

WHITE WING

100 YEARS

APRIL 2023

MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

RECONCILING THE WORLD TO CHRIST

THROUGH THE POWER
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT





It's a celebration!

The *White Wing Messenger* was first published in September 1923.

The magazine was originally designed twice a month in General Overseer A.J. Tomlinson's home. Each issue was carried to the post office in a mailbag or two strapped to the handlebars of a bicycle that belonged to a young Milton Tomlinson. The *White Wing Messenger* is indeed a marvelous part of our heritage!

When the history of a people is written, their art, literature, and poetry play a significant role for later interpreters. The *White Wing Messenger*, in its journey across these 99 years, has served this Church well and will be found by historians to have faithfully told the story of a people who followed hard after God.

Publishing is an expensive, dynamic business. God's grace and calling have allowed the Church to sustain this great effort these many years. This incredible magazine, its noteworthy achievements, and its faithful presentation of the Word of God will continue to be a source of joy to the Church of God of Prophecy and a blessing to the nations. "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who published it" (Psalm 68:11).

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WE BELIEVE in the Holy Trinity—one God, eternally existing in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We believe in one God, the Father, creator of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. All things were made through Him and for Him. He is true God and true man. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin, Mary. He suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He will return to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who eternally proceeds from the Father. He is Teacher, Comforter, Helper, and Giver of spiritual gifts. Through Him the saving and sanctifying works of Jesus Christ are applied to the life of believers. He is the empowering presence of God in the life of the Christian and the church. The Father has sent His Son to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and bearing the fruit of the Spirit are New Testament signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that He died in our place. The believer's sins are forgiven by the shedding of His blood. We believe that healing of mind, body, soul, and spirit is available to the believer through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in one baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the grace of God brings forgiveness and reconciliation to those who repent, as well as transformation in holiness, enabling them to live a Christ-like life. Sanctification is both a definite work of grace and a lifelong process of change in the believer brought by the blood of Jesus, the Word of God, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one holy, universal church, composed of all true believers in Jesus Christ, offering fellowship and calling for service to men and women of all races, nations, cultures, and languages. We believe in the spiritual and ultimate visible unity of the church.

We believe that the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His will to humankind, sufficient for instruction in salvation and daily Christian living. The Bible is the Christian's rule of faith and practice.

We believe that God will ultimately reconcile all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Therefore, we look forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Executive Editor/Publisher:

Tim Coalter

Managing Editor: Marsha Robinson

Editorial Assistant: Roxanne Corbett

Graphic Designer: DeWayne Hamby

About the Church of God of Prophecy

The Church of God of Prophecy is a vibrant, worldwide body of believers, united in worship, working hand-in-hand to share God's love and a message of hope to the brokenhearted. The organization has more than a million members and more than 10,000 ministers, worshipping in more than 10,000 churches or missions in 135 nations of the world.

Church of God of Prophecy Core Values

- Prayer
- The Harvest
- Leadership Development
- Biblical Stewardship
- Service

Vision Statement

Reconciling the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

Mission Statement

The Church of God of Prophecy is a Christ-exalting, holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple-making, church-planting movement with passion for Christian union.

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James Kolawole: Africa

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FACING FORWARD

The Cross

The most important event in all of human history was the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Calvary was more than a single event; it is a continuous river of liberation for every tribe and nation and kindred and tongue—all those who want to be freed from the curse of sin and death—throughout the ages.

St. Augustine of Hippo believed we must not see the cross on which Jesus was nailed as an instrument of horrendous affliction and torture. Yes, Jesus suffered, but the victory of the cross transformed his suffering into joy (Hebrews 12:2). Augustine insisted we should see that cross, above all, as the pathway that leads us to God.

Crosses were designed to inflict maximum physical suffering and shame on the person nailed to them. But the cross of Jesus was an instrument of triumph! Christ has overcome the world!

The cross was an instrument of execution; it became a symbol of reconciliation and hope. The cross should have brought only shame; it became a symbol of life and forgiveness for the followers of the resurrected Christ. The worst that Jesus' enemies could do could never overcome him. The cross and the tomb were transformed into markers of hope and eternal life.

The chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and even the elders mocked Jesus, saying, "He saved others, he cannot save himself; if he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will; for he said, I am the Son of God" (Matthew 27:41-43).

But coming down from the cross was not an option. Jesus was always one hundred percent God and one hundred percent human, which means that he could have easily saved himself. But to save himself would be the end of all humanity. Jesus of Nazareth was not a victim of the government but the Savior of everyone who believes in him. He could not abort the process of the cross because he knew the Law, and the Law said, without blood, there is no remission of sin (Acts 20:22). The blood that poured out of the sinless Son of God on the cross possessed the power to save all who believe in it. The cross provided the world with the only way of escape from God's wrath to come. Therefore, he paid no heed to the mockery of Israel's leaders but went on to the end.

What the Roman cross meant—torture, shame, death—lost its meaning because of Christ. A cross today points to our wonderful Savior.

The apostle Paul declared that the cross of Christ was "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24). We cherish the cross!

The cross is the most powerful expression of God's love for us. Christians should never forget it. Every year we celebrate another anniversary of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ has become, especially in the United States, another day of great consumption. And in many tropical countries, it is a beach weekend, where alcohol, drugs, and other illicit activities reign. It seems there is an insidious plan to dishonor and forget the day of our total redemption.

I call for the entire Church of God of Prophecy and Christians everywhere to offer thanksgiving and praise in this season, because our Savior preferred to suffer on the cross so that you and I may have Shalom, the life, peace, and well-being of God. The cross brought peace with God and peace from God.

That peace, the Shalom of God, transmits a desire for health, harmony, inner peace, calm, and tranquility amid a world full of pain and sadness. It is at the cross where those who believe and practice the teachings of Jesus receive eternal life; therefore, this date should be sacred for all of us. I urge you to share with someone during this month the story of the cross. It is a time to celebrate that God demonstrated his great love for you and me, in a flowing river of redemption and deliverance from the punishment and consequences sin produce. Shalom to each of you



Bishop Gabriel Vidal, DMin
South America General Presbyter

GLOBAL

MISSIONS MINISTRIES
CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY



Dr. Cathy Payne coordinates Global Missions Ministries for the Church of God of Prophecy internationally and has ministered in more than 100 nations. Cathy obtained a Masters of Divinity from Pentecostal Theological Seminary and is currently enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry program with Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. She is also working toward a Doctor of Philosophy degree with Bangor University in South Wales, UK. Cathy and John have one son and five grandchildren.

REV. CATHY PAYNE, DMin | GLOBAL MISSIONS MINISTRIES COORDINATOR



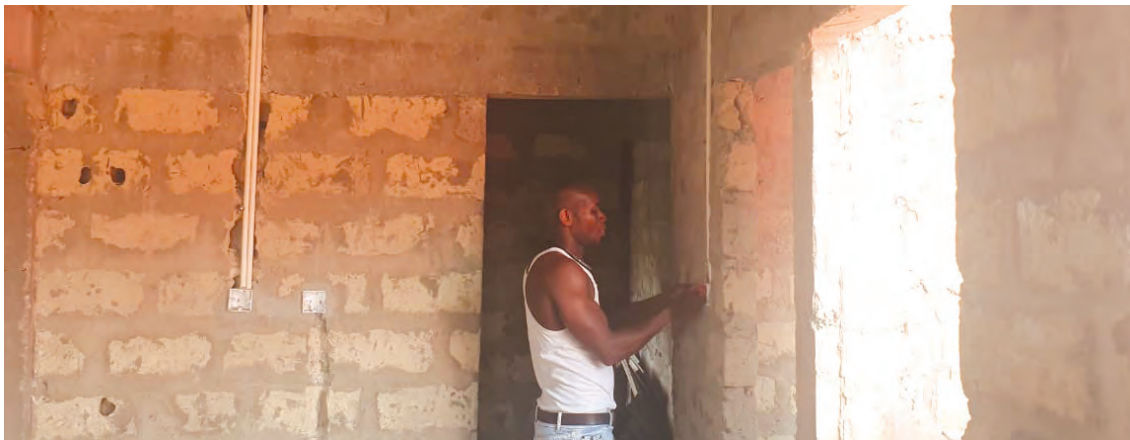
New Headquarters Building in Gambia

Praise the Lord! The second phase of COGOP Gambia National Headquarters Building Project is very much in progress. This phase includes work on the offices of the National Church of God of Prophecy in Gambia, work on the parsonage for the national bishop, work on the toilets, and completion of the children's hall. Currently we are working on the electrical, plumbing, fixing the doors, preparing the windows for anti-burglary, and fixing some

window glasses. We are also plastering the interior.

To all our Harvest Partner churches, pastors, individuals, and our International Offices coordinators and leaders, we can't appreciate you enough. Your support has enabled us to achieve so much. Thank you for your continuous support and prayers.

*God bless you immeasurably!
Chris Uti, National Bishop*





Newsletter for Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau

Greetings, everyone, we are delighted to share with you some information on the work the Lord has called us to do on this side of the globe. This is one of the ways we would like to express our thanks and appreciation for all your support to us as we labor to fulfill the call of God on our lives through serving as messengers of reconciliation among our people in Africa.

Our latest update includes the Guinea Conakry headquarters church building, a vehicle for our national bishop, and our church property in Guinea Bissau.

Our Guinea COGOP Headquarters Project started more than eight years ago. With your greatly generous support (for which we are exceedingly grateful), we have come this far. Work is still going on while we use the ground floor for the church worship service. Though inflation has caused a lot of setbacks in terms of when we thought we could complete the building, with our faith in God, we are determined to dedicate this building in May of 2023.

We are also grateful and wish to thank you for our mission vehicle for our national bishop's use.

Guinea Bissau Land

Our land in Guinea Bissau is listed among several empty properties for which the city council will fine the owners if no structures are erected on them. This property was bought in 2007. We have a plan to build a school on this property. We will use it to meet the educational needs of the people, help our members, and boost our evangelism efforts. Right now, we will need to start with a foundation to avoid the fines of the city council. Pray for us.





RECONCILING THE WORLD TO CHRIST

STARTING WITH OUR OWN HOMES

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children” (Deuteronomy 4:9 ESV).

“How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when his own disciples do not teach his gospel to their own sons and daughters?”—Charles Spurgeon, *The Kind of Revival Wanted by the Church*.

The vision for reconciling the world to Christ should begin in each of our homes. Making the sharing of faith and providing invitations for our children to accept Christ as Savior should be a priority for all believing parents and grandparents. So often, parents care for the daily needs of their children and engage them in activities to prepare them for future success in life. While this is part of good parenting and an expectation, there is nothing more important than attending to children’s spiritual needs and direction. Unfortunately, many parents feel inadequate or ill-equipped to present the gospel message to their children and rely on the church to provide these opportunities.

While this is common and understandable, God has given parents the responsibility and most influential role when it comes to guiding their child’s path—including salvation. As parents talk to their children about salvation and engage them in conversation, the Holy Spirit can activate the faith of a child and draw them to repentance. How can a parent, grandparent, or caregiver become more comfortable introducing their child to faith?

LAYING A FOUNDATION

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 NIV).

Our children can develop a foundation of understanding God through our words and example. This foundation is laid as we talk about God through activities such as reading Bible stories with them, memorizing scriptures together, and singing worship songs in the car. This foundation becomes even more solid as our children experience life in our homes where faith is modeled through our examples, words, actions, and discipline. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 reminds us that these words and our example are best experienced in the context of family life.

DETERMINE READINESS TO RECEIVE

As a child begins to learn the message of salvation, perhaps the parent is in the best position to discern if their child has an accurate understanding of the gospel. We must allow the Holy Spirit to draw our children through his convicting power. In our desire for their salvation, we should avoid pushing our children into making a faith decision, framing it in a way that they wish to please us, or motivating them by overemphasizing fear. We can ensure that children are ready and understand the gift of salvation by asking them questions.

You can share scriptures such as Isaiah 53:6, Romans 3:23, and Romans 6:23. Then ask the child questions such as “What is sin?” “How has sin affected your relationship with God?” “How can you be made right with God?” Listen intently to the child’s response to see if they fully understand. If they do not, you can provide correction to them in a loving manner.



Bishop Shaun McKinley, PhD serves the Church of God of Prophecy as director of International Children's Ministry and administrative liaison to Presiding Bishop Tim Coalter. He earned a Master of Business Administration in Marketing from Bryan College and a PhD in Leadership from the University of the Cumberland. Shaun is an adjunct instructor with Belhaven University, Trevecca Nazarene University, and Oral Roberts University teaching Business, Leadership, and Management. Shaun is an ordained COGOP bishop who, along with his wife, Stephanie, is raising three daughters: Reagan, Madison, and Kennedy.

BISHOP SHAUN MCKINLEY, PHD | INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

LEADING YOUR CHILD TO CHRIST

"...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Romans 10:9, 10 CSB, NIV).

If you believe that your child has a solid understanding of sin and that the Holy Spirit has led them to accept Christ, you can lead them through a review of God's plan and the prayer of salvation.

It is always a good idea to review the plan of salvation with them. This can simply be sharing the following points with them:

- God knows all about your sins, but he still loves you.
- Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again to take the punishment for your sin.
- You can receive Jesus as your Savior from sin.

Before praying, share a verse with them to help them understand how they should respond to God's invitation. You might read or quote one of the following Scripture verses that contains both the child's response and God's promise.

- "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31 NIV).
- "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13 NIV).
- "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NIV).
- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV).

Verses like 1 John 1:9 give a clear understanding of God's salvation promise that if we do our part (confess our sin), God will do his part (forgive us our sin). This is a wonderful review exercise to do with children. Ask them, "What is God's part?" and "What is our part?"

If it seems from their responses that your child understands the gospel and is ready to receive Christ as Savior, give them the opportunity to decide. Ask, "Would you like to receive Jesus as your Savior now?"

If your child says yes, encourage them to pray. Say something like, "You can talk to God out loud, just like you have been talking to me. Tell God how you feel about the wrong things you have done. Tell him that you believe he died on the cross for you."

If your child does not know how to pray or does not feel he can pray alone, help him form a prayer, line by line. Remember, it is not the prayer itself that saves the child. His salvation comes through his faith in Christ as Savior.

Sample Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am sorry for the wrong things I have done. I believe you died on the cross so that I could be saved from my sins. Thank you for forgiving my sins. I choose to live for you.

For older children, you might decide not to provide a word-for-word prayer. Rather, you can provide prompts for their prayer such as telling God that they are sorry for their sins, asking for forgiveness, and asking him to be Lord of their life.

PROVIDE ASSURANCE

When your child finishes praying, ask: "What did Jesus do for you?" Don't say, "I'm glad Jesus has saved you." Allow the child's assurance to come from the Holy Spirit through the Word of God rather than from you.

To confirm the child's experience of salvation, use the verse that you reviewed with them before your prayer. Remind the child of their part and ask, "Did you do your part?" Then ask, "What was God's part?" Assure them, "If you did your part, God will always do his part."

PREPARE THEM FOR BAPTISM

Once your child has decided to accept God's gift of salvation, you should encourage them to take the next biblical step in their walk with Christ, baptism.

IT'S THE FATHER'S WILL

Jesus concluded the story of the lost sheep with these words, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14). It is the Father's will that our children are saved, and he provides us with the precious opportunity to lead them in this experience.

It is God who saves our children—not our will, our words, or our way. When we realize that it is God who does the saving, we can relax, ready ourselves to do our part, and see God work in the lives of our children.



INTENTIONAL

I've developed an affinity for walking lately. I will stroll along some trails for several miles listening to music and podcasts, talking to friends, or just looking around admiring creation. Once upon a time, I enjoyed running, but I have slowed down over the last couple years to a more leisurely pace. Now I just walk.



Hunter Roberts is a licensed minister in the Church of God of Prophecy and was raised in Mooreville, Mississippi. After completing his degrees in International Finance and Spanish at Mississippi State University in December 2021, he relocated to Cleveland, Tennessee to serve in the North America General Presbyterian's office. Following the 2022 International Assembly, Hunter transitioned into the role of executive assistant to Presiding Bishop Tim Coalter. In addition to serving in this capacity, he is also now pursuing a master's degree in Church Ministries from Pentecostal Theological Seminary.

HUNTER ROBERTS | OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Here in Cleveland, I tend to walk on a trail that cuts right through the center of the city; nevertheless, it is immersed in nature. I have seen birds, squirrels, turkeys, deer, and even some turtles on my walks on that trail.

As I reflect on this, I am reminded of a story of a woman that would do the very same thing. Each evening after work, she would walk on a trail close to her home. There was a relatively busy road that ran parallel to the trail on one side and a swiftly flowing creek that ran along the other.

As she would walk this trail, she would often come across turtles on the path. As she saw them, in an effort to keep them from wandering into traffic, she would help them along by tossing them over into the creek. She would then continue on her way. She saw these turtles every few days at first, but as time went by, it became every few weeks, and then eventually she quit seeing them all together.

After a couple of months had passed, she finally came across another turtle on the trail. So as she always did, she went over to toss it into the creek. This time, being that they were becoming so uncommon to see, she lingered a bit longer after tossing it in as she wished to admire the little animal and did not know when she would come across one again.

It was then in that horrifying moment that she realized—that was not a turtle she had just tossed into the creek. It was a small tortoise. And if you know anything about the difference between the two, well, a tortoise can't swim.

Before you get upset about the tortoises, let me disclose that this story is entirely fictitious. Nevertheless, I have seen this same scenario illustrated in my own life. There have been moments I thought I was being heroic. I thought I was doing the right thing, and I thought I was helping make things better. However, due to my limited understanding of a person or a situation, I was doing just the opposite. My own righteousness was like filthy rags, and I completely misunderstood and misidentified the needs of the ones I was trying to help.

Perhaps this is in part why we are given the proverbial wisdom to "lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). As we engage and participate in this ministry of reconciliation, there are going to be people we encounter about whom we must not make assumptions or premature judgments. The first course of action must always be to inquire of the Lord.

In a recent Upper Room chapel service at the International Offices, Bishop Brian Sutton shared the importance of inquiring of the Lord. He recounted that,

in many instances, King David was known for inquiring of the Lord when faced with a decision (i.e., 1 Samuel 23; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19; 21:1). However, in one particular instance, it appears that David—as well-intentioned as he may have been—decided he would do something without consulting God. It was to honor God and celebrate their victory after all, so why would he need to inquire of him for this?

The story I am referencing is a familiar passage from 2 Samuel chapter 6. In this account, the Ark of the Covenant was set on a new cart led by oxen and paraded within a musical procession. This was a celebration after all! With the sons of Abinadab guiding the cart, they had set out to transport the Ark to the city of Jerusalem.

As they were traveling, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out to keep the Ark from falling. At that point, he was struck down by the anger of the Lord, and he died. Why, though? The endeavor was destined to fail because it was built on disobedience and a lack of communication with God.

God's commands regarding the Ark of the Covenant were recorded in Exodus 25:10–22. God ordered that the Ark should have two poles inserted into the rings of the Ark which should not be removed, and it was with those that the Ark should be transported.

David and those who planned this parade made an assumption. They did what they thought would be worshipful, yet they failed to inquire of the Lord and recall what he had already commanded. If only we would inquire of the Lord, so many adverse consequences could be avoided. Our good, well-meaning intentions can still result in undesirable, devastating outcomes.

On a more practical note, this may mean that before you assume that the impoverished visitor at your church is looking for a handout, you should learn the details of their life and how you can minister to the heart of their issues rather than the superficial symptoms. It may mean that when a friend continues to send you messages incessantly throughout the day, they are not only looking for conversation but companionship to combat their loneliness. It may mean that hidden within the insults of the scoffer, there is a sense of curiosity and desperation to learn of the hope that is within you. What good does it do to bandage a wound without first cleaning it?

Before we go tossing turtles or moving Arks, let us first be intentional in hearing what the Lord says and educating ourselves on the details of the situations before us. Love before you cast judgment. Listen before you speak. Pray before you act. Inquire of the Lord.

SERVING FAMILIES

IN TIMES OF CELEBRATION AND CRISIS

Frequently, our experiences open paths to the truths and values that shape our personality. It is through these experiences that we grasp an understanding for both the festive and hopeful side of reality. Families are formed according to the determination of what they celebrate and how they celebrate it. They have celebrations to strengthen their unity, share mutual expressions of love and joy, engage in religious experiences, and develop healthier families. We also know that families are exposed to critical times we call crises. Some crises happen because they are a part of life's natural course, while others happen due to unforeseen circumstances.

Times of celebration and crises within the family offer the church and the pastor the opportunity to provide effective ministry. They may often do this with a biblical and theological reflection that enhances these events. It is the goal of this lesson to equip participants with basic knowledge and needed tools that will enable them to effectively minister to their congregants and to the community during these times

Serving Families During Times of Celebrations

Biblical Foundation

In the Bible, we find there were public festivities for the community and families to celebrate the cycle of nature, i.e., planting and harvesting of crops. There were also historic celebrations, whether national or sacred, that were reminders of past events. These festivities and others were characterized by a high level of participation and a halt in all working places. In the Old Testament, the Jews expanded on several feasts that were related to the significant moments of Jewish life (Leviticus 23:2-6; Numbers 28 and 29; Deuteronomy 16:1-17). These observances provided opportunities to acknowledge God as the creator and sustainer of all the earth—the crops, time, history, national life, etc.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus participating in celebrations. Jesus observed the Jewish festivities of his time. We know from Scripture that he and his family participated in wedding celebrations, among other celebrations. He used festivities to illustrate his message and mission, giving it a new meaning. That is what happened during the Feast of the Tabernacles (John 7:37; 8:12; Matthew 21:1-10) and Jesus' dedication (John 10:22-28). The Passover is the framework deliberately chosen by Jesus to institute a new covenant in his blood (Matthew 26:2, 17, 28; John 13:1; 19:36; 1 Corinthians 5:7). The Passover, First Fruits, Pentecost,

and other festivities illustrate some of the most significant events in the life of Jesus, the Messiah, and explain why such events are an important part of the divine redemption.

Celebrations and Family

Throughout the world today, families host celebrations as a mean of expressing their most intimate realities. Family celebrations develop a full sense of contentment and positive values. Religious and family celebrations are resources that families can use to educate children, increase and maintain their social networks, and pass on their traditions. These celebrations are important for the children, who can establish a relationship with other relatives, regardless of their age. Furthermore, the children learn social skills, are often given the opportunity to express their views, participate in family customs, and experience closeness, love, and sense of belonging in their families. These experiences directly affect their sense of well-being.

Family traditions leave a mark that later becomes an emotional memory to treasure. When members begin their own families, they put into practice customs and traditions of their families of origin, recreating the environment and sensations they have experienced in their developmental years.

Serving Families Through Crises

Biblical-Theological Foundation for Family Crises

In the Old Testament, the book of Job presents a dialog about suffering in terms of the relationship between the human being and God. His main topic is, "Why do the just suffer?" The purpose of this wonderful document (the book of Job) is to help us see crises as a time for us to grow and shape our character. This book has been interpreted by many as an intent to explain human suffering. Job lived through a great crisis; he lost it all in a "blink of an eye"—all he had worked hard for and secured slipped through his hands in a few moments. When we read the biblical passage, we find a godly man, who without a doubt stood out for doing good for himself and for his family. Even so, he experienced a circumstantial crisis. When facing this economic and family disaster, Job reaffirmed his faith, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21 NIV).

Let's consider great crises during New Testament times. Before Jesus came to this world in incarnate



Bishop Fernando Lopez Cruz, Jr. has been a bishop and pastor in the COGOP for many years and is an adjunct professor at Spirit and Life Seminary as well as the Theological University of the Caribbean and the Pentecostal University at Mizpa. He has earned a BA in Biblical Interpretation, a Master of Religion, and a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. He is married to Rosa Villegas and they have two children.

BISHOP FERNANDO LOPEZ CRUZ, JR. | SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

form, many dangerous situations had provoked crises for the Jewish people. Some of those crises were: The rise of the Maccabees (167 BC–70 AD); King Herod the Great's reign (37–4 BC); social, political, and economic discrimination during the Herodian aristocracy that left the people oppressed, poor, and hopeless; rebellious movements against Herod (Maccabees/Zelots); Herod's kingdom divided into three parts; the Roman government's census to create an economic burden and servanthood; a loss of Israel's identity as a nation and God's chosen people, both in culture and religion; inferior condition of women in relation to men; moral corruption in leadership and authorities. Regardless of all these things, Jesus understood how to handle each crisis and take care of the people in their suffering. He showed his capacity to be an excellent reconciler.

Defining Crises

When we talk about crises, we are referring to that temporary state of disorder and disorganization usually characterized by 1) the individual or family's inability to solve problems using known methods and strategies, and 2) the potential to generate positive or negative radical results. Crises do not in any way represent an illness or pathology. They are part of the universal human experience.

An individual or a family may fall into a crisis when an unexpected event or circumstance is perceived as a devastating moment (for instance, the sudden death of a loved one). Another circumstance that may trigger a crisis is an event that can be interpreted as threatening (for example, losing a job or all finances). In the face of such difficult times, people often break down and seem unable to find an effective way to face it.

Both the crisis and its resolution will depend on a combination of factors, including both the triggering event and personal resources—family, community, culture, and religion. It's expected for a crisis to last for a limited period of time. For better or worse, they can vary from a few days to a few weeks (a maximum of six to eight weeks) to be resolved. Neither the person nor the family system tolerates high levels of disorganization during long periods. However, it is important to realize that grieving a significant loss takes much more than a few weeks or months. Grieving a loss may take years.

Types of Family Crises

Family crises can be categorized as circumstantial crises, developmental crises, structural crises, or abandonment crises. The circumstantial crises are

unexpected crises. They present an unforeseen manifestation of stress rising out of external forces, unknown both to the individual and the family. Some examples include wars, illnesses, accidents, fires, earthquakes, coin devaluation, high living cost, etc.

Developmental crises in a family often happen when a family structure is unable to incorporate into the new developing stage of any of its members or the family itself. Some of these events may include migration or divorce. These events can be considered as vulnerable aspects experienced by every family and can result in a crisis.

Structural crises are a recurrent result of the internal dynamics and exacerbation in the family.

Frequently, this type of crisis is the result of an intention to avoid changes. These crises originate from hidden, unresolved, and underlying tense moments in the family structure itself, before external forces or developmental stages. These are some of the crises most dysfunctional families suffer, including domestic violence and addiction.

Pastoral Care and Family Crises

First Pastoral Care

Here are a few general suggestions to offer during the first pastoral care intervention in a crisis:

Listen empathetically. This is most important. When you listen with empathy, it means that you are trying to perceive the world through the other person's point of view.

Refrain from preaching, lecturing, or giving advice. The best support you can give to a person in crisis is your presence and solidarity, not your words.

Do not be intimidated by the expression of strong emotions. These emotions are normal and natural. Any person affected needs to express and vent his/her emotions, not restrain them. Crying is healthy to an affected person.

There's not an easy response to human suffering. To acknowledge the mystery behind life and death, joy and sadness, or laughter and crying is what reveals the humanity in us and communicates hope.

Know and accept your limitations. You cannot resolve all problems. If you realize that you cannot handle a situation, consult a colleague, or refer the person or family to a professional counselor or therapist.

The A-B-C Intervention Model

During the '60s, Warren Jones, a psychiatrist from Los Angeles, California, developed the A-B-C method

to train lay personnel in a community center that served people in crisis. This model consists of the pastor/counselor moving through three sequential stages of help or ministry. This intervention model is usually effective in circumstantial crises.

- “A” represents reaching a relationship of openness and trust. It offers solicited attention, to listen without judgment, to consider the family in crisis and their capacity to confront the crisis, and to communicate this conviction. In summary, it is quick attention, listening emphatically, and evaluating family resources.
- “B” represents identifying the components of the crisis. It includes identifying and expressing feelings, defining the particular content of these feelings and adjusting the focus of attention when articulating what triggers these emotions.
- “C” means to combat actively. To identify, along with others, the resources the family has, and to establish achievable objectives. “C” counteracts paralysis and avoids dependence. The pastor/counselor pays close attention to the referred need. In short, “C” establishes achievable objectives and commits to action.

Grief

The term “grief” comes from the Latin word *gravis* and is the natural emotional response to the loss of someone or something. *The Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* defines grief as:

The experience of losing a loved one or a cherished object. “Grief” usually describes a person’s reaction to the death of a spouse or close relative, although the term can also be used to describe other losses, such as that of a limb, a home, the experience of leaving to a faraway place, the loss of a job or a divorce. “Sorrow” is the emotion of grief; it is part of the price you have to pay for love, and it is a normal response to loss of a special person or object in our life.

The most striking thing about this definition is that it presents grief as a normal reaction to the loss of the loved person or object, and adds “that it is the price to be paid for loving...” It is those demonstrations that manifest the feeling that one has for that loved one.

Dr. Pablo Polischuk, professor and clinical psychologist, writes, “When losing a loved one, belongings or health, people experience natural reactions—physiological sensations, overwhelming negative thoughts and emotions.” Here he emphasizes not only the sense of loss, but he also mentions various physiological and psychological reactions that accompany this loss. Thus, we can also affirm that there are various factors that mediate

grief, such as the relationship with the person dying, the type of attachment, the circumstances of death, historical background, variables of personality, social variables, and concurrent stressors.

In terms of the processes a grieving person goes through and the emotions that engulf them, Dr. Gary Collins, clinical psychologist and Christian author, says, “When a person goes through this grieving process, they experience many emotions, including regret, despair, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, anger, confusion, feelings of worthlessness and feelings of loss (as if a part of themselves has been taken away, or something inside them has died).” The grief stage is like finding yourself in a maze, looking desperately for a way out; it is like going through a dark and scary train tunnel without the light at the end. It is a desperate situation where the person that is going through the grief deserves all our attention and help.

William Worden was the creator of the theory of grieving tasks, where he offers a model for dealing with grief. The four tasks to elaborate a normal grief contained in his book *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* are: “(1) Accept the reality of the loss, (2) Release the feelings and emotions that accompany the grief, (3) Enable yourself to live without the deceased, and (4) Recover interest in life and in the people who are still alive.”

Pastors and Christian counselors must know how to serve grieving families and how to help them in their grief recovery process, to find a new meaning for their grief, and eventually rekindle the core meaning of life.

Conclusion

Serving families during times of celebration and crises provides us with the opportunity to give a part of ourselves without expecting anything in return. The feeling is even greater when we do it intentionally and with empathy. The intentional practices of a pastoral ministry that provides support during times of celebration and crises promote restoration, growth, liberation, and empowerment to those who receive their benefits and services. Serving individuals and families during these times makes them happier, increases the sense of belonging, brings them closer to humility, increases a healthy self-esteem rather than the ego, strengthens relationships, etc.

The church also benefits because a healthy church is one whose leadership has the capacity to think critically, to adopt a holistic theology, and the ability to put into practice appropriate functions and skills for pastoral service. In turn, serving families during times of celebration and grief provides us with the opportunity to address the needs of people and opens the way for a ministry of support, healing, and growth.



Roxanne Corbett is a native of the US Virgin Islands. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Health Administration and is a licensed ordained minister in the Church of God of Prophecy. She presently serves as worship pastor at Spring Place Ministries (Cleveland, Tennessee) and as the editorial assistant for the White Wing Messenger. Roxanne and her husband Nathan have five daughters and three granddaughters.

ROXANNE CORBETT | WHITE WING MESSENGER EDITORIAL ASSISTANT



RECONCILING THE WORLD THROUGH •• Hospitality ••

“One day Elisha went to the town of Shunem. A wealthy woman lived there, and she urged him to come to her home for a meal. After that, whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for something to eat. She said to her husband, ‘I am sure this man who stops in from time to time is a holy man of God. Let’s build a small room for him on the roof and furnish it with a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp. Then he will have a place to stay whenever he comes by!’” (2 Kings 4:8-9 NLT).

“The secret weapon for the gospel advancement is hospitality, and you can practice it whether you live in a house, an apartment, a dorm, or a high-rise.” –Dustin Willis, Brandon Clements

On February 6, 2023, my eldest daughter gave birth to our granddaughter, Ms. Tenley. Our granddaughter arrived safely, and we are thankful. My job during this momentous occasion was to keep her three older sisters at my house. My grandchildren affectionately call me Grammy and we had a lovely time, laughing, eating junk food, and working on schoolwork. After their mom came home from the hospital, they went home, and I missed them terribly. I enjoyed opening my home. As a young girl, I remember how often my parents would open our home to guests. I met people from around the world. We shared meals, exchanged stories, and enjoyed the fellowship. I always marveled how easily Mom and Dad opened their home to everyone. They

worked to make others feel welcome and loved it. As Christ's followers, the Bible commends us to be "given to hospitality." Do we remember how powerful hospitality is? Let's explore a few avenues of thought.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 has had a profound impact on societies around the world. It has changed the way we live, work, and interact with each other. COVID's impact on healthcare, communication, economic and educational systems forced a transition to new interpretations of normal. Families weathered extended lengths of house isolation, and technology, in many cases, was the only means of communication and contact. As a global community, hospitality, as we had known it, vanished.

Growing up in a neighborhood and community with strong ties and relationships is an experience many of us can recall with fond memories and thoughts. How many times did we run next door to borrow a cup of sugar or see our neighbor at the front door? These memories remind us of the importance of care and community, and how it connects our lives. During the pandemic, in-person care became quite impossible. Believers in active prayer and support sent messages, texts, and videos that provided comfort and solace. We found ways to simply be there for someone who needed it.

Now that the global health crisis has waned for many, we are opening our homes again and spending time with family and friends. This is an opportunity once again to share the gospel face to face. Hospitality pushes us out of isolation and breaks down walls of indifference and loneliness. Loneliness was part of the fall-out of the pandemic. People felt isolated during the crisis in addition to losing their normal routine and lifestyle. As believers in Christ, we provide the support and space for others to find refuge and solace. The Shunammite woman saw Elisha's need and met it. She did not require a resume of his character. She realized he was a holy man of God and wanted to meet that need. This is the nature of hospitality. It reaches forward and connects God's purposes.

"One day Elisha returned to Shunem, and he went up to this upper room to rest. He said to his servant Gehazi, 'Tell the woman from Shunem I want to speak to her.' When she appeared, Elisha said to Gehazi, 'Tell her, "We appreciate the kind concern you have shown us. What can we do for you? Can we put in a good word for you to the king or to the commander of the army?"' 'No,' she replied, 'my family takes good care of me.' Later Elisha asked Gehazi, 'What can we do for her?' Gehazi replied, 'She doesn't have a son, and her husband is an old man.' 'Call her back again,' Elisha told him. When

the woman returned, Elisha said to her as she stood in the doorway, 'Next year at this time you will be holding a son in your arms!' 'No, my lord!' she cried. 'O man of God, don't deceive me and get my hopes up like that.' But sure enough, the woman soon became pregnant. And at that time the following year she had a son, just as Elisha had said" (2 Kings 4:11-17 NIV).

Hospitality opens doors for God to change the world. The Shunammite woman's world changed after her act of kindness. She was willing to open her home and be a part of God's mission. Our world wants to know what God is like. What are Christians really like? Are they just an exclusive club? Or does the gospel really have the power to change us? If we are part of God's reconciliation plan on earth, then we must be open to the possibility of hospitality as transformation not only for the recipient but also for us.

In verse 14 of 2 Kings, Elisha asks Gehazi what he can do for the Shunammite woman. Often when others receive a gift of hospitality, it opens their heart, and they want to reciprocate the kindness being shown to them. Hospitality lights the way for God to work in the lives of others in greater measure. The Shunammite woman received a life-changing gift. Yes, she was hospitable. And she did not require compensation. She did require truth. "O man of God, don't deceive me and get my hopes up like that."

There are other examples in Scripture. Zacchaeus, in Luke chapter 19, opens his home to Jesus. He was the chief tax collector for the region, and was despised by his community. But in hospitality, Christ enters his home and Zacchaeus declares that he will change. Christ responds that salvation has come to his home. Another act of hospitality involves the account of Abigail in 1 Samuel chapter 25. Knowing that David was on his way to annihilate her family, she prepares food and goes to meet him. She accepts the blame for her husband, Nabal's actions, presents her case, and asks for forgiveness. Her hospitality saved the lives of her household.

Reconciling the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is not a task given to the elite, the best, and brightest in God's kingdom. It is given to the ordinary man, woman, boy, and girl who has a willing heart to obey his command. Each of us may have excellent grand plans for fulfilling the call, and that is wonderful, but let us not neglect the simple act of being hospitable and opening our homes to those who need to see God's kindness in action. It may be as simple as offering someone a cup of coffee at the kitchen table.

AS BELIEVERS IN CHRIST, WE PROVIDE THE SUPPORT AND SPACE FOR OTHERS TO FIND REFUGE AND SOLACE. THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN SAW ELISHA'S NEED AND MET IT. SHE DID NOT REQUIRE A RESUME OF HIS CHARACTER.



Bishop Elias T. Rodriguez was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He obtained a Master of Divinity degree from Church of God Theological Seminary (now Pentecostal Theological Seminary) in 2007 and a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon–Conwell Theological Seminary in 2014. Dr. Rodriguez served as regional bishop for the Southeast Hispanic Region prior to his appointment as a Center for Biblical Leadership (CBL) Instructor. He has taught extensively throughout the world. He has been married to the former Maria E. Vargas since 1983. They have three children.

BISHOP ELIAS RODRIGUEZ, DMIN | CBL INSTRUCTOR

A REDEEMED PEOPLE A REDEEMED PEOPLE

When we talk about redemption, we usually mean “liberation from slavery, usually by paying a price.” In the Old Testament, the term is related to the redemption of the firstborn of humans or animals, which, according to the law, belonged to God. In Exodus 13:13, God told Moses: “Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons” (NIV). Next, God tells Moses that in the days to come, when the children ask the parents about the meaning of that redemption ceremony, the parents should tell them that the Lord had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, out of the land of slavery (v. 14). Implicit in this statement is the recognition that the redemption of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt required the direct intervention of Almighty God to overcome the power of Pharaoh.

The redeemer was also that close relative who was obliged by law to rescue a relative who, due to his poverty, had sold himself into slavery to pay his debts (Leviticus 25:47). Also, if an Israelite became impoverished and sold his land, the redeemer or closest relative had to redeem what his brother had sold (v. 25). Another aspect of redemption was that if a man died childless with his wife, it fell to a brother or close relative to marry the childless widow, not only to give offspring to his brother, but also to care for her. This was what happened with Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3–4). The redeemer was called the goel.

The above statements help us understand that the term *redemption* is related to the liberation of someone who cannot free him/herself, and therefore

requires someone more powerful than him/herself to intervene.

Our crude reality is that, because of our rebellion and disobedience to God, we are slaves to sin. Sin has brought us all under God’s condemnation. In our sinful condition, we cannot save ourselves, and therefore we need someone more powerful than ourselves to come to our rescue. It’s like when someone bigger and stronger than you is attacking you and you can’t defend yourself. Then someone bigger and stronger than your aggressor comes and defends you freeing you from him.

This is where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes in. There was no way we could break free from Satan’s power and sin’s dominion over us. But Jesus became our goel, that is, our redeemer. Jesus defeated the devil and set us free. But to accomplish that, he became human and gave his life for us. To his disciples Jesus said, “the Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus sees his death as a substitutionary payment for those who live in slavery to sin and death. Jesus, with his death on the cross, paid the price for our liberation, and now we are no longer slaves of the devil or of sin, but servants of God.

How was our redemption achieved?

As we have said before, redemption involves a business transaction, where someone has to pay one way or another to obtain the freedom of someone who cannot free him/herself. We have also said that Jesus became our goel, that is, our redeemer. Our



A REDEEMED PEOPLE

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redemption is based on the love that God has for us. Jesus told Nicodemus for “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Redemption has to do with the recovery of something that has been forfeited. If you buy something and cannot continue paying for it due to some adverse circumstance, then the owner can seize your property, until it is paid. When the debt has been satisfied, you recover what you had bought. That is what Jesus did, who satisfied the debt that we could not pay.

To achieve our redemption, Jesus became the propitiation for our sins. The apostle John tells us in 1 John 2:2, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (NKJV). In 1 John 4:10, he writes again: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Propitiation is a word that describes the covering provided by God to protect the sinner from the judgment of God. We usually describe this covering as the blood of Jesus, but Jesus is the propitiation. Jesus is the atonement cover over the believer. Jesus is the covering provided by God to be the protective covering for the sinner for the forgiveness of his sins. Can you imagine God providing Jesus for us to cover us and protect us from God’s judgment? This means that in our sins, we are under the judgment and condemnation of God, but at the same time, God provides us with Jesus, who covers us from the wrath of God. For this reason, John writes that “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

To redeem us, Jesus had to shed his blood on the cross of Calvary.

The apostle Paul tells us that “we were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 7:23). The price Jesus paid was his blood that he shed at Calvary. The apostle Peter reminds us: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Our redemption was not bought with the usual financial instruments of doing business in this world. Our redemption required the ultimate sacrifice of love, which was the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22).

The writer of Hebrews reaffirms this truth by establishing the difference between the ancient system of animal sacrifices and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus,

saying that we were redeemed not by the blood of goats or bulls, but “He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.” So, “for this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:12-15).

The ancient sacrificial system required that calves be offered for atonement each year, but the apostle Peter, like the writer of Hebrews, tells us that Christ “died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered himself, suffered, and died only once to purchase our redemption.

Glory to God for Jesus Christ, who with a single sacrifice purchased our redemption!

Why did the Lord redeem us?

Jesus redeemed us for a special purpose.

First, with redemption, Jesus has reconciled us to the Father. Now we are “justified through faith, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Now, we are children of God, members of the family of faith. We are no longer children of wrath, but Children of God. We now belong to the family of God.

Second, since Jesus bought us with his blood, he redeemed us so that we may be “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10). We have been redeemed by the love and mercy of God.

Third, Jesus redeemed us to be salt and light in this world: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

The apostle Paul tells us that “Jesus redeemed us for good works” (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, there is an ethical aspect to our redemption. We are not redeemed just to say that we are children of God and that we are a special people. We have been redeemed to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

As light, we are called to illuminate the darkness. Our way of living should contrast with the world’s way of living. Our way of living must reflect Jesus, in everything we do. Like salt, we are called to preserve this world from corruption and putrefaction. Salt gives flavor, preserves, prevents rotting, but to achieve that, it must be in contact with what it is going to preserve. We are called to live in the world, without contaminating ourselves from the world, but preserving the world. Being light and salt is

also related to our good works of service that we do in favor of others. Those that benefit from our good works will glorify our God who is in heaven.

The apostle Paul reaffirms the theme of good works by saying that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14).

Another ethical aspect of our redemption is the care of our bodies. Paul writes to the Corinthians and tells them: “You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Our bodies are the temple, that is, the most holy place where the Spirit of God dwells, therefore, we must glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits. Paul tells us that if anyone “destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Corinthians 3:17). In a time where bodies are devalued, we must recognize their value, since God is jealous of our bodies and will judge us for the things we do through them. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians and tells them: “May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body, be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

What is our future as a redeemed people?

The redeemed of God have a glorious and victorious future. Our future as God’s redeemed people is to reign with Christ for all eternity. Our story does not end in this world. Our story is linked to Jesus’ story. Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to heaven, but he promised to return for us. When he comes, he will take us with him, so that where he is, we may be also (John 14:3).

In Revelation chapter 5, John heard the song that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sang after the Lamb that was slain took the scroll from the angel’s hand. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb; they all had harps, and golden cups full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, “And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

John also saw us standing before the throne and in the presence of the Lamb:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders

and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, Saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:9-17).

Brothers and sisters, we have been redeemed to spend eternity with our Redeemer. God will spread his tabernacle over us. This means that God is going to dwell with us. Jesus will shepherd us and guide us to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. No more suffering, death, or pain. We will be with our God forever.

Fanny Crosby reminds us that our redemption came with a high price. I invite you to sing “Redeemed,” rejoicing in your God-given freedom by the blood of the Lamb.

Redeemed, how I love to proclaim!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever, I am.
Redeemed, redeemed,
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed, how I love to proclaim!
His child, and forever, I am.
I think of my blessed Redeemer,
I think of Him all the day long;
I sing, for I cannot be silent;
His love is the theme of my song.
I know I shall see in His beauty
The King in whose law I delight,
Who lovingly guardeth my footsteps,
And giveth me songs in the night.

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Minister's Development Program

Course Title: The Pastor and Practical Ministry

Lesson Title: The Role of a Pastor



Introduction: From a Fellow Elder

"So, then, as your fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as a sharer in the glory which is going to be revealed, I urge the elders who are among you, shepherd the flock of God which is in your charge, not because you are coerced into doing so, but of your own free-will as God would have you to do, not to make a shameful profit out of it, but with enthusiasm, not as if you aimed to be petty tyrants over those allotted to your care, but as being under the obligation to be examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:1-4 *William Barclay's Daily Study Bible*).

"I am a fellow elder," Peter writes to the elders of the churches scattered throughout Asia Minor. Asia Minor is the term used for the area which lies in Asia but is close to Europe. It includes the present countries of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Peter establishes his right to counsel elders of the churches in Asia Minor concerning their role as an elder because he also is an elder.

Peter reminds the elders that they are to shepherd God's people out of a sense of divine calling rather than duty or a desire for profit. Nor are they to exercise their positional authority oppressively. Rather, they are to lead by example. Why? Barclay's translation describes the flock, or God's people, as "those allotted to your

care." The word "allotted" is translated from a Greek word that means "an office assigned, or an inheritance given." Serving as a shepherd over God's people is an assignment made and inheritance given by God. Because we did not earn this assignment by merit, we should rule with humility, gentleness, and purity of heart.

And what reward does Peter offer to these who serve humbly, gently, and with pure motives? The Great Shepherd, the one whom these elders are modeling, will give them a crown—a badge of royalty and rulership that will offer unending honor.

As you participate in this study of the biblical roles of the pastor, consider the attitudes, actions, and promises in Peter's words. Invite God to create within you a clear understanding of how he desires for you to lead the people he has entrusted to your care.

The Biblical Foundations of Pastoral Ministry

Elder or Presbyter: (πρεσβύτερος transliterated)

As the New Testament church began to expand, the need to establish some form of leadership was essential. The first mention of elders in the New Testament is in connection with the church in Jerusalem. This group of believers had taken on the leadership structure of the synagogue and a council of elders. This structure was repeated by other groups of believers as evidenced in Luke's writing of Acts.

"And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23 ESV).

The term "elder: πρεσβύτερος (prebyteros)" presents a challenge in both the Old and New Testaments. This meaning is not always clear, and, at times, both meanings may be intended. The elders in a Jewish sense were the older and tested members who could serve as the presbytery or leadership group.

According to James, this group of congregational leaders was to be called for prayer. "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14 ESV).

This congregational structure would have been expected of James, who lived in the sphere of Jewish Christianity. His understanding was that the spiritual giftedness would have been recognized when appointed as an elder.

The development of local church "elders" was different in Pauline churches. Paul does not exclusively use the term elders for church leadership. This could have been the reality of going into Gentile areas where there were no elder statesmen who were coming from Judaism to follow Christ. Many of Paul's converts were converted from paganism and did not meet the expectations of an elder, in age or experience. This gives insight into Paul's instruction to Timothy:

"Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the

public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:12, 13 ESV).

Although not as experienced or aged as many of the Ephesian leaders, Timothy was still gifted to read, exhort, and teach God's Word as a pastoral leader.

As stated in the introduction, in 1 Peter chapter 5, Peter also acknowledges the role of elders, describing himself as "a fellow elder."

Although no specific job description is given, verses throughout the New Testament give us understanding concerning the role of the elders.

- They were entrusted with financial accountability (Acts 11:29-30).
- They were involved with spiritual decisions related to doctrinal issues (Acts 15:1-29).
- They were to be examples (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3).
- They were to be devoted to reading and studying God's Word (1 Timothy 4:13).
- They confirmed leadership through the laying of hands (1 Timothy 4:14).
- They labored in preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17).

Through reading verses in the book of Acts, as well as the epistles, we develop an understanding that the elders were individuals given responsibility for the care and leadership of a local congregation. It's consistent in both the Jewish and Gentile context that local church structure included a group of elders who participated in a shared style of leadership in the local church.

Pastor or Shepherd:

"Shepherd" is the metaphor used in both the Old and New Testaments for those responsible for the care and guidance of God's people. Before dying, Moses prayed to the Lord, "May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd" (Numbers 27:16, 17 NIV).

The most well-known and often quoted use of the word "shepherd" in the Old Testament is Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (NIV). The psalmist states that God is the shepherd who ensures that all the needs of the sheep are provided.

In Jeremiah 3, God tells Jeremiah to proclaim to the people of Judah, "'Return, faithless people' declares the Lord ... 'Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding'" (vv. 14, 15 NIV).

Although an example of failure, the prophet Ezekiel gives great insight into God's expectation of the responsibility of shepherds.

"Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe

yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them" (Ezekiel 34:1-6 ESV).

There are many indictments against the shepherds of Israel in this passage. First, they used people as a means to fulfill their own selfish ends. Second, they lacked the compassion to act on behalf of those who needed extra protection. The helpless were left to face the cruelty of life without the help of their shepherds. Last, the result was a lack of spiritual leadership that doomed the people to idolatry and immorality, ultimately, causing them to be scattered. All viewed as a failure of the shepherds of Israel.

In the New Testament, the term "pastor" is used only in Ephesians 4:11 to refer to a ministry in the church, although the related verb, "to shepherd," appears on several other occasions, expressing similar thought (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; John 21:16). In Ephesians, the term pastor is used alongside other ministry gifts. All these ministry gifts are given to the church to ensure that believers are fully equipped for works of service and the body of Christ is strengthened. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11, 12 ESV).

There is some discussion to the position of "pastors" and "teachers," or should these two terms be joined as "pastor-teacher." However one interprets the two words, the distinction does not impact the role of pastors, as teaching is an essential component of their role within the local congregation.

The imagery of the shepherd is used by Jesus and recorded in John 10:11, when He claims to be the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, ensuring that our greatest need, the need for salvation, is met. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (NIV).

The implications for the meaning behind shepherding is clear. Shepherds (pastors) are to pattern their leadership after Christ's example. He is the one who leads sacrificially, with deep compassion for the sheep.

As we read verses of Scripture referring to the command to pastor (*poimaino*) and the title of elder (*presbyteros*), it is clear that the terms can be interchangeable. In Paul's final meeting with the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38), Luke writes that Paul brings the "elders" together and instructs them to "care for" (lit., "shepherd") the church there.

What is most evident from a study of the biblical

titles for pastor is how little direct instruction on church organization is given. There are no job descriptions for specific leadership roles. The absence of rigid structure has afforded the church great flexibility to organize and be led in ways that allowed it to respond to cultural circumstances and needs. Surely this absence was not an oversight on Christ's part. The flexibility must be intentional. Jesus desired spiritual leadership to be responsive to various times and cultures since He would always be the church's ultimate leader—a role that He has not abdicated.

Participant Activity:

Form small groups to discuss the following: Both Peter (1 Peter 5:1-4) and Paul (Acts 20:17, 28-31) use the title of elder and the concept of shepherd in identifying the attitudes and responsibilities of a pastor. Discuss how the title or office of elder (*presbyteros*) combined with the command to pastor (*poimaino*) defines the pastor's role.

The Development of Pastoral Ministry Throughout Church History

"The Bible presents pastoring primarily as protecting and feeding the flock of God and being an example to them of a living faith. [However,] over the centuries [of church history] these functions developed into specific and distinct roles." While you are serving many years after the leaders who performed these functions, many of the responsibilities they fulfilled now carry down to modern-day pastors as well.

The early church writings show diversity in pastoral leadership. However, as time progressed, the responsibilities of a pastorate passed from the plurality of elders to a single church leader. That which would have been accomplished by a group of elders with a variety of spiritual gifts was now viewed as the role of one leader.

Preacher

During the Reformation, Martin Luther and others returned the church to *Sola Scriptura* and the prominence of preaching. In the past, the central focus on preaching had been lost, but the Reformers placed preaching at the center of corporate worship. It was this return to Scripture alone that birthed life in the church again.

Evangelist

The Revival Movement of the 1700's was a time of great evangelists, many of whom were local church leaders. This movement impacted the growth of the church worldwide.

Organizer

John Wesley is one of the better-known leaders during this time of awakening. His impact is still evident in many of the organizational structures of evangelical and Pentecostal churches today. Wesley organized new converts into "bands," or small groups, for



accountability. It was in these bands that women began to be recognized as spiritual leaders and ultimately congregational leaders.

Missionary

One of the most important developments during this time was the sense of fulfilling the Great Commission, locally and globally. The result was that pastoral leaders became deeply involved in social impact in their nations and local communities. This ranged from the abolition of slavery, to educating the poor and young, to providing poverty relief.

Pastor/Counselor

Although used throughout the Reformation, the title of pastor became the dominant designation and model of evangelical local church leaders during the twentieth century. The primary focus was on the nurture and care of the local church. The pastor became involved in the development of programs to meet the needs of the congregation. One of the most challenging aspects but highly regarded roles was that of the pastoral counselor, who connected the study of psychology with spirituality.

Manager

Recently, the pastoral focus has moved from care to administration. Although the term CEO is not used, church leaders focus on “running a church”—recruiting and hiring, establishing structure, and administering programs. The increasing reality of legal responsibilities within the governments of many countries has made this role more necessary.

Participant Activity:

Form groups of two or three and discuss the following questions:

- How have local churches benefited from these historical models of pastoral ministry?

- How does each role still impact the expectations for pastoral leaders in your culture?
- Has the prevailing view of the lead/senior pastor model limited ministry capabilities? If so, how?
- Are there potential benefits of a plurality of pastoral leadership in the local church? If so, what are they?

This is only a portion of the lesson, “The Role of the Pastor,” written by Dan Chatham, MDiv. The entire lesson can be found in “The Minister and Practical Ministry,” a course of the Foundations: Minister’s Development Program. For more information on the Foundations: Minister’s Development Program, visit cblcogop.org.

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R E C O N C I L I N G MILLENNIALS TO CHRIST



Why the Church and World Can't Afford to Lose US Millennials

It has been reported that 59 percent of millennials who grow up in the US church drop out. We've pressed on with thoughtful outreach programs, and we have been fueled with evangelistic zeal. But when it comes to interacting and engaging with millennials, time and time again the church has been criticized for coming up short. The harshest critics call us "irrelevant" and the sympathetic commentators call our endeavours empty. As we turn our pockets inside out, and examine our best efforts, it appears as if we have little to offer hungry, searching millennials. One thing is overwhelmingly clear: millennials are deeply spiritual and live with ease in the non-material aspects of life. But the church is clearly failing to translate this soul searching into church going.

What will it take to compel a generation?

As a non-American, I often ask the question, "Why does it matter that there is this decline in the US? After all, faith is growing rapidly amongst Christian young people in the developing world, and there is also no significant drop-off in this age group in other major religions.

It does matter. And it matters to the world at large. For over 40 years that I've spent working as a banker and as a church leader, I have had the privilege of engaging with American commerce and

with churches and young leaders across the country. I have had extensive exposure to the financial and religious sectors in the country. The USA has been both a source of great energy, global capital, and a rich well of theological dialogue made generously available to the world at large.

To find millennials disengaged and to fail to reach a generation with the good news of the gospel is not only bad news for America, it is bad news to the world. It is vital that this generation of Americans does not lose its confidence in the Christian message. Although Christianity still claims the highest market share of American millennials, this generation identifies as religiously unaffiliated at higher rates than any other generation. The US religious tide of this generation is shifting and changing. I believe its destructive force can and needs to be turned urgently.

In establishing an approach, we must recognize that Jesus was unapologetic about the "Strange Kingdom" he had come to establish. Jesus didn't try to dilute or water-down his message to attract others. Today we suffer from two extremes. On the one hand, in an effort to win millennials, an anaemic presentation of the gospel is advanced. On the other, we have the pre-packaged certainties which are advanced with deep conviction and little reason. Neither of these approaches are honed for a

Ken Costa is an internationally renowned author and banker, having worked as chairman of UBS Investment Bank for EMEA, and chairman of Lazard International. He is Chairman Emeritus of Alpha International, emeritus professor of business at Gresham College London, and dean of the Leadership College London. Costa is also the founder and author of God at Work and Know Your Why. He and his wife, Dr. Fiona Costa, live in London. They have two sons and two daughters. His latest book, Strange Kingdom: Meditations on the Cross to Transform your Day-to-Day Life was published this year by Thomas Nelson - Emanate.



KEN COSTA | LONDON, UK

thoughtful generation. We have to reassert our firm belief that we can disagree well. That the gospel is counter-cultural and the kingdom of God even more so. Fake news is not a new concept. Jesus' mock trial was littered with fake news making it easier to push Jesus to the side of society. Pilate thought it easier and better for him to wash his hands of Jesus; he sent Jesus away. We shouldn't be surprised when people do the same thing today.

Secondly, we need to apologize for trying to attract millennials to this Strange Kingdom by assuming there is a "millennial profile." No outsider can suggest: "This is what Millennials are thinking" or that "Millennials want this" as if we're trying to dissect some foreign entity. I believe there is a stronger, more compelling way to think about reaching this generation than focusing on generational stereotypes. The "millennial void" that plagues many churches can be recognized and resolved when we move away from trying to "target" them as a potential audience, but instead, we listen to them as their ideas and thoughts serve as answers to the demands of this age. In addition, we need to develop a theology that allows for disagreement and to learn to disagree well while maintaining the overriding command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Taking this into consideration, three things come clearly to me as I reflect on what this means for us today. In particular, what we need to recognize about millennials and what this Strange Kingdom holds for them:

A core story to live for: This generation has lots to live with and little to live for, and yet it is hungrier and more informed than ever. Steve Jobs' famous Stanford University commencement address encouraged graduates to "stay hungry, and stay foolish." Not to settle or to become complacent. To keep pushing forward with purpose. Purpose is what the next generation longs for, but has to deal with more distractions, options, and choices than ever before. We can offer them a purpose that is rooted and grounded in love, a purpose that is generated not from outside but from within. Churches and their leaders can co-write a core story for the generation

based on the resurrection power of Jesus which spurs us on to live for a cause that will outlast us, yet include us in its advancement.

A community to live with: Being challenged to expose our truest self can at times cause us to isolate ourselves and drive us into hiding. This generation is more connected than any other generation. To this there is the global scourge of prevailing and pervasive loneliness. The Strange Kingdom that Jesus inaugurates distributes courage through authentic community. Moreover, this generation has voiced their disillusionment at distortions from institutional leaders and those in power. We must draw upon the fact, this Strange Kingdom we're inviting people into is an irresistible community where Jesus develops resilience through fellowship, and dissects our doubts through conversation with one another. Seeking and sharing stories of transformation, exchanging different ideas, grappling with the key themes and concepts of our times. For us to invite a generation, we must foster an irresistible community of dialogue, discussion, and transparency.

A counter-culture to live out: I believe that fueled and energized by the resources made available to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live counter culturally, with humility and a sense of profound hope. Daring to be different, pursuing both reconciliation and unity with those that are different to ourselves. Above all, this generation is passionate about justice which Martin Luther King reminded us is the arc to which human history bows. And so together—across the generations and denominations—we become co-workers in pursuing peace. Engaging in the hostility that can be created in our work-spaces and becoming true peacemakers. This alone will allow us to get our bearings and design a world which reflects and represents this strange kingdom.

To reach millennials, we need to mentor and model a lifestyle which brings to life the vision of a better world redeemed, restored, and replenished. This is the world that the generation longs to be captured by and to see established. This is also the future hope for the church of tomorrow.



THREE-DIMENSIONAL PASTORING

The Pastor's Roles in Reconciling the World to Christ

While the preaching role of the pastor is perhaps the most visible element of ministry, most would agree that ministers actually fulfill a three-dimensional ministry of preaching, teaching, and counseling. Let's explore how each of these roles serves to benefit the health and wholeness of the local church.

The Preaching Role of the Pastor

English Puritan church leader, poet, hymn-writer, and theologian Richard Baxter articulated well the ultimate purpose of preaching and the preacher's heart when he said, "I preach as though never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men." We are reminded of both the pitfalls and possibilities of preaching. Those who are called to preach the Word of God are also called to be accountable for what we preach. Ezekiel was admonished to raise the dead conscience of the shepherds when he was instructed to tell them, "You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally" (Ezekiel 34:4). Isaiah 52:7, on the other hand, said, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'"

In our faith community, the question of what to

preach is largely determined by the local pastor as the Spirit leads him or her. It is not out of bounds to ask questions like, "What moral, spiritual, or contemporary matter have we not dealt with and why?" All preachers are storytellers. Pastors reach into the chronicles of history for stories to quicken the hearts and minds of the listeners. He or she recalls personal narratives and the narratives of those around them in an effort to show that God is still at work in this fractured world. The preaching role of the pastor is to tell the world again and again of the Christ child, the crucified Christ, and the resurrected Savior.

As a storyteller, the pastor prophetically moves into the lives of people and brings their pain to the surface. The pastor, through the Spirit, gives the congregation's suffering a name and then with passion and conviction, like a barrister, argues, presents evidence, and strikes down falsehoods, to make the case that God is able to answer and is the answer to their pain and suffering. He or she ends with a final call to the altar. "Today is the day of salvation! Today can be the beginning of a life in Christ, come let us pray with you and for you."

The Teaching Role of the Pastor

With or without a degree in education, all pastors are teachers. With or without a degree in curriculum



Bishop Roger Ball is the senior pastor of the Family Worship Center in New York City and co-director of Family Ministries for the Church of God of Prophecy Northeast Region and Bermuda. He studied Marriage and Family Life at Fordham University where he also serves as an adjunct professor. He and his wife, Senikha, live in Westchester, New York.

BISHOP ROGER BALL, PHD | WESTCHESTER, NEW YORK

and principles in teaching and learning, all pastors are teachers. Jesus instructed his disciples to fan out into the far reaches of the world and teach people to adhere to the Word of God. While teaching and learning have been primarily relegated to the classroom, we know that teaching and learning take place in and out of academia. In this case, when people come to Christ, pastors have the task of helping them to unlearn old and sinful habits. We teach people how to pray and how to worship.

Part of this teaching creates an atmosphere within congregations where the business of transference of knowledge becomes a shared enterprise. I have long said the church does not need more preaching, what we need is more teaching. We have mastered the art of shouting, dancing, and singing—and so we should. But now, more than ever, we need sound doctrine; now, more than ever, we need a church that is educated in the things of Christ.

The Counseling Role of the Pastor

With or without a degree in pastoral counseling or social work, all pastors are counselors. We know instinctually that at any time we can be called to deal with issues of sickness, trauma, and death. Our role as a counselor leads us to the hospital room and the funeral home. We are called to lead the prayer for healing, and we are called to invoke the great and final “ashes to ashes and dust to dust.” And long after the last visitor leaves and the final call comes in to say, “My condolences,” the pastor stays with the person and with the pain until dawn and a way forward breaks forth. We are required to find words to comfort those that mourn in Zion.

We are strategically placed to fight back our own tears so that we can be fully present with those whose tears flow freely. We offer tissues to couples dealing with divorce and advice to parents of teens whose choices have upended the family system. In an atmosphere of confidentiality with their pastors, congregants unburden themselves and break the silence of childhood traumas that have shaped their adult lives and worldviews. Where others have failed to listen, the pastor listens, where others have failed to keep confidentiality, the pastor honors the individual story of each member by talking to Jesus and Jesus alone about such stories. When he feels the issues are beyond the scope of his expertise to help, he gently makes a referral for additional support.

WE ARE STRATEGICALLY PLACED TO FIGHT BACK OUR OWN TEARS SO THAT WE CAN BE FULLY PRESENT WITH THOSE WHOSE TEARS FLOW FREELY.

What About the Pastor?

Now, if pastors occupy all three spaces (teaching, preaching, and counseling) of the office, then it is worth noting that all three dimensions must be turned back on the pastor as a son or daughter of God if the church is going to be healthy. It is well known that pastors are underfed while feeding the masses. Pastors are under-taught while teaching the congregation and, yes, pastors are under-nurtured while nurturing the congregation.

The case being made here is that pastors for too long have been left to fend for themselves, to work outside of our areas of expertise without the proper support. After all, we are not moving papers around; we are dealing with the souls of God’s people. As a profession, much needs to be done to support pastors who serve their communities. This includes not only the things noted above but also things like a decent retirement plan, healthcare benefits, proper compensation, as well as training and development.

It is said that very few other professions require a broader knowledge base to be effective as the pastor. Pastors are required to know a bit of psychology and a working knowledge of fields of human behavior to attend to the needs of the congregation. Pastors need to be administrators and experts in supervising an army of volunteers. They are also crisis managers and conflict mediators, community organizers, and budget experts.

In fact, it has been said that in a given week a pastor might find him or herself conducting a funeral service on Saturday, preaching a mighty sermon on Sunday, and dedicating a baby on the same day before running to the office to meet with his or her board and treasury team to figure out how to make up the shortfall in monetary intake—just to name a few. The call to be a pastor is one of the greatest calls on earth. What is clear, though, is that we have quite a way to go in supporting and ministering to pastors, who are on the front lines of the battle to reconcile the world to Christ, including those who have lost their way and are in need of reconciliation themselves.

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES BEGINS A NEW YEAR OF STRATEGIC COLLABORATION AND TRAINING



BISHOP SHAUN MCKINLEY, PhD | INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Institute of Children's Ministries Conducted in Egypt

February 2-4, 2023, International Children's Ministries conducted a joint training with International Youth Ministries in Assiut, Egypt. The three-day event was sponsored by the Egypt National Office and the General Presbyter's Office of Europe/CIS/Middle East, after more than a year of planning and prayer. The event included two plenary sessions and six breakout opportunities. General Presbyter Clayton Endecott ministered during the general sessions, while International Youth Director Bishop Kirk Rising and International Children's Ministries Director Bishop Dr. Shaun McKinley led two training groups for specialized training.

Thirty-eight participants were engaged in the Children's Ministries sessions and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the training concepts and processes through group activities and presentations.

One of the more complicated lessons, "Developing a Discipleship Plan," requires participants to work in groups to develop a four-week lesson plan based on one of twelve discipleship needs for children. The students must select a need and design four lessons that include a Bible truth, an appropriate Bible Story/ Passage, and a Bible Verse. These three components provide a foundation upon which participants may then develop activities based upon. The Egypt participants grasped this lesson incredibly well and shared the value of this method, especially for many of them who do not have access to a written curriculum.

"I was personally impressed by the number of young leaders with us, as well as the number of men present for a children's ministry training," said Bishop McKinley. This was the first such training for all but one of the participants.

On Sunday morning, February 5, the team traveled to the Church of God of Prophecy in the village of Badary, Kadariak, an hour from Assuit. More than 125 people were in attendance with many children present. National Bishop Bashir Dawood, along with Bishop Endecott and

Bishop Rising, shared a greeting, as did Sarah Rising. Bishop McKinley was given the honor of sharing the morning sermon which was based on Judges 21:25, as well as the account of Samuel.

On Sunday evening, the team worshipped at the local church in Assiut. Bishop Rising preached on the topic of the Prodigal Son. It was especially moving to the training in Egypt as the congregation shared communion. Many people lined up for prayer with each of the members of the team following the service.

International Children's Ministries has the opportunity to return in October 2023 to conduct additional training in the north of Egypt should funding be secured. If you would like to contribute financially to support this training, you may send your love offering or gift to International Children's Ministries, Attn: Egypt ICM, P.O. Box 2910, Cleveland, TN 37320-2910.



Egypt Institute of Children's Ministries





Egypt Institute of Children's Ministries

Central and South America General Presbyter Offices Renew Partnership with CM for Third Year

The general presbyter offices of Central America, Mexico, and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean, as well as South America, have agreed to renew a strategic partnership with International Children's Ministries for a third year. Through this partnership, the position of a Spanish-Language Training Specialist remains fully funded for 2023.



Abigail Avila, national director of Children's Ministries for Honduras, will continue to serve in this role as the principal strategist and content developer of resources, training events, and community support initiatives. Avila will develop monthly blogs, podcasts, and webinars in the Spanish language for the ministry. She also hosts several live, online training sessions targeting specific nations throughout the year. In 2022, she traveled with International Children's Ministries Director Dr. Shaun McKinley to provide training in Peru, Bolivia, Spain, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia.

"I believe that gratitude is the memory of the heart," says Avila. "I have received many blessings during the past year, and it fills me with hope for what is to come."

Avila's plans for the coming year include monthly webinars on the strategic priorities of Serving Children in Crisis, Child Discipleship, Leadership Development, and Biblical Literacy. She also has new practical series that will be offered through blogs and podcasts to focus on team development, the spiritual development of children, and children and the sacraments, among other topics. Abi will also develop Spanish-language programming for the 2023 Institute of Children's Ministry being held in November in Ridgecrest, North Carolina.

"I am very grateful to General Presbyter Ben Feliz and General Presbyter Gabriel Vidal for partnering with us in such a significant way," said Bishop McKinley, international director. "Abi continues to lead with passion, understanding, and tremendous influence. We anticipate another year of expanded support for our leaders through Latin America and beyond because of their investment."

Strategic Planning with the Leaders of South America

During February 17-19, 2023, International Children's Ministries joined members of the Leadership

Development and Discipleship Ministries team to meet with the national bishops of Central America. Bishop McKinley shared a presentation concerning the present training events and resources available to these nations, shared about the ministries' 2023 strategic priorities, and planned for an area training meeting coming in August where all the nations will be represented.

Bishop McKinley and Bishop Rising also presented a new training program being offered cooperatively between International Children's and Youth Ministries, called LINKED. This new training event provides nations with the opportunity to host a single training event for both youth and children's leaders that provide specialized training for each ministry and collaborative session that address the most current needs for both groups, such as gender identity and bridging the gap between children's and youth ministries.

Transgenderism: A Gospel Approach for Today's Kids

During February 22-23, 2023, Bishop McKinley represented the Church of God of Prophecy at the Child Discipleship Summit, a gathering of the top 200 leaders in children's ministry. The theme of the Summit was "Transgenderism: A Gospel Approach for Today's Kids" and focused on how children's ministers can remain biblically faithful while pastoring and counseling parents through the transgender revolution. Discussions also included how to address issues of gender identity and sexuality within the local church. Bishop McKinley was invited to present as a featured guest panelist, speaking from the perspective of denominational leadership from a global perspective. Bishop McKinley shared examples of how the church in many parts of the world is being confronted by issues related to the Summit theme and resources presently being developed to assist COGOP congregations. The resources are anticipated to be available in the Fall of 2023.





The Cross Reconciles

Dividing walls between people and nations are sometimes easy to see and touch. Some walls of hostility are not visible but are still very real.

Many cities have invisible barriers between neighborhoods, and people feel very uncomfortable crossing them. Ideological barriers often prevent genuine, enriching communication between people with differing viewpoints. We all are trapped by dividing walls, perhaps more than we fully realize.

But the good news is that the cross of Jesus makes possible the ministry of reconciliation. The cross breaks down the barrier between God and us. What happened at Calvary has the power to remove walls of division between individuals and even groups of people in astonishing ways. The cross reconciles.

One of the best things about the Church of God of Prophecy is that the people who are part of it are not all alike. Quite the opposite is true. We are a global church with a breathtaking array of nations and cultures and people and languages. In the Church of God of Prophecy, we can know people from 135 nations by name—on social media, through emails and newsletters (thank you Global Missions Ministries), and in person at the International Assembly. We can know people we would have never otherwise known as brothers and sisters.

What a blessing! But not everyone has experienced this kind of reconciliation. Think about all the people near you that are still divided from each other: the rich, the poor, the young, the old, the light-skinned, the dark-skinned. How can we live out the good news that the cross breaks down the dividing walls of hostility? How can we reconcile the world to Christ?

Most human beings have some hang-ups. We don't think we do. We like to imagine ourselves as perfectly balanced in all our thinking, able to objectively apply the Scripture's wisdom without bias or corruption. But none of us do that. We are all flawed in our thinking, which is why Scripture tells us that there is wisdom in many counselors (Proverbs 15:22).

After rising from the dead and before ascending to the Father, Jesus told his followers: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy



Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20 CSB). When we advocate for greater obedience to God on matters like reconciling disparate groups to Christ and each other, we must not downplay the grace of God given in Christ.

The message we are to speak is reconciliation—first with God, then with each other (2 Corinthians 5). To demolish the worldly barriers which have separated humans from God since Adam and Eve, and the barriers that have separated human from human since Cain and Abel, we need the power of the cross. God's people are to live in the Spirit and bear his fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23). Only in such an environment is reconciliation even possible. Laws may change human behavior, but laws can never change human hearts. For that, we need the cross. Others who do not know Jesus may find unity on some level, but unity without the power of the cross will lack the life transformation that is available to those who believe!

We have all been wronged. Many of us were wronged by those who are of the family of God. That's the ugly truth. But the beautiful, abiding truth remains that God

How can we live out the good news that the cross breaks down the dividing walls of hostility? How can we reconcile the world to Christ?



have been reconciled because of the cross of Christ. He tells them to remember this. Humans are prone to forget things they ought to remember and remember things they ought to forget! But what happens when we forget? We lose focus. It is important, as a Christian, to have “markers” that remind us of things. Our forebears in the Church of God of Prophecy knew this. They put up literal markers to help them remember. Joshua 4:6, 7 says, “That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.”

Our testimonies memorialize the great things God has done. The original temple built by Solomon had one division: between priests and laity (1 Kings 8:41-43), but by the apostle Paul’s day, walls had been erected to separate Jews from non-Jews and men from women. Paul claims that these barriers are destroyed in God’s spiritual temple. In Jesus, the chief cornerstone, the whole building is joined together and rises up to become a holy temple in which God lives by his Spirit. We are the living stones that make up this new temple. We are living markers.

During this Paschal season, let us remember the power of the cross. Through it, we have been reconciled to Christ. Let us call to mind and remember Jesus called us to the ministry of reconciliation. Let our words and actions lead others to the truth. We are reconciling the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

promises to provide family beyond anything we had before on our journey with him (Matthew 19:29). And the origin of this hope, this family, this life eternal is the cross of Jesus Christ.

In his epistle to the church in Ephesus, Paul presents the power of the cross as the hope of reconciliation. In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul tells Jews and Gentiles they

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