.

"This showed me how vulnerable life is," he said. While riding a tram, he saw an advertisement for a gospel meeting hosted by the Church of Christ.

He and his wife studied the Bible with workers including Jerry Earnhart, an American missionary. Berty Schrader was baptized in 1961, with Wolfram following two years later. Gwen Antwine helped teach them English. Wolfram also learned Hebrew and Greek.

He practiced preaching in Vienna, Austria, where a missionary, Tom Turner, told him, "You didn't reach the people." He changed his approach. He focused on inviting people to one-on-one Bible studies.

"When you come to the church, he takes you in," said Brigitte Muggler, who was baptized in 1989 after studying with Schrader. She was looking

for Christians "who read the Bible, whether Catholic or Reformation, and who love each other."

Schrader "taught me how to study the Bible," Muggler said, "how to grow in your own faith."

He did the same for the church's leaders — including Chris Simeon, whom he baptized in the early 1990s. Simeon, originally from India, now serves as an elder along with Schrader and Martin Lysser. Working with the church's two evangelists, Olivier Cuendet and David Tarjan, they train church members to conduct Bible studies for the next generation. Rather than sending members away for ministry training in the U.S., the congregation focuses on in-house discipleship, Simeon said.

Not all of them stay. Dorothee Zehnder, who grew up in a Church of Christ in the eastern Swiss city of Schaffhausen, fell away from the church when she went to the U.S. to study.

"Many of my friends think there is something bigger, but they can't name it," she said. As for her, "I felt alone. I needed God."

Now 26, she worships with the church in Zurich. Her husband, Gabriel, was baptized last year — after studying the Bible with church members.

"I've been asking myself, 'What is holding me back?'" he said. "I knew it was the right thing to do."

## KNOWING 'WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT'

After serving in Europe, the Antwines returned to the U.S. and trained future generations of

missionaries at Oklahoma Christian University. They visit Switzerland and Germany when they can and have sponsored teams of students on mission trips here.

Among Churches of Christ on the continent, "it's one of the larger and stronger churches in Europe," Clyde Antwine said of the Zurich congregation. He credited that to the Bible studies conducted by members including Schrader — studies that continue long after baptisms.

"What's that going to produce?" he

asked. "It's going to produce a church that knows what it's all about. And they're going to convert others."

They're also going to help others in need — including refugees from the conflict in Ukraine. The Zurich church has become an adopted home for two Ukrainians, Lena Prochorova and Tamara Maliuga, who are members of Churches of Christ in the war-torn nation. Members in Zurich have provided them with housing, transportation and support.

And, most importantly, love, Maliuga said.

"This is a very, very good family," she said. "We are loved by everyone, and we love every person here. This church family — this is a real family."

Five hundred years after Zwingli's sausages, Manz's martyrdom and Switzerland's Reformation, the Zurich Church of Christ fights against its city's spiritual apathy by investing in its people, Cuendet said, those in need and those with plenty.

"You have these brothers and sisters; you've been given them by the Lord," he said. "You make the best of them."



Ukrainian Christians Tamara Maliuga and Lena Prochorova found family in Zurich.

# SWITZERLAND



**POPULATION:** 8.7 million. **LANGUAGES:** German, French, Italian. **RELIGION:** Roman Catholic 34.4 percent, Protestant 22.5 percent, other Christian groups 5.7 percent, Muslim 5.4 percent, other 1.5 percent, none 29.4 percent, unspecified 1.1 percent.



**CHURCHES OF CHRIST:** Jack McKinney pioneered mission work among the German-speaking Swiss. Gene Arnold and Stanley Shipp worked in French-speaking Lausanne. Doyle and Barbara Kee helped to plant a church in Geneva in 1970. Today there are about 10 Churches of Christ in Switzerland.

**SOURCES:** CIA World Factbook, "Churches of Christ Around the World" by Mac Lynn. Map via Shutterstock.



Missionaries Clyde and Gwen Antwine served in Zurich from 1959 to 1966.

PHOTO PROVIDED

PHOTOS BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

## At ACU, Christians rally against hate

Participants pray during the West Texas Rally for Christians Against Hate, organized by the Carl Spain Center on Race Studies and Spiritual Action at Abilene Christian University. The Oct. 15 rally occurred at the base of the Tower of Light at ACU's Beauchamp Amphitheatre.

## Influential minister, missionary dies

Owen D. Olbricht, whose evangelistic efforts contributed to thousands of baptisms in 30 states and eight countries, died Nov. 2 of complications from COVID-19. He was 90.

A Missouri native and graduate of Harding University in Searcy, Ark., Olbricht taught at his alma mater and the defunct Northeastern Christian Junior College in Villanova, Pa.

He preached in Arkansas, Missouri and New Jersey and directed Campaigns Northeast/Southeast evangelism teams. He also



Olbricht

authored books with biblical analysis, including Truth for Today's commentaries on Colossians and Philemon.

Dan Cooper, retired minister and current elder of the Pitman Church of Christ in Sewell, N.J., is one of many who felt Olbricht's personal impact.

"Owen taught me more about life, ministry and evangelism than I ever learned at any semester of university training," Cooper said.

Admirers of Olbricht had even organized a Facebook fan page dedicated to him. One of his brothers, the late Tom Olbricht, founded the Christian Scholars' Conference.

Gifts in Owen Olbricht's honor can be made to Truth for Today World Mission School, 2209 Benton Ave, Searcy, AR 72143.

### Minister Search - Medford, Oregon

The **West Main Church of Christ** is actively seeking a leader who does as Jesus did by talking to the people in their homes and communities. Our church family is seeking a visionary to lead the saved and the lost to the kingdom of God by guiding us and being involved with us.

Our lead minister will appreciate the rich heritage within the Churches of Christ. He will also envision a future not bound by tradition but open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. With a firm commitment to the Bible and a desire to apply its truth to the 21st Century, our new minister will provide leadership and instruction and be a role model for a church that is looking to glorify Christ. He will be first and foremost a man of integrity in all aspects of his life. He will be respected in his home, church, and community.

The ideal candidate will be at the forefront of designing and preparing the Sunday worship while being open to sharing the preaching duties in order to focus on being • A Biblical Teacher • A People Person • A Relationship Builder • A Caring Disciple • An Active Collaborator.

**For further information and to apply, visit our website: [churchofchristmedford.org](http://churchofchristmedford.org)**

### Full-time Preacher - Hastings, Neb.

The **Church of Christ at 1131 N Laird** is seeking a man of God to serve and work with a congregation of 50-70 in attendance on a Sunday morning. Primary responsibilities would be pulpit preaching, teaching class, visitation of members and outreach with emphasis on youth and young couples. The preacher will be working alongside elders and deacons. Housing is provided, and salary is commensurate with experience. We are a financially stable congregation. Current minister of 15 years is wanting to retire and move closer to children. We would like to fill the position by spring of 2023. Direct questions to:

**Gaylin Prior at [prior1956@yahoo.com](mailto:prior1956@yahoo.com), phone 402-984-4833**

**Send resume to: Church of Christ, 1131 N Laird, Hastings, NE 68901  
[www.hastingschurch.org](http://www.hastingschurch.org)**

### Full-time Minister - Yorba Linda, Calif.

The **Yorba Linda Church of Christ** is actively seeking a full-time minister who will partner with our congregation to show Jesus Christ to our community. We are a diverse, friendly, mission-minded, Bible-focused congregation of about 75 members looking to grow spiritually and numerically. Applicants should have formal Bible training, solid preaching experience, and preferably some experience in church growth and/or youth ministry. Our congregation is led by both Elders and Deacons. We have a number of well-qualified men who serve in all aspects of worship and teaching Bible classes. We also have qualified and dedicated women who teach classes and participate in outreach. The compensation package includes a 4-bedroom/2-bath, 1700 square-foot, unfurnished home. Salary is negotiable based on experience and qualifications. See [www.yorbalindachurch.com](http://www.yorbalindachurch.com), Yorba Linda Church of Christ on Facebook, or contact [yorbalindachurchofchrist@gmail.com](mailto:yorbalindachurchofchrist@gmail.com) for more information. Please submit your resume, references, and video of sermons to:

**[yorbalindachurchofchrist@gmail.com](mailto:yorbalindachurchofchrist@gmail.com) or to  
22707 La Palma Ave, Yorba Linda, CA 92887**

### Full-time Preacher/Minister - St Marys, W. Va.

**George Street Church of Christ** is a small congregation of 50 to 60 people. We are seeking a full-time pulpit minister/evangelist. Candidate must be knowledgeable of the scriptures, sound in his sermons and Bible classes, and willing to help grow our congregation. We are looking for a minister with a passion to serve and a desire to promote growth in relationships with the Lord and with one another and to provide outreach to the lost. We seek someone whose purpose is to glorify God in word, worship, and his daily life. If interested, please contact:

**Paul Miller • [millerj@marietta.edu](mailto:millerj@marietta.edu) • (740) 525-6253 or  
Eric Little • [Eric.R.Little@gmail.com](mailto:Eric.R.Little@gmail.com) • (304) 299-4127**

# CHRISTIAN CARE: Pandemic accelerated financial difficulties

FROM PAGE 3

make a smooth transition.

The faith-based nonprofit filed for bankruptcy protection in the Northern District of Texas earlier this year. By the time of the May 23 filing, the situation was dire for the operator of three senior living campuses in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

At the end of March, Christian Care Centers had about \$61 million in assets and \$65 million in liabilities, including about \$50 million of municipal bond debt, according to a bankruptcy filing.

“My whole being from the time I was 4 years old was to protect other people,” said Porter, who joined Christian Care Centers as its president and CEO in August 2018 — unaware at the time, she noted, of the depth of the financial problems or the drastic role the COVID-19 pandemic would play.

“So it’s a natural, it’s an innate thing for me,” she said of devoting her attention to the organization’s more than 1,000 residents and employees. “And I’ll go back to when I was 11 years old, and my (abuser) moved from me to my little sister. That’s when I stood up, and a voice told me, ‘Run, grab your little sister and go out that window.’”

“Back then I didn’t know it was God,” she added. “But after many, many years of counseling and helping other people get out of battered situations, it was God. I didn’t know him. He knew me.”

## ‘THIS INDUSTRY SAVED ME’

At age 13, Porter got a fake ID and a job as a nurse’s aide — a way to help support her family after her mother left the abuser, she said.

At Carriage Square nursing home in San Antonio, the late Fay Sutton served as the head nurse’s aide.

“Ms. Fay” became Porter’s friend and mentor.

“She didn’t go to church, and she didn’t talk about God,” Porter said. “She just represented him. ... I just knew values, integrity, excellence, compassion and faith through her faith. And then her hope and her steadfastness — she was always out there to help people.”

That first job propelled Porter into



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LACY STANLEY

**Christian Care Centers Inc. — rebranded by Sabrina Porter as Christian Care Communities and Services — was founded by members of Churches of Christ.**

a 46-year career that has taken her from managing small nursing homes to overseeing multisite continuing-care retirement communities.

“This industry saved me,” she said. “When I started working and the elderly needed me, and I knew that some people couldn’t feed themselves and I was the reason they had a meal, or I was the reason they were clean and dry and had no skin problems ... it was the most rewarding job.”

By age 27, Porter was working as a regional director of operations for 21 nursing homes when she bought a duplex in Dallas. A colleague introduced her to a friend who attended the Preston Road Church of Christ, and Porter accepted an invitation to church.

She got connected with the singles class. “I loved the singles class because they went country dancing and didn’t drink,” she said with a chuckle. “I just thought that was absolutely wonderful ... because I didn’t drink.”

At the Preston Road church, a friend, Jack Hodge, told her about a buddy he wanted her to meet: Joel Porter, a graduate of Abilene Christian University in West Texas. Both Hodge and Porter were the sons of ministers. Their fathers, Charles Hodge and Harvey Porter, had been classmates at Abilene Christian in the 1940s.

Hodge’s nudging led to a blind date at a restaurant in North Dallas. The couple talked for seven hours, and six months later, there was a wedding at the Prestoncrest Church of Christ, a Dallas congregation where the groom was active.

Joel Porter, now an elder of the Cedar Hill Church of Christ, southwest of Dallas, baptized Sabrina when she was pregnant with their first child. Their daughter, Rachel, is now 28 and a nurse at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas. Their sons are both U.S. Army veterans who deployed overseas on active duty — Mason, 26, to Afghanistan and Caleb, 24, to Poland.

“I learned very quickly, just by Joel’s modeling, what a Christian does,” Sabrina said. “I just can’t tell you how much my husband saved my life because he represented God to me.”

The couple moved to Cedar Hill in 2005. They own a 20-acre farm across the street from the church. They raise miniature livestock — cows, goats, pigs — and Sabrina enjoys busing senior residents to the farm to interact with the animals.

“They’re miniature for a reason,” she said. “They’re manageable animals for my elderly residents, whether they have dementia or not, so that they can pet them. ... I believe so strongly in pet therapy.”

Besides teaching Bible classes and

helping maintain the church facilities, Joel picks up people at an addiction recovery center for an Overcomers Outreach meeting at the church each Monday night, preaching minister Alan Martin said.

Sabrina mentors young women and couples in the congregation, Martin said.

“People love her,” Martin said. “She brings a demeanor to the table that is just professional but also very, very caring and in touch with people.”

“We depend upon both of them — Joel and Sabrina — for a lot of things,” the minister added.

## CALLED TO LEAD

Sabrina Porter was serving as president of Juliette Fowler Communities, a faith-based senior living nonprofit in Dallas, when she got a call from Harold Tidwell in 2018.

Tidwell, then the chairman of Christian Care Centers’ board, asked if he could visit Porter and learn about her operation. She did not realize at the time that Christian Care Centers was looking for a new CEO.

Tidwell was just a boy when Christian Care Centers was founded in Gunter, Texas, about 50 miles north of Dallas, on April 4, 1947. The original idea was to build a “home for the aged” that could serve retired ministers of Churches of Christ.

“I was 9 years old, I think, and my friends and I played there in the old Gunter Bible College church building while our dads built that first cottage,” said Tidwell, now 84, who attends the Preston Road church.

Over the years, at least a dozen of Harold and Gail Tidwell’s relatives have lived at Christian Care Centers. The Gunter location closed in 2013, but campuses remain in Allen, Fort Worth and Mesquite.

Porter impressed Tidwell in their initial meeting: “She showed me their property, their facility and all. I was really struck by the fact that nearly everybody we ran across in the hallway, she knew them — whether it was an employee or a resident or whatever.”

“She’d say, ‘How’s sister Sue doing?’ and all that stuff,” he added. “But it really, really touched me the knowledge and recall that she had on all the

employees and residents there.”

Later, when Tidwell asked Porter to consider taking the Christian Care Centers job, she was reluctant.

She was happy at Juliette Fowler Communities.

“He said, ‘Well, would you pray about it?’” she recalled. “Joel and I prayed about it ... and I just felt called that I needed to do that.”

Porter said she knew Christian Care Centers was facing financial challenges but not the severity of them. But even if she had known, she would have taken the job.

“When ministers say they feel called, I understand what that means,” she said.

### ‘STRAW THAT BROKE THE CAMEL’S BACK’

At Christian Care Centers, Porter set out to change the culture.

One way she did so was by eliminating special parking spaces for top administrators.

“It kind of took away some of the hierarchical stigma,” said Kristen Mazza, a Christian Care Centers vice president who previously worked for Porter at Juliette Fowler Communities.

In addition, Porter rebranded the organization as Christian Care Communities and Services.

As the financial concerns became more apparent, Porter said, she initiated \$3.2 million in budget cuts — roughly a 20 percent reduction — in February 2020.

Then came the long, lonely COVID-19 lockdown, which hit nursing homes and retirement communities particularly hard.

“It definitely was the straw that broke the camel’s back,” Porter said of the pandemic’s impact.

The ministry’s financial demise since 2018 follows a pattern similar to other senior living operators that have filed for bankruptcy protection this year. Communities for seniors are expensive to develop and, once built, they’re costly to maintain. The construction phase often requires the operator to take out bonds, leaving them with regular bond payments on top of their everyday expenses.

Christian Care Centers’ utility bill ran about \$133,000 per month. Its payroll for 490 employees came out to about \$690,000 every two weeks. Its payment obligations to bondholders totaled \$53 million in principal and



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LACY STANLEY

**President and CEO Sabrina Porter, right, greets a resident of Christian Care Centers Inc.’s campus in Fort Worth, Texas.**

interest on bonds totaling \$57 million when it filed for bankruptcy.

For some communities struggling with payments in 2018 and 2019, the pandemic was their breaking point. Occupancy dropped as seniors delayed moving into a community, while labor costs rose.

Later that year, the operator received a \$4.5 million forgivable loan from the Paycheck Protection Program, which helped companies keep employees on payroll during the pandemic. But in 2021, the operator failed to make bond payments again. In February 2021, the company retained B. Riley Financial as its chief restructuring officer, a sign that it was headed for a sale or restructuring of some kind.

In April 2021, the bond trustee said bondholders were no longer waiting and would seek immediate payment from the facility of its outstanding debt. In June 2021, the two parties came to an agreement for the second time to delay payments. In return, Christian Care Centers agreed to hire an investment banker to help it explore solutions, including a sale.

The following month, management presented the board members with a summary of the company’s past and future financial status, according to a filing. Following the meeting, board members unanimously agreed to file for bankruptcy.

“Decreases in fundraising contributions also meant donations were

not sufficient to defray the shortfall,” a bankruptcy filing said. “Based on extensive financial analysis and other due diligence, the debtors have determined it is in the best interest of their estates, their residents, and the future of their communities to sell substantially all of their assets.”

When it filed for bankruptcy protection, Christian Care Centers was desperate with about \$85,000 in cash on hand, according to a bankruptcy filing. The company said it didn’t have funds to take care of necessary maintenance issues and general improvements.

As part of the bankruptcy filing, the board also agreed that Texas Benevolent Trust LLC would be its initial bidder at \$45 million. This created a purchase price floor for other interested bidders.

Texas Benevolent is a joint venture between Covington Health Group of Atlanta and McFarlin Group of Dallas, a senior living-focused real estate investment firm. McFarlin launched a \$100 million fund to acquire senior housing in 2020, hoping to take advantage of discounted pricing as communities struggled to keep up with payments during the pandemic.

When Christian Care Centers received no other qualified bids by the July 12 deadline, Texas Benevolent Trust’s bid was approved on July 20, according to a bankruptcy filing. The company will lease the campuses to affiliates of the Atlanta-

based Boncrest Resource Group, a nonprofit that specializes in operating long-term care facilities.

The official change of ownership is expected to occur by the end of the year. At that time, the nonprofit’s board — composed entirely of members of Churches of Christ — will be dissolved.

Until just recently, Porter did not know if the new owners would retain her as president and CEO.

If she were in a similar situation, Pat Lawson, a Christian Care Centers board member for 15 years, said she wonders if she would give her job the same level of energy.

“But she just, she kept on,” Lawson said of Porter, “and I feel like God really used her to make this transition go smoothly.”

Lawson, a member of the Waterview Church of Christ in Richardson, north of Dallas, said Christian Care Centers always has been a focus of ministry for that congregation.

“When we moved there (in 1980), that seemed to be one of the first things that I would hear a lot about,” she said. “Once a month, we’d make pies and take them down to the residents. ... And we have had a lot of people from Waterview that in their later years were at Christian Care.”

Just in the last few weeks, the new owners asked Porter to stay in her position as they take over.

“I’m thrilled,” Lawson said. “But it still will be — it will be hard.”

### REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Porter said she prefers to think of the new owners as “investors.”

She said she’s excited about Christian Care Centers’ future and her planned role in it.

“They want us to keep our name, our branding,” Porter said of the new owners. “They want us to continue honoring our heritage with Churches of Christ. They want us to stay the same.

“They realize that it’s the money, the resources that we need to put into our buildings and then into our people, our programs,” she added. “And that’s the only thing we don’t have because we had such a big loan that was refinanced and refinanced.”

Porter believes she is right where she needs to be.

“I’m a survivor,” she said. “I have peace of mind about it all.”

# ENROLLMENT: Faith-based institutions face challenges

FROM PAGE 3

number of new freshmen coming straight out of high school.

When it comes to the number of FTIACS with backgrounds in Churches of Christ, the trend shows a dramatic decline.

From 2000 to 2022, the number fell from 4,411 to 1,526 — a 65.4 percent drop in a little over two decades and an average numerical decline of 131 per year. And the trend shows no signs of stopping.

Put a different way, in 2000, two-thirds (66 percent) of new freshmen at universities associated with Churches of Christ came from within the fellowship compared to less than one-third (28 percent) in 2022.

That may not be primarily the fault of the institutions, however.

Geography plays a factor. Universities inside the Bible Belt, Hebert said, have access to greater populations in Churches of Christ than schools like Rochester University in Michigan or York University in Nebraska — or the defunct Ohio Valley.

But even in the South, numbers are declining.

“All of them are losing ground when it comes to Church of Christ populations,” Hebert told *The Christian Chronicle*. “None of them are holding their own. ... No one’s unscathed here.”

The bigger issue, he added, is that this trend is a symptom of the overall decline in — and aging of — membership of Churches of Christ in the U.S. Simply put, there are fewer and fewer 18-year-old graduates in the fellowship.

According to 21st Century Christian’s tri-annual survey, overall membership has fallen by about 13.4 percent since 2000, though data from the last few years is incomplete because of the pandemic. While the organization doesn’t have data on age groups, Pew Research’s Religious Landscape Study shows the proportion of 18- to 29-year-olds in Churches of Christ is also shrinking.

## SHIFTING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The problem isn’t limited to Churches of Christ.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

At Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn., students participate in the annual Running of the Bison.

Other faith-based institutions face similar difficulties with declining student pools, Hebert said. Secular schools will in the near future, too, if they aren’t already.

“In the next five to eight years, we’re going to see a drop in the number of 18-year-olds coming into our institutions,” Hebert said. “And the reason is just pure census data. ... All the post-secondary institutions are bracing for the fact we’re going to be competing for fewer students in the years to come.”

But there’s an upside: Overall, enrollment numbers for institutions associated with Churches of Christ show a brighter outlook.

“What’s fascinating is that if you look at the total enrollment for these institutions, they’ve remained pretty healthy,” Hebert said.

In fact, the total enrollment — undergraduate and graduate students of any background — at schools associated with Churches of Christ has slightly increased since 2011, from 35,796 to 37,649. That’s largely because some of them have managed to offset

falling undergraduate numbers with increasing graduate enrollment.

At Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif., for example, undergraduate enrollment remained relatively steady from 2017 to 2021 — but in that same period, graduate enrollment grew by 64 percent, from 4,106 to 6,738.

And Harding University in Searcy, Ark., boasted a nearly 23 percent rise in graduate enrollment last year, even as overall enrollment is down nearly 30 percent over the past decade to 4,804.

In the aggregate, Hebert’s data showed a 38.1 percent increase in graduate enrollment for universities associated with Churches of Christ from 2013 to 2022.

## POSTIVE SHORT-TERM TRENDS

One university in particular has managed to take advantage of the shifting market.

Abilene Christian University in Texas reported a record enrollment for the fifth consecutive year, with 5,731 students — up from 5,334 in 2021 and 4,371 in 2012. And that

growth hasn’t been by accident.

“We made a commitment ... in 2015 to expand and make a strategic priority the growth of our graduate programs, and the strategy around that had to do with the way nontraditional adult learners were accessing graduate education,” ACU Vice President Stephen Johnson told the *Chronicle*.

Out of that commitment came ACU Dallas — which Johnson heads — a second campus devoted primarily to online graduate programs. Undergraduate programs were later added and expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, enrollment in ACU Online’s 44 programs accounts for 37 percent of the total student body, with an average growth of more than 20 percent each year.

An emphasis in online programs like these may be one of the keys to the future, though Hebert currently does not track those trends.

Elsewhere, total enrollment at Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City grew from 2,216 to 2,607 — including a 5 percent increase in undergraduate

enrollment and a 65 percent increase in graduate enrollment.

Crowley's Ridge College, in Paragould, Ark., also reported an increase in enrollment for the third year in a row, with 201 students.

Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tenn., reported a record-breaking undergraduate enrollment for the fifth consecutive year, with 1,850 undergraduate students — though its total enrollment has remained mostly steady, at 2,283.

Notably, FHU has managed to grow its undergraduate enrollment while remaining successful in recruiting students from Churches of Christ. A majority of its undergraduate enrollment comes from within the fellowship.

School administrators attribute that success to the leadership of President David Shannon, who took over in 2017, as well as an emphasis on close relationships among students and faculty and a commitment to the university's mission.

"We know who we are, and we claim it," said Dave Clouse, vice president for community engagement.

At Harding University, new student enrollment grew to 920, up 6.2 percent from last year.

At York University in Nebraska, though total enrollment has dipped slightly to 600, the number of new students grew by 10 percent.

Likewise, at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Ala., total enrollment fell by 1 percent, but new undergraduate enrollment is up by more than 10 percent and new graduate enrollment by nearly 13 percent.

And for Lipscomb, this year marks the largest freshman class in school history, at more than 880 out of nearly 2,800 traditional undergraduate students — another school record. Total enrollment remains steady at around 4,650.

Other Christian schools — Florida College in Temple Terrace, Fla.; Lubbock Christian University in Texas; Pepperdine; Rochester University in Rochester Hills, Mich.; and Southwestern Christian College — have not reported this year's enrollment numbers to the *Chronicle*.

#### FUTURE PLANS

The bottom line for universities associated with Churches of Christ,

Hebert said, is this: "We're going to be challenged by the shrinking pool of high school graduates in the years to come — the next eight-plus years.

"And we're going to have to continue to supplant those losses with other types of enrollment — with adult learners and graduate students — and if we fail to do that, we're going to have shrinking budgets and financial difficulties."

But adapting doesn't mean institutions associated with Churches of Christ have to leave behind their Christian values and traditions, ACU's Johnson noted.

"The shifting marketplace does not require us to abandon our historic and core mission as institutions, and that's certainly not what's happening at ACU. ... It really is about understanding the marketplace and where (people) are and being willing to design the extension of our mission to meet people in that place, which I think is a very missional move."

In fact, ACU President Phil Schubert believes faith-based education helps Christian colleges stand out in a crowded field.



**Schubert**

Christian conservative education to be more willing to go to great lengths to secure that education and recognize the differentiation that takes place in a faith-based educational journey versus one that's secular," Schubert told the *Chronicle*.

"We're very intentional in all of those graduate programs, even the online programs, to have a major focus on strong Christian values and spiritual formation. ... That is something that's a foundational part of our identity."

Johnson added a word of optimism for members of Churches of Christ concerned about the future of Christian education:

"I do think there is opportunity, and I think there's hope for our institutions to not only sustain but to flourish in their mission and in their calling to serve students out of the deep and rich history of our tradition."

#### Full-time Minister - Woodinville, Wash.

The **Woodinville Church of Christ**, a congregation of 85+ in a small town, is looking for a full-time minister with a heart for service, tradition, and outreach to the community. If you are looking to work with a congregation with a dedicated core of workers who value life together outside the building and to work in growing and connecting a wider community, we want to hear from you! We are looking for a man who is: adept at mentoring and team building, utilizes great leadership abilities, is organized, is a good team player, has excellent interpersonal relationship qualities, and, especially in the current climate, has the heart of a conciliator. Our congregation has weekly men's and ladies' classes, a dedicated children's ministry team, small groups, and deep ties to WBS and WEI.

To begin the process, email us:

[SearchCommittee@woodinvilleCofC.org](mailto:SearchCommittee@woodinvilleCofC.org)

#### Pulpit Minister - Urbana, Ill.

The **Dublin St. Church of Christ** is seeking a pulpit minister who is capable of preaching, teaching and defending the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are a small congregation of about 20 members and are willing and ready to go to work spreading the Word of God. All interested candidates must send a cover letter, resume, references (including current congregation), and video or electronic copy of one sermon. Please send all responses to:

[dublinsearch23@gmail.com](mailto:dublinsearch23@gmail.com)

#### Associate Minister - Norfolk, Va.

**Norfolk Church of Christ** in Norfolk, Va., wishes to add an **Associate Minister** to work with our senior minister, who will retain primary pulpit duties. Ideal candidates will have interest in youth ministry, family ministry, evangelism efforts and small groups. There will also be opportunity to preach two or three times each quarter. Resume and compensation expectations should be submitted to:

[robert@norfolkcoc.org](mailto:robert@norfolkcoc.org)

#### Full-time Minister - Fort Wayne, Indiana

**East Chestnut Church of Christ** is seeking a full-time minister. Our congregation has approximately 100 members and is looking for a minister who will meet the following obligations: preaching sound doctrine, interacting with our sister congregations in the area, and sharing the Gospel in the Fort Wayne area. Brothers who are interested in applying should have the following characteristics:

**Essential qualifications:** • Ministerial experience (5 years minimum) • Bible-based teaching (sound doctrine) • Ability to defend the faith (active within the community). **Preferred skills/abilities/status:** • Effective communication skills for all age groups (youth to seniors) • Established leadership ability • Vision for growth and progression in the congregation with short-range and long-range plans • Spiritual insight to our various ministries • Married. **Salary and benefits** will be commensurate with education and experience. Potential candidate can send a cover letter and resume to:

[eastchestnutchurch2@yahoo.com](mailto:eastchestnutchurch2@yahoo.com) with subject "Minister application"; **East Chestnut Church of Christ, ATTN: Selection Committee, 3601 East Chestnut St, Fort Wayne, IN 46803, (260) 426-5051**

*East Chestnut Church of Christ "Know The Lord, Grow the Community, Show the Harvest"*

#### Full-time Minister - Los Angeles

The **Redondo Beach Church of Christ** is looking for a full-time minister to preach, teach and make disciples for Christ. We are a loving congregation located in the beautiful South Bay Area of Los Angeles with three elders and an average Sunday attendance of 75 members. Our building has pews, a pulpit, a projector and hymn books. We are involved in community service and mission work. If interested, send a current resume along with references, information about yourself and your family, and links to two sermons to:

[elders@redondochurchofchrist.com](mailto:elders@redondochurchofchrist.com)

#### Family/Youth Ministry

The **University Church of Christ** has an opening for a full-time youth and family minister. We are located on the north side of the University of South Alabama at **5651 Zeigler Boulevard, Mobile, AL 36608**. All interested candidates are asked to submit a resume to:

**Richard Jay (elder)**

[richard.jay@spireenergy.com](mailto:richard.jay@spireenergy.com)  
(251) 281-7550

# Milestones

Showcase the lives of your loved ones — birth and wedding announcements, anniversaries, memorials, honors for longtime ministers and workers and more. Contact [milestones@christianchronicle.org](mailto:milestones@christianchronicle.org) for rates and more information.

## Honored

### Robert Kimberly

Congratulations to Robert Kimberly on his recent retirement as executive director of Southeastern Children's Home and Counseling Center, a South Carolina Christian-based organization that provides care to needy children and families. He served as head of this ministry for 32 years.

Robert's talent, cooperation, and vision have earned him and the agency a truly outstanding reputation in all respects. He has devoted time to churches across the Southeast by teaching parenting seminars, preaching, and serving others. He has worked with task forces with the South Carolina governor's office to strengthen the state's children and families.

Robert is a Licensed Adoption Investigator. He is also a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor, and a National Board-Certified Counselor. The husband of Kim, he is also the proud father of Katie, Jeremy, and Austin, and grandfather to seven.

Throughout his career, Robert has received many awards and honors. This year Robert received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Network 1:27 that read: "For your Leadership, Compassion, Visionary Faith and Personal Sacrifice on behalf of Children and Families in Need." Robert also received the Order of the Palmetto, the state's highest honor, from Gov. McMaster which was presented by State Rep. Rita Allison.



## Birthday

### Calvin Boyce Jr., 85

**Giving him flowers while he can still smell them:** Hats off to brother Calvin Boyce Jr., an elder of the Norris Road congregation of the Church of Christ, formerly known as the Vance Avenue congregation, the oldest established Black congregation in the city (at that time) of Memphis, Tenn.

He is the great-grandson of Nelson Garrett, traveling pioneer evangelist of the Church of Christ, who was also instrumental in the encouragement of the young famed evangelist Marshall Keeble.

Nelson Garrett was one of the organizing forces behind the first Black congregation of the Church of Christ in the city of Memphis, first at a storefront on Monsarrat Street located between West Person Avenue and South Parkway West, soon moving to better accommodation at Lauderdale and Iowa. This congregation later built the popular location of Vance Avenue near the downtown area.

Calvin Boyce Jr. first served as a deacon during the tenure of A.J. Coaston and later as an elder under the services of Nokomis Yeldell, James Crusoe and presently Don Burnell Holly.

Brother Boyce's knowledge and sound teaching of the Bible is known throughout the brotherhood in Memphis.

He was married in 1957 to his high school sweetheart, Mary Frances Maclin, enjoying 63 years together. They have seven children, all members of the body of Christ.

He celebrated his 85th birthday in Jacksonville, N.C., with two of his daughters, church members, and other friendly associates on



July 8, 2022. We thank God for sending brother Boyce our way and for his being an inspirational example of what the prophet Isaiah stated in the description of what true religion represents: the setting of foundations for many generations to be called the repairers of breaches and restorers of paths to dwell in.

We love you.

## Memorials

### Ron Bever, 1933-2022

Ronald D. Bever was born Nov. 21, 1933, to Arley and Arnold (Wilson) Bever in Granada, Colo. He passed away peacefully at his home in Oklahoma City on Nov. 5, 2022, at age 88, surrounded by his family. He is survived by Doris, his wife of 64 years, four children (Ken, Stan, Jane, and Annette), eight grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

With a heart for preaching, Ron earned advanced degrees in Bible and Religious Education from Harding College. To enhance his speaking ability and with a passion to teach others, Ron received a Ph.D. in Public Address and Group Communication at Northwestern University.

He joined the faculty of Oklahoma Christian College in 1964. During his 32-year tenure, Ron served as chair of the

Communication and Fine Arts Division for 20 years and was prominent in the formation and operation of the campus radio station. His favorite courses to teach included Speech 101, Expository Preaching, and Restoration Movement.

For 10 years, Ron served as faculty sponsor of a student missions organization that later

*continued*



## NEWSMAKERS



PHOTO PROVIDED

Alumni and friends of Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tenn., pose for a photo after an opening ceremony for the Laurel Cottage Hospitality House. The university renovated the cottage — named in honor of Laurel Sewell, who served as first lady from 1990 to 2008 — to host parents, alumni and other campus visitors.

**HIRED:** Andrew Beasley as pulpit minister for the Northwest Church of Christ in Greensboro, N.C. **Jonathan Godsey** as minister for the Amory Church of Christ in Mississippi. **Michael Jacobs** as preacher for the Palm Desert Church of Christ in Bermuda Dunes, Calif. **David Dixon** as preaching minister for the Central Church of Christ in Saraland, Ala.



Beasley

**APPOINTED:** Gary Bryen and Taylor Cave as elders and **Jacob Bautista, David Clevenger** and **Marland Taylor** as deacons of the South Walker Church of Christ in Oklahoma City. **Andrea Morris** as assistant to the provost for strategic initiatives at Harding University in Searcy, Ark.



Dixon



Morris

**HONORED:** **Mary Stephens** of Canyon, Texas, by Let's Start Talking with the Woodward Heart of the Servant Award. **Tim** and **Rebecca Talley** with the 2022 Crystal Globe Award for distinguished service in world missions from Mission Resource Network.



Stephens

## Milestones

*continued*

became Outreach. He organized, promoted, and led numerous mission trips. He encouraged many to become missionaries and everyone to share their faith regardless of their vocation.

Ron had a particular passion for Hope for Haiti's Children, a ministry which his son, Ken, and daughter-in-law, Rhonda, began in 1995.

Ron has filled numerous roles for Churches of Christ congregations, including preacher, youth minister, song leader, deacon and elder. He served as an elder at the Britton Road Church of Christ from 1975 until his death.

Donations in Ron's memory can be made to Hope for Haiti's Children at [www.hopeforhaitischildren.org](http://www.hopeforhaitischildren.org) or to the Britton Road Church of Christ Mission Fund at [www.brittonroad.org](http://www.brittonroad.org).

### Linda Gearhart, 1945-2022

Linda Lou Gearhart, 77, went to be with her Savior Oct. 16, 2022. She was born May 14, 1945, to Dwight and Dorothy Shady in Bluffton, Ind. She led a life of service through ministries in the United States and abroad — Africa, Asia, Europe and the South Pacific.

Known as "Mama G" to loved ones, her life was a kaleidoscope of service, relationships, ministry, giving, encouragement, laughter, pickleball, mahjong, fellowship with her faith community and commitment to her wellness company, Melaleuca.

She is survived by her husband of 54 years, Gerald; children Andrea (Matt) Miller of Musanze, Rwanda, Anna Lisa (Morgan) Bowden of Roseburg, Ore.; Angelina (Michael) Byron of Monument, Colo.; and Andrew (Veronica) Gearhart of Colorado Springs. She treasured her 14 grandchildren, ages 4 to 24.

She loved *The Christian Chronicle's* crossword puzzle and was working on one just before she passed. Her second-grade granddaughter and two other family members continued working on it to honor her memory.

Memorial gifts may be made to Let's Start Talking ([1st.org](http://1st.org)).



### Carl Cole, 1934-2022

Carl C. Cole Sr. of Muskogee, Okla., departed this life for his eternal home on Oct. 13, 2022.

Carl graduated from Abilene Christian High School and College in Texas. There he met the love of his life, Louise.

They enjoyed 64 wonderful years of marriage. Louise Cole died Oct. 30, 2021.

Carl proudly served in the Marine Corps, stationed in Korea. He was the first full-time treasurer for the City of Muskogee, a position from which he retired in 2000.

Carl was a faithful member of the Church of Christ and served for over 30 years as an elder with the Central, East Central, and Chandler Road congregations in Muskogee.

He and Louise were passionate about evangelism, taking youth to South Texas on mission trips, traveling to Kenya for mission work and financially supporting various good works of the Lord's body in the U.S. and abroad.



### Victor Leo McLeod, 1929-2022

Victor Leo McLeod, 93, died Oct. 18 in Athens, Texas. He was born in Jayton, Texas, to J.A. and Norma McLeod. He was raised in a farming family and spent most of his life working the land where he lived.

He was a member of the Eastern Hills Church of Christ in Athens



and loved to read *The Christian Chronicle*.

At 14, he hitchhiked to Mexico and lived there with a family for three months. He has proudly hitch-hiked to every state in the continental U.S. He was a passionate John Wayne fan and was known as a loving man who always put others above himself. He was a friend to many and will be greatly missed.

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Frances, and two brothers. He is survived by four nieces, two cousins, and caretaker Nancy Andree, who read the *Chronicle* to him every month in his later years.

### Bob Walker, 1936-2022

Robert Lowell "Bob" Walker, 86, passed away peacefully in his sleep into the arms of Jesus on Oct. 25, 2022, in Bryan, Texas. He was a beloved brother, father, grandfather and great-grandfather as well as a faithful man who loved the Lord, his family, his church and his community.

Born Jan. 20, 1936, in Victoria, Texas, to Richard and Louise Walker, he earned a bachelor's from Texas A&M University in 1958. To help pay his way through college, he worked summers at the Dixie Dog Drive-in that his parents bought in Spur, Texas. He also earned a master's from Pepperdine University and a doctorate from Texas A&M. He was in the Corps of Cadets, a member of Squadron 4 (Fightin' Phantom Four, Pride of the Corps!).

He worked in fundraising at Pepperdine University for 10 years and at A&M for 46 years. Bob served on boards of Brazos Valley Community Foundation, Camp Deerfoot, Easterwood Trust, Ed Rachal Foundation, Eastern European Mission, Institute of Nautical Archeology, Pepperdine, and Texas A&M University Press. He was a longtime member of the A&M Church of Christ, where he had previously served as an elder.

Bob enjoyed sports and rooting for his team, The Fightin' Texas Aggies.



He was also an avid 42 player, but his favorite hobby and joy was fishing.

Bob is preceded in death by his brother, Richard Lee Walker; a son, Richard Nolen Walker; and his wife of 52 years, JoAnn Nolen Walker. Survivors include three children, a sister, eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren: Rebecca and Charlie Elkins of Rockwall, Texas, their daughter Abigail and Scott Sawyer of Houston and daughter Olivia, son Brazos and Kaitlyn Elkins of Rockwall; Sid and Amy Walker of College Station, their son Will and Candace Walker of College Station and children Sage, Saylor and Wells; Wes Walker of Bryan; Bill and Shawna Walker of Colorado Springs, their son McKinnon and Lauren Walker of Lubbock, and son Nolen; and daughter McClain and Bryson Chiles of Denver and sons Kade Walker and Ky Walker of Colorado Springs. Bob's sister Ginger Davis lives in Dallas.

Bob was involved in numerous charitable causes. Memorial gifts may be made to any of the organizations mentioned here or to your favorite nonprofit. Memories may be shared at [memorialfuneralchapel.com](http://memorialfuneralchapel.com).

### Jim Willis, 1941-2022

James "Jim" Floyd Willis, 80, of Spring Hill, Tenn., passed away July 6, 2022. He was born in Pensacola, Fla., and spent 25 years serving in the Marines, retiring as a master sergeant in 1982.

He earned a doctorate and served as vice president of workforce development at Southwest Tennessee Community College in Memphis. He was a dedicated member of the Heritage Church of Christ in Franklin, Tenn.

James is survived by his wife of 29 years, Sylvia Willis, of Spring Hill, Tenn., three sons, three stepchildren, a brother, 17 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

Memorials may be made to Heritage Church of Christ ([heritagecoc.org](http://heritagecoc.org)) or to the charity of your choice.



## EDITORIAL

# Giving thanks despite chaos

**W**ith an election behind us and holidays ahead of us, *The Christian Chronicle's* Editorial Board took time to discuss what we're thankful for — and to think seriously for a few minutes about what it means to be an international newspaper that covers a global fellowship that often finds itself caught up in the chaos and catastrophe that inevitably plague a sinful world.

First, we're thankful we get to. We're keenly aware that not all of our readers, let alone all the people we write about, live in places where they have a First Amendment to protect their work. But we do. And we're thankful for that. In this country, Christian journalists, writers and speakers understand that a document written more than 200 years ago protects what we do and how we practice our faith.

Second, we're thankful that words crafted over 2,000 years ago set the standard for our work. When Jesus said, *"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, then you shall know the*

*truth, and the truth will set you free,"* he was talking to believing Jews among his disciples, not 21st century journalists.

But the principle of truth enabling freedom applies to discipleship of all kinds, including our professional practice of truth telling. We are thankful for the power of truth in all its forms and thankful we get to pursue it, report it and watch it work.

Finally, we're thankful that we get to be a part of conversations — and sometimes begin conversations among our readers — that transcend the divisiveness and bitter dissension that too often fill the pages and screens and airwaves and pulpits and stages and living rooms of life.

Who is hungry, and who is helping? Who is struggling, and who is bringing solace? Who is sharing the Good News, and who is seeking the lost?

We're thankful we get to tell stories that spread the light of truth. And we're thankful you take the time to read those stories. — **Cheryl Mann Bacon, for the Editorial Board**



## Christian Chronicle Editorial Board members share what they're thankful for:

"Family. Friends. Fellowship. Time to write. Time to read. Time to travel. People who love truth. And seek truth. And, of course, two perfect granddaughters." — **Cheryl Mann Bacon**

"I am thankful God's kingdom is bigger than any nationality, race or language and that it will triumph no matter what happens in the world." — **Jeremie Beller**

"I am thankful for God's patience as we stumble from day to day, seeking to be who he has called us to be." — **John Edmerson**

"I'm thankful for those who have fought against the injustices of this world to make a better tomorrow." — **Gabriel Grant Huff**

"I am grateful for the opportunity to share meaningful time with people I love in both mundane and memorable moments." — **Audrey Jackson**

"With all of the medical issues I've endured this year, I am most thankful for my improvement of health. To God be the glory!" — **Trindi Mitchell**

"I am thankful for beautiful sunrises, sweet grandbabies, caring loved ones and so many other undeserved blessings that God bestows on me day after day." — **Bobby Ross Jr.**

"I'm thankful for the people who don't harvest to the very edge of their fields, who remember the poor and the stranger (Leviticus 23:22)." — **Erik Tryggestad**

The Editorial Board collaborates on the newspaper's editorial each month. The group is a mix of full-time *Chronicle* staff members and volunteer contributors. Positions taken represent the Editorial Board's consensus and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the paper's Board of Trustees.

 **The Christian Chronicle.**  
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Phone: (405) 425-5070; Fax (405) 425-5076

Mail: P.O. Box 11000, Oklahoma City, OK 73136-1100  
Delivery: 2501 E. Memorial Road, Edmond, OK 73013

 [facebook.com/ChristianChronicle](https://facebook.com/ChristianChronicle)  [twitter.com/ChristianChron](https://twitter.com/ChristianChron)

President and CEO: **Erik Tryggestad**  
erik@christianchronicle.org

Editor-in-Chief: **Bobby Ross Jr.**  
bobby@christianchronicle.org

Associate Editor: **Audrey Jackson**  
audrey@christianchronicle.org

Advertising Manager: **Christi Roméo**  
christi@christianchronicle.org

Contributing Editor: **Cheryl Mann Bacon**

Opinions Editor: **Jeremie Beller**  
jeremie@christianchronicle.org

Media Editor: **Calvin Cockrell**  
calvin@christianchronicle.org

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# How congregations can rebound

LOS ANGELES

**A**t age 13 in 1983, I moved to the West Coast. Relocating from a rural community in the South to this sprawling Southern California metropolis marked a major transition for a young Christian: More people. More congregations. More activity.

To say that I was like a kid in a candy shop is an understatement. Attending youth conferences, gospel meetings and weekend programs for young people was the norm for area Churches of Christ at that time. The youth had annual events and, in general, a lot to do.

**Views**



John Edmerson

I made friends who remain my friends to this day. Los Angeles was a great place to grow up.

After ministering elsewhere, I returned to L.A. this year. I found a very different place. I am still seeking to understand

all of the dynamics at work in the city's churches, but so far I am not seeing much life. Though some of the change can be attributed to the pandemic, I suspect meaningful congregational activity has been waning for some time, and I find myself deeply concerned.

I miss those days of old. I am troubled about what we are offering ourselves and what we are presenting to the public.

No one person or group of people is to blame. Numbers in Churches of Christ are dropping everywhere. We are aging. With the advent of technology, ministry is done differently. It has just been tougher to be effective.

So how do we reverse our reality? Where do we start? Who should be at the table? What does the future hold?

First, don't be discouraged. All living things follow a life cycle, and the cycle of our fellowship is trending downward. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, we were on an upswing, but we plateaued in the 1970s and 1980s. Now we are declining.

But death is not a given. Churches



SHUTTERSTOCK PHOTO

can rebound and rediscover themselves. New cycles can be initiated. Making that happen requires a lot of energy and wisdom. Let me suggest three areas where we can start working:

**1. Leadership**

Meaningful change begins with the leaders. Our leaders must recognize the decline and be courageous enough to address its causes and create solutions. For example, if updating the church's technology face is the greatest immediate need, then the solution is to find a church whose web presence we like and ask for help.

The church of tomorrow will have multiple ways to represent herself to the public. Technology, video integration, contemporary messaging and programming for multicultural and varied socioeconomic groups are new dominant needs.

**2. Combining resources**

Though Churches of Christ have a model of local autonomy, this should not preclude us from thinking in ways that will maximize our resources. The way forward should be considered with all options on the table.

Recently, *The Christian Chronicle* featured an article on the merging of the Kennedy Heights Church of Christ with the Indian Mound Church of Christ. Both congregations are in Cincinnati. No doubt, not everyone was happy about everything, but both groups felt their future would be more secure if they combined resources.

Their numbers are better. Their balance sheet is stronger. They are now poised to improve on handling the present and future. Congregations that need help should look for a congregation with which they can team up.

**3. Evangelism resurgence**

Our fellowship's baptism numbers have weakened considerably. Many congregations have moved from being birthing centers where we, spiritually speaking, facilitate new births and care for new babies. They have become, instead, retirement centers where we spend the bulk of our attention taking care of people who are "old" in the faith.

I can't think of a more warped way of existing than to stop evangelizing. We can't be afraid to ask for help from others who are more effective and enlist the membership in rededicating itself to an aggressive evangelism strategy. This is not the time for egos or excuses.

We need a major revitalization. We can't skate the facts. If our congregation's numbers are bleak, we must set a table with all of the stakeholders and aggressively tackle the obstacles.

Leaders need prayer and courage. The church needs to reexamine the way it functions and serves. We were never designed to have all of our activity directed inward. The bulk of our money should always be outwardly focused on strategies to reach the world.

Let's pray for an evangelism fire to be rekindled. Let's recreate and better create a more stable and vibrant faith community.

**JOHN EDMERSON** is a member of *The Christian Chronicle's* Editorial Board. He serves as associate minister for the Figueroa Church of Christ in Los Angeles. He is also a well-known song writer among Churches of Christ.

## Growth and decline among Churches of Christ, 1906-2022

Year	Congregations	Adherents	Average annual change	Year	Congregations	Adherents	Average annual change	Year	Congregations	Adherents	Average annual change
1906	2,649	207,555	—	1994	13,013	1,651,103	-0.5 %	2009	12,629	1,578,281	-1.26 %
1926	6,226	563,828	+5.12 %	1997	13,080	1,647,078	-0.08 %	2012	12,447	1,554,231	-0.51 %
1948	10,089	886,824	+2.08 %	2000	13,032	1,645,645	-0.03 %	2015	12,300	1,519,695	-0.75 %
1980	12,762	1,601,661	+1.86 %	2003	13,155	1,656,717	+0.22 %	2018	11,965	1,447,271	-1.61 %
1990	13,174	1,684,872	+0.51 %	2006	12,963	1,639,495	-0.35 %	2022	11,905	1,424,918	*

\* The 2022 numbers are taken from the latest online figures provided by 21st Century Christian. The pandemic has delayed data collection for a new edition of "Churches of Christ in the United States," last published in 2018. Data from 1980 to 2018 was compiled by Carl Royster and Mac Lynn for 21st Century Christian. Earlier data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau's Religious Census of 1906 to 1926 and M. Norvel Young's 1948 estimate. This chart was adapted from the 2018 directory.

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By Keith Brenton and Rick Gibson | See more by following [brenton.daily](https://www.brenton.daily) on Facebook and Instagram.

## FROM OUR READERS

### Can Ukrainian, Russian believers reconcile?

No, we are not one people or nation ("Does God love Russians?" Page 1, November). They (Russians) have been trying to wipe us off the earth for over three centuries.

It is not NATO expansion that had provoked them. ... It is just the sick ambition of one madman, backed by the vast majority of the population of Russia. Whether our brethren are in that number or they just keep quiet, they carry equal responsibility for the war crimes the Russian army is committing in Ukraine.

Does God love Russian people? Absolutely. If they want to have all the benefits of that love, they need to repent.

For us Ukrainians, reconciliation with Russian Christians will be a long and painful process. It will take much more than this one article.

**Kostyantyn Kisilenko** | Bila Tserkva, Ukraine

"Is Putin Right?"

I was appalled to see this question

asked in a subhead as part of your report on Christian Russians and the Ukraine War.

I can't imagine asking this about a man who has engaged in torture, murder and unspeakable war crimes.

You appeared to justify asking this question based on Putin's "proclamation" about social and cultural issues, as if that justified these despicable acts. Shame on you!

**Ellen McCollum** | Richardson, Texas

Great article on Russia and Ukraine. Thank you for this reporting and perspective.

**Clyde Slimp** | Cleburne, Texas

Here we have a story worth telling about how Jesus works in the lives of people ("Loretta Lynn was a believer," Page 6, November).

I did not know these things about Loretta — good news in a world where often little good seems to get play in the media.

**Antonio Cardona** | Fords, N.J.

## CALENDAR

**Sept. 1-Dec. 31 HOPE - Million Dollar Sunday Campaign.** Eastern European Mission. See [eem.org/mds](http://eem.org/mds).

**Dec. 2 Annual Benefit Dinner with Kurt Warner.** Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, Tenn. See [fhu.edu/giving/dinner](http://fhu.edu/giving/dinner).

**Jan. 13-14 IHCF Medical Missions Seminar.** Plano, Texas. See [IHCF-Seminar.org](http://IHCF-Seminar.org).

**Jan. 25-28 SIBI Vision Workshop.** Lubbock, Texas. See [workshop.sibi.cc](http://workshop.sibi.cc).

**Feb. 3-5 Telling the Story: Conference on Evangelism & Church Growth.** Prestoncrest Church of Christ, Dallas, Texas. See [prestoncrest.org/story](http://prestoncrest.org/story).

**Feb. 5-9 87th Annual Bible Lectureship.** "For Such a Time as This: Restoring God's People in Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther." Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, Tenn. See [fhu.edu/lectureship](http://fhu.edu/lectureship).

**Feb. 23 Harding University Preachers Conference.** Searcy, Ark. See [harding.edu/preaching](http://harding.edu/preaching).

**Feb. 24 - Mar. 10 The Acappella 40 Tour.** Various cities. See [acappella.org/40tour](http://acappella.org/40tour).

**Mar. 20-23 Abundant Living.** Retreat for senior adults. Hot Springs, Ark. See [abundantlivingseniors.com](http://abundantlivingseniors.com).

**April 6-8 Harding University's Spring Sing.** Searcy, Ark. See [harding.edu/events/springsing](http://harding.edu/events/springsing).

**July 8-14 Worship Leader Institute.** Jacksonville, Fla. See [acappella.regfox.com/wli-2023](http://acappella.regfox.com/wli-2023).

**Sept. 21-24 Global Missions Experience.** Harding University Tahkodah, Floral, Ark. See [harding.edu/gme](http://harding.edu/gme).

**FULL CALENDAR:** [christianchronicle.org](http://christianchronicle.org)

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**El Campo Church of Christ** is seeking an associate minister to coordinate praise and worship services and lead our youth program. We are praying the Lord will send us a person who has a love for the gospel and a heart for youth. While education, experience and qualities like age and marital status will be considered, our priority is finding the right person regardless of their situation or season in life. We are a church that seeks to invest in and nurture a passion for discipleship in God's kingdom with those we have the privilege of serving alongside. The applicant should be encouraging others to grow spiritually and to utilize their spiritual gifts for God's glory in accordance with Matthew 28:18-20. This would include teaching, discipleship, and setting an example for youth in our church and community. Other tasks would include coordination of praise and worship as well as coordinating with local youth ministers in fellowship opportunities as we give back to our community. Submit resumes to:

[robert@elcampochurchofchrist.org](mailto:robert@elcampochurchofchrist.org)



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The Department of English & Modern Languages invites applications for the position of department chair and associate / full professor (tenure-track). Areas of specialization include one of the following: Rhetoric and Composition, with expertise in technical / professional writing (including social and digital media literacies); or English Education. As a department that values a supportive community, we seek candidates dedicated to mentoring students and working collaboratively with colleagues. Applicants will have a passion for teaching as demonstrated by student and peer evaluations, as well as a strong record of scholarship. Ph.D. required.

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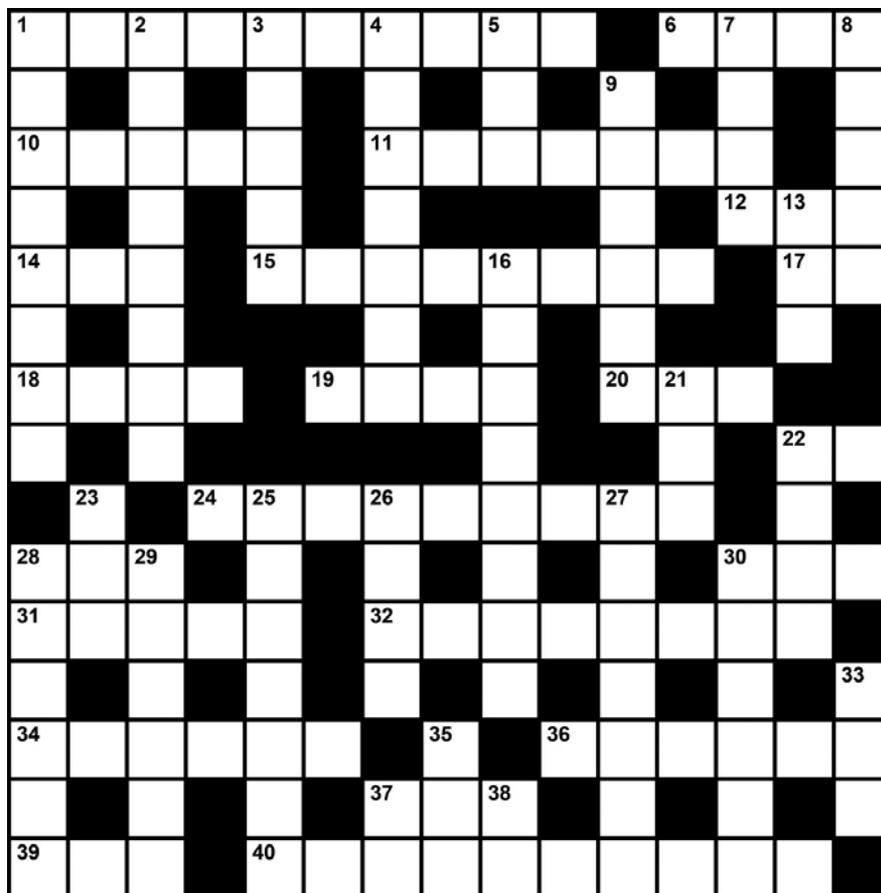


# The Christian Chronicle Crossword

By Myles Mellor | www.ilovecrosswords.com

## ACROSS

1. "Then Jesus went with them to a place called \_\_\_\_\_, and he said to his disciples, "sit here while I go over there and pray" (Matthew 26:36, English Standard Version).
6. Genesis brother.
10. "Let there be \_\_\_\_\_, and there was \_\_\_\_\_" (Genesis 1:3, ESV).
11. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the \_\_\_\_\_ of stone, with the law and the commandment ...'" (Exodus 24:12, ESV).
12. Jump up and down.
14. "And \_\_\_\_\_ of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Genesis 2:9, ESV).
15. He went to Jerusalem to rebuild walls.
17. Exists.
18. "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take \_\_\_\_\_ lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12, ESV).
19. Jacob, to Esau.
20. Racket.
22. Kilogram, for short.
24. Christ rising to heaven.
28. "\_\_\_\_\_ the season to be jolly."
30. Pen liquid.
31. Jesus turned it into wine.
32. "And he came to the disciples and found them \_\_\_\_\_. And he said to Peter, 'So, could you not watch with me one hour?'" (Matthew 26:40, ESV).
34. Agree with and follow one's beliefs, two words.
36. Faith.
37. Started a fire.
39. Emergency responders, abbr.
40. "to them we did not yield in \_\_\_\_\_ even for a moment,



so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you" (Galatians 2:5, ESV).

## DOWN

1. "Place of the Skull" (Mark 15:22).
2. "And we know that for those who love God all things work \_\_\_\_\_ for good" (Romans 8:28, ESV).
3. The devil.
4. Apostle who was a tax collector.
5. Pen part.

7. "He looked, and behold, the \_\_\_\_\_ was burning, yet it was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2, ESV).
8. "For when the foolish took their \_\_\_\_\_, they took no oil with them" (Matthew 25:3, ESV).
9. "Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, \_\_\_\_\_ of good news" (Isaiah 40:9, ESV).
13. Fuel for lamps.
16. "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not \_\_\_\_\_ to you?" (Matthew 25:44, ESV).

## BIBLE BOWLING

### Alpha-biblical quiz

Can you identify these people, places and things?

1. Home of some demonic swine:  
G \_\_\_\_\_
2. Great king of Judea, allegedly:  
H \_\_\_\_\_
3. Pilate said he was this with regard to Jesus' blood:  
I \_\_\_\_\_
4. Peter denied him:  
J \_\_\_\_\_
5. Saul's father:  
K \_\_\_\_\_
6. Jude wrote one:  
L \_\_\_\_\_
7. At least two visited baby Jesus:  
M \_\_\_\_\_
8. God has lots of these:  
N \_\_\_\_\_
9. Defeated Cushan-rishathaim:  
O \_\_\_\_\_
10. Paul wrote to him:  
P \_\_\_\_\_

ANSWERS, crossword solution on Page 38.

21. "because there was no place for them in the \_\_\_\_\_" (Luke 2:7, ESV).
22. Herod, for one.
23. By way of.
25. The \_\_\_\_\_ and the Pharisees.
26. "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the \_\_\_\_\_" (Genesis 2:8, ESV).
27. "You shall not wrong a sojourner or \_\_\_\_\_ him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21, ESV).
28. Number of disciples.
29. Barrel slats.
30. Part of a rainbow.
33. Commonly.
35. Not well lit.
37. Pound in weight, abbr.
38. Musical scale note.

# Word Find: Church activity

By Betty Hollister | The Christian Chronicle

ADULTCLASSTORYSNOITAGERGNOC  
 DBLESSINGSUPPLYTINUTROPOO  
 OEINTERESTSALVATIONAIRERNRM  
 RNDLEARNINGIVINGGDLGIRAFDIM  
 AEEIIGNIRAHSMMSNEEHGSEESUU  
 TVVSTRUSTTEGTIRNTIOESRSSNN  
 IOETYAIALHANUDTTENNRSIIISI  
 OLLETLTEGLIDAAEOAASIYOCTROO  
 NEONSLIISVYEKDUILLFORNEYROUN  
 GNPIERSLOLREOSIUNLNPSUBIS  
 SCINNNULANTARTTESREAOHATHGR  
 DENGOFAWETSLYLLAUTIRICHGIE  
 NYGSHNESEMITLLASREVINUTAILK  
 EPATRNECIGNIROTNEMATSETCEEAA  
 IEIEEQUILTINGANOITARIMDANRE  
 RATRANSFORMATIONURSERYRTNAP  
 FELLOWSHIPLSNOSSELARUTPIRCS

Find the following words associated with congregational living. The unused 31 letters form a sentence. (Find the answer on Page 38.)

- ABILITIES
- ADMIRATION
- ADORATION
- ADULT CLASS
- ALL TIME
- BENEVOLENCE
- BLESSINGS
- COMMUNION
- CONFESSIONS
- CONGREGATION
- DEDICATION
- DEVELOPING
- ETERNAL
- FAITHFUL
- FELLOWSHIP
- FRIENDS
- GIVING
- HONESTY
- INTERESTS
- LEARNING
- LESSONS
- LISTENING
- LOVING
- MEALS
- MENTORING
- MINISTRY
- MISSION
- MUSIC
- NATURAL
- NEIGHBOR
- NURSERY
- OPPORTUNITY
- ORDERLY
- ORIGINALITY
- PANTRY
- PERSONALITY
- PRAYERS
- PREACHERS
- QUILTING
- READING
- REASONS
- RELIGIOUS
- RENEWAL
- RIGHTEOUS
- RITUAL
- SALVATION
- SANCTION
- SCRIPTURAL
- SHARING
- SIGHTS
- SPEAKERS
- STEW
- STORY
- STUDY
- SUPPLY
- TALENTED
- TESTAMENT
- TRANSFORMATION
- TRUST
- TRUTH
- UNDERTAKE
- UNITY
- UNIVERSAL



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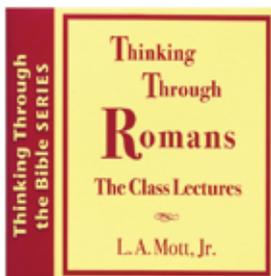
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Contact: Minister/Evangelist  
Jake Wayne (jakehis@aol.com)

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#### Let Us Come Before His Presence

Yann Opsitch. **Let Us Come Before His Presence: 365 Days to Learn, Meditate and Pray from the Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount.** Keledei Publications, 2021. \$24.99. Order from Amazon or Keledei.



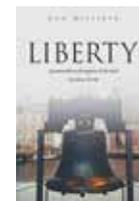
#### A Conversation with John about Revelation

Yann Opsitch. **Dialogues on Revelation with John the Apostle.** Keledei Publications, 2022. \$14.99. Order from Amazon or Keledei.



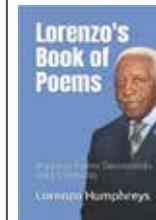
#### "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land."

Ron Milliner. **Liberty.** Quarterly study with discussion questions. Xulon Press, 2022. \$15.49. Available in paperback and ebook. Order from Amazon.



#### Poems, Devotionals, and Scriptures

Lorenzo Humphreys. **Lorenzo's Book of Poems: Inspiring Poems, Devotionals and Scriptures.** Self-published, 2022. \$14.95. Order from Amazon. Poems to put joy in your day.



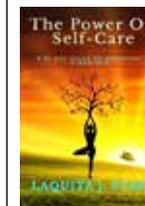
#### Teach Others the Truth of the Gospel

D. Keith Loyd. **EasyBeliefism.** Page Publishing, 2019. \$11.95. Order from Amazon, or contact the author for a discount: dkeithloyd@reagan.com.



#### Spiritual and Emotional Health

LaQuita J. Starr. **The Power of Self-Care: A 21 Day Guide to Becoming a New You.** Self-published, 2021. \$13.99. Order from Amazon.



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**Cedar Key Church of Christ,** Pulpit Minister, Cedar Key, Fla., (904) 910-1353. Contact Mel Beckham, melbeckham@me.com. Salary and house provided.

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# 'Find what's in the skies': The legacy of poet Walt McDonald

God loves poetry. We know this because he authored a good deal of it — about a third of the Bible comes to us in poetic form. For 2,000 years, Christian poets have expressed their faith through hymns and poems of stunning variety. That grand tradition continues with the publication of *The Essential Walt McDonald*.

McDonald — the late poet laureate of Texas, Air Force pilot, rancher, professor and disciple of Jesus — has bequeathed to us a remarkable work: a collection of over 500 poems, lovingly selected and arranged by the author himself.

In McDonald's poems, the sacred is seldom overtly named, but rest assured, Christ is near.

"The foundation of all my work is Christ," he once declared. "Not one poem would have come without that rock."

McDonald's mission is similar to

C.S. Lewis' — to do one's best to pay attention, to see what is squarely set before us and discover a world crowded with God's presence. "Keep your eyes wide," he counsels in one poem. "Find what's in the skies."

Religious verse is notorious for sometimes turning cloyingly sweet or maudlin, for putting on airs. McDonald travels a more direct, warts-and-all path devoid of obscurity and pretention. He is honest about humanity's flawed and fallen state. Whether the subject is a near-bankrupt farmer pleading for rain, a grandfather praying for a dying granddaughter, a cowboy fixing fences, a couple savoring their morning coffee or a father waiting on news from the war front where his son serves — grief, desperation, hope and joy are treated with equal candor and compassion.

Even when answers aren't forthcoming, McDonald reassures that God's grace is sufficient.

McDonald is a love poet, enamored

of the Word and words, of natural beauty and people, his ordinary saints. "Those who overcome the everyday with simple faith are my heroes," McDonald said. In memorable scenes of graceful realism, ordinary folk perform simple acts of goodness — without fanfare or expectation of reward.

He especially delights in family and friendships. Scenes of parents and children, aunts and uncles, rural neighbors and war buddies appear often. But he is at his finest celebrating married love.

Like the singer in the Song of Solomon, McDonald soars when he recalls time spent with Carol, his beloved wife, an Abilene Christian University honor graduate and graphic artist.

The psalmist used ordinary

material things — a starry sky, a shadowy valley, a green pasture, a deer seeking water — to convey spiritual realities. McDonald similarly

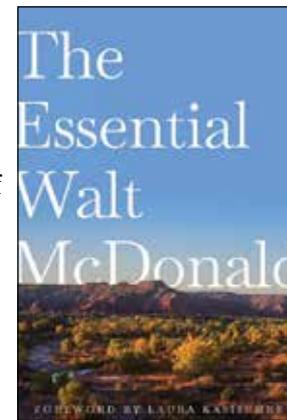
finds truth, beauty and the sacred in human relationships, nature — and the smallest of things.

Few poets from Churches of Christ have ever achieved national recognition for their literary excellence. Walt McDonald is the exception, authoring over 20 books and 2,000 poems and receiving numerous awards. We owe him and his memory a great debt for leaving us his last, best work — a masterwork overflowing with hope, love, wisdom and beautiful, honest faith.

## In Print



Darryl Tippens



Walt McDonald. *"The Essential Walt McDonald."* Texas Tech University Press. 2022. 608 pages. \$39.95.

**DARRYL TIPPENS** is a retired University Distinguished Scholar of Faith, Learning and Literature at Abilene Christian University and former chief academic officer at Pepperdine University.

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# Swiss church is stamping passports for eternity

## VADUZ, Liechtenstein

“Does anyone want their passport stamped?” I quickly raised my hand. How cool! Passport stamps are hard to come by these days in the mostly borderless European Union — especially in the 26 countries called the Schengen Area.

### Insight



Erik Tryggestad

So I and a handful of fellow tourists hopped off the bus and followed our guide — past city hall and into a gift shop. Three Swiss francs later, I had a stamp bearing the words “Tourist Office, Fürstentum (Principality) Liechtenstein.”

In 21 years with *The Christian Chronicle*, I’ve been blessed to visit more than 80 countries. This was the first time I’d ever stood in an “immigration” line behind people buying T-shirts.

Admittedly, my little jaunt to this tiny principality was an indulgence. I had a spare day between preaching for a Church of Christ in Zurich and catching a flight to my next destination, Tanzania. It was hard to resist the chance to cross an international border and visit Liechtenstein — 15 miles tall and five miles wide, landlocked between equally landlocked Switzerland and Austria, and home to fewer than 39,000 people.

It has more corporations than citizens due to its status as a tax



The Cathedral of St. Florin, left, stands among the mountains in the tiny principality of Liechtenstein. Vaduz Castle, right, sits high above the city streets.



PHOTOS BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD

haven. Switzerland has accidentally invaded it multiple times — mostly as a result of Swiss soldiers taking a wrong turn in the Alps.

It’s probably the last vestige of the Holy Roman Empire (which wasn’t really holy, Roman nor an empire) and was named after Anton Florian of Liechtenstein — whose family evidently didn’t even set foot in the principality for more than 100 years after they were given control of it.

I’m glad I set foot in it. Vaduz, the capital, is a beautiful city surrounded by mountains. The prince’s majestic castle overlooks a pedestrian street where shops sell gelato, cappuccino and lots of stuff with “Liechtenstein” on it. Plus, they stamp passports.

As beautiful as Liechtenstein is, I found greater beauty on the lower level of a nondescript office building

in Zurich — the meeting place of the Gemeinde Christi (Church of Christ).

One of the members, Anina Good, called Switzerland “the nicest country in the world — and probably the most expensive!” But what I loved about the place was the simple, family things. I went hiking with Anina and her husband, Daniel. One of the elders, Chris Simeon, and his wife, Marianne, fed me a wonderful pasta dinner. Evangelist Olivier Cuendet hosted me for three nights and, a week later, let me rest at his apartment during a long layover as I headed home from Tanzania.

During my sermon I shared pictures and stories of the Ukrainian Christians I’ve encountered, many of them now scattered across Europe. Two ladies in the back started pointing and taking pictures of my PowerPoint

slides. They were Ukrainians, Lena and Tamara. I learned about how the Zurich church had helped them.

I asked them about their feelings toward Russian Christians — a subject I wrote about last month. Tamara, who has gotten used to speaking German in recent months, suddenly had to switch to English to answer.

They want justice, she said, but they understand that, ultimately, what’s happening in their country is the work of the devil — not Russians, not Vladimir Putin. With Ukraine so prominent in the news these days, “we are very aware that others see what we do,” Tamara said. “The Bible says this world is not our house. In this situation, we tell about God.”

That’s what the Zurich church is doing — through its Bible studies and its kindness, its hospitality. I saw the DNA of my friends Clyde and Gwen Antwine, who worked as missionaries in Zurich more than 60 years ago. On Sunday afternoon I excitedly called my wife. “It’s like a whole church of Clydes and Gwens!” I told her.

Stamping passports for eternity — that’s the business I should be about, like Clyde, Gwen and my Swiss brothers and sisters.

And I shouldn’t put it off.

How many members of the Liechtenstein family missed their chance to see the land they’d been given, their beautiful inheritance?

**ERIK TRYGGESTAD** is president and CEO of *The Christian Chronicle*. Contact [erik@christianchronicle.org](mailto:erik@christianchronicle.org), and follow him on Twitter @eriktryggestad.

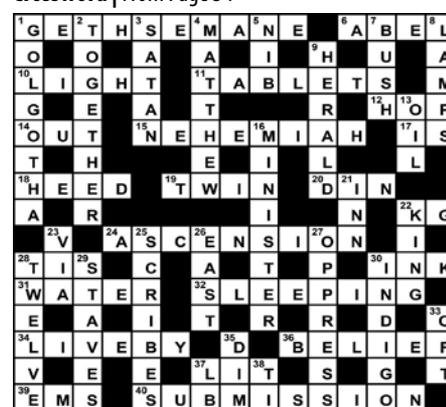


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## Crossword | From Page 34



## Bible Bowling | From Page 34

- 1) Gerasenes (Mark 5:1).
- 2) Herod (Matthew 2:1).
- 3) Innocent (Matthew 27:24).
- 4) Jesus (Luke 22).
- 5) Kish (1 Samuel 9:1).
- 6) Letter (Jude).
- 7) Magi (Matthew 2).
- 8) Names.
- 9) Othniel (Judges 3).
- 10) Philemon.

Quiz by Steve Whitehead of the British Bible School, [britishbibleschool.com](http://britishbibleschool.com).

## Word Search | From Page 35

The unused 31 letters read: **“SMALL LIFE GROUPS ARE REALLY SPECIAL.”**



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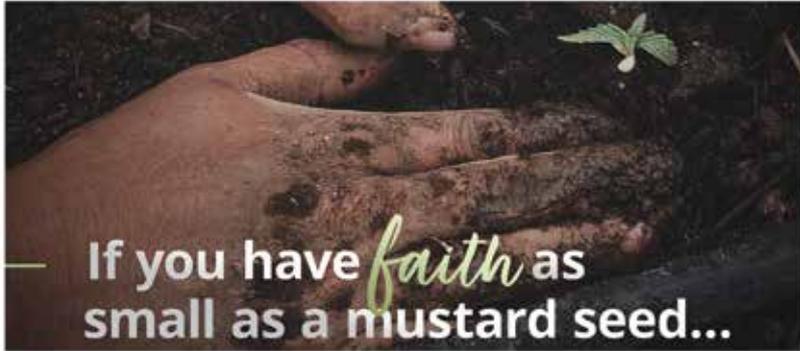


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