

*"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."*



# The *Word and Work*



*"Holding forth the Word of Life."*

JULY 1993

## DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY!

### In This Issue:

- "I see change as building on our past, not destroying it."  
--Lynn Anderson
- "Helpful changes can take place only in an atmosphere of love and sensitivity. Much time and personal involvement are prerequisite to suggesting change." --Charles Moore
- "We felt that mere tradition was inhibiting us from genuinely meeting needs." --Rick Atchley

### Services As Usual

Randy Fenter

My three year old and I follow the same routine every night. After I bundle her into bed, she says, "Daddy, tell me a story." Then follow three songs -- all invariably the same -- "Jesus Loves Me,"

(continued inside front cover)

"Jesus Loves The Little Children" and "The Wise Man" (enthusiastic hand motions must accompany "The Wise Man"). Next comes a drink of water and a prayer. It's not hard to remember the order as Marta is quick to correct if a song is sung out of order or if I offer the drink of water at the wrong time. Three year olds. I love 'em. I hope we learn some new songs, though, by the time she's four

I sometimes grin to myself wondering if Marta or some other three year old designs most church services. Predictable is a kind of adjective. The only thing missing is the drink of water. After graduating from college I served as an associate minister. My first Sunday I was asked to lead singing. Immediately following the closing prayer one of the elders grasped my arm and led me to a classroom just off the auditorium. His first words to me went something like this: "I know you're new here so we'll let it go this time, but you led two songs instead of three before the prayer. Then you failed to have us stand for the prayer but made us stand up for the song before the sermon. When you do things like that you just confuse people. So don't ever let it happen again." I never did.

As the years have gone by that experience has become less acrid but profoundly sadder. What joy we missed in that church! Already damp services were constantly gloomed by the dull lowering clouds of sameness.

Chuck Swindoll writes, "We are witnesses and spokesmen for the God of infinite variety, boundless creativity, indescribable majesty and beauty. We hold in our possession a white-hot message of hope, a pulsating invitation to approach a living Savior. Can we justify garbing this hope in faded sackcloth, delivering it in a predictable monotone?"

I love three year olds; but let's find someone else to plan worship services.

-- From the bulletin of a Church of Christ in Midland, Texas

# THE WORD AND WORK

*"Declare the whole counsel of God"*

**Alex V. Wilson, Editor**

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## Theme:

# DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Alex V Wilson

Times change, and people do things differently. I once saw a picture of a Puritan church meeting in the 1600's. All the men sat on one side and the women on the other--at least in that picture--and the men were wearing their hats inside the building! (The movie *Oliver Cromwell* showed the king wearing his hat at mealtime in his palace, so that must have been accepted custom in those days.) The Puritan preacher and commentator, Matthew Henry, "in public services usually prayed for half an hour, preached for an hour, and joined in singing Psalms." Are you glad or sad that we do things differently from the Puritans?

Alexander Campbell lived 150 years ago. He too didn't quite follow our pattern, or rather, we don't follow his in every way. In his magazine he reported visiting a church on one of his trips to the Midwest. Shocked, he wrote something like this: At that meeting I saw something I've never seen before and hope never to see again, a congregation remaining seated during prayer to the Heavenly Father! He expressed his profound wish that such a disrespectful, irreverent custom might never spread elsewhere. He believed we should either kneel or stand before the Lord when we pray. His view may have been wise, but times have changed, haven't they?

Campbell also did not follow our custom of having invitation-songs in most meetings. Earl West writes, "When J. W. McGarvey enrolled at Bethany College, he determined to become a Christian. He made up his mind that at the first opportunity he would confess Christ and be immersed. He listened to Alexander Campbell preach much, but it was not Campbell's custom to extend an invitation after each sermon, so McGarvey waited two weeks after he made up his mind before he had the opportunity of stepping forward." There's nothing wrong with having invitation-songs, of course, but they are not essential. Peter at Pentecost didn't say, "If you want to become Jesus' disciple, come forward while we sing #131." It's too bad McGarvey thought he couldn't confess faith in Christ till "the invitation" was publicly given in some set way.

### Memories from the Early 1900's

After *Word and Work* ran two articles about Stanford Chamber's life, I received a letter and pamphlet from sister Mary Neal Pitner. Her father had been one of his closest friends, and they attended Berea Church near Sullivan, Indiana. Brother Chambers considered that his "home church" in Indiana, so it was interesting to read the memorial

pamphlet about the congregation (now disbanded, largely due to nearby coal mines becoming depleted.)

But you might be surprised to read the section, "Sunday Morning at Berea Church." Here is an excerpt:

Mrs Clara (Chambers) Blakeman led singing at Berea Church for as long as I can remember. Clara was an excellent song leader and when we went to Harding (College) or visited nearby congregations, we always could sing the songs correctly, because she was very strict about singing the songs as the music was written. She never stood to lead singing but sat near the front row, usually in about the same place

Well, that was different, wasn't it! We mention it here, not to push the idea, but to rejoice in the fact that in those days such an unusual practice didn't cause any uproar, division, or attacks by other congregations. We wonder if it happened today, whether Berea would be blacklisted and find few churches extending fellowship to it? Apparently Stanford Chambers, a man who was never accused of compromising Biblical teaching, didn't feel that his sister's being the songleader was wrong. Of course the Bible never even mentions songleaders, much less telling the requirements for such a ministry.

#### **Which Leads to the Need for Making Distinctions. . .**

It helps to distinguish between what is *ANTI-Biblical* (contrary to Scripture), what is *NON-Biblical* (unmentioned in Scripture but not opposed to its principles), what is *Biblical -but-UNBINDING* on us today, and what is *Biblical-AND-BINDING*. Think through those four classifications for a minute or two and see if you consider them valid

Here are some examples of what I mean. A church gathering where there are prayers to Mary and other "saints" is anti-Biblical, for there is only one Mediator between God and man. A meeting in which, after the sermon, the listeners divide into small groups and discuss the sermon topic among themselves--this exemplifies what I mean by non-Biblical. Scripture doesn't require us to do it, and yet it might sometimes be a very useful activity. Examples of Biblical-but-not-now-binding practices would be footwashing, the holy kiss, and raising our hands in prayer or praise. The earliest disciples engaged in these practices sometimes, if not regularly (1 Tim 5:10 & 2:8, 1 Cor 16:20), but most Christians feel they are optional today because our culture differs from the first century. Examples of Biblical-and-binding practices would be loving one another deeply, and yet on the other hand expelling from the congregation any Christian brother or sister who persists in clearly wicked activities after being warned -- until he or she repents (1 Thes 4:9-10, 2 Thes 3:6-15, 1 Cor 5:1-13, etc.).

To tease us into thinking more about this, here's a quiz. Classify the following as either AB (anti-Biblical), NB (non-Biblical), BU (Biblical but unbinding) or BB (Biblical and binding)

     1. A church which always stands during the Scripture reading, out of respect for God's Word.

     2. Churches in Africa where after the meeting the first member to leave the building waits outside the door to shake hands, then the second one out does the same, followed by all the rest--until each member shakes hands with *every* other person there.

     3. A military chapel in Manila where the chaplain was expected to lead the opening prayer, the main prayer later on, the prayer at the Lord's Supper and the closing prayer, plus giving the Scripture-reading, sermon and announcements!

     4. A church where, instead of a sermon, several men may share some lessons from the Bible, perhaps or perhaps not on a pre-arranged subject.

     5. A church which held a youth-emphasis Sunday during which young men led the singing and prayers, and also preached and led the Lord's Supper meditation; but young ladies took up the offering and passed the Lord's Supper emblems.

     6. Some churches in Africa where before singing a hymn they always hum the first verse. (Brother Robert Boyd told about that; and David McReynolds asked how he knew it was the first verse they hummed--maybe it was the third verse, which often gets omitted!)

     7. A prayer meeting where folks pray so softly that most other people can't hear them

     8. A church which sponsors a Boy Scout and/or Girl Scout troop.

All the above are actual cases, not imaginary. I wonder if we would all agree on our classifications of those practices? Here are some others to think about: churches having an annual budget; hymnals; baptismal robes and pools, Lord's Supper trays and cups, Sunday school; church buildings, church schools; church camps, revival meetings; monthly magazines. Obviously all the items in this paragraph are not-Biblical. They are not required, neither are they necessarily wrong. But it's wise to evaluate them periodically, and maybe make adjustments. They are human traditions rather than divine requirements, but that doesn't mean they are harmful. Yet it's possible that some of them might outlive their usefulness, and need to be changed or eliminated.

Here then are valuable guidelines: 1. don't be AFRAID to change, so long as you do so within Biblical guidelines. 2. Don't INSIST on change without strong reasons, unless you are opposing something which is definitely anti-Scriptural. 3. Make LOVE your emphasis, because that's the most important of Christian virtues.

### **Innovative "Services"**

Most of this issue develops the themes mentioned here. But I fear this editorial has been one-sided. Almost all our examples have dealt with church *meetings*--different ways of doing things when disciples gather together. But we also need creativity in *outreach*, thinking of fresh, improved ways of serving folks around us. That's definitely Biblical! So we close with two examples mentioned in *Wineskins* magazine, entitled "Liberated to be Creative":

In congregations all over the world Christians are constructing new wineskins as they discover the joys of creating much broader ways to seek first the purposes of God in their lives and congregations. A congregation in Texas has "adopted" a public school in a poverty-stricken neighborhood. Christians provide food and manpower for a pantry at the school to minister to the neighborhood. A physician provides a free "well baby" clinic at the school every Thursday afternoon. A pharmacist provides prescription drugs at cost for the parents who use the clinic. Every Christmas the entire congregation throws a party for the school complete with Christmas dinner, clothing, toys, and bedding.

In Tennessee a creative congregation is sewing new wineskins by using its facilities to help the homeless. Christians provide dinner and breakfast for the indigent men and women who come to spend the night. Most care-givers at the congregation minister side-by-side with their entire families as they prepare meals and then spend the night at the building. Children are experiencing first-hand what Matthew meant when he said to provide "cups of cold water."

May our Lord enable us too to be imaginative, bold, visionary--and Biblical, both when we gather to praise Him and when we scatter to proclaim Him and serve others.

# **Abilene Mission Exemplifies Efforts to Reach 'Unchurched'**

Jack Welch

A new congregation recently begun in Abilene, Texas, is built on a perceived need for the church everywhere in the United States.

"If we were reaching our children," says Kent Smith, a specialist in domestic missions at Abilene Christian University and one of the leaders of the Abilene mission church, "we would have grown 15 or 20 percent over this past decade, but the growth has been flat."

Smith is eager to use this congregation to experiment with ways of strengthening the church, which he sees as having an identity crisis. He also wants to give students a chance to try out evangelistic techniques, so that they, themselves, may go out and plant new churches.

The Abilene Mission church meets Sunday morning in a room of the Abilene Civic Center. Upon walking in from the parking lot, one is greeted by several people who introduce themselves and provide an informal brochure about the church. Inside there is more greeting and people are encouraged to have refreshments.

The service begins when five song leaders invite everyone to join in praise. The words of the devotional-type songs are flashed on a screen by an overhead projector. Reg Cox, graduate student and part-time counselor at ACU, gives the announcements, and there is loud applause at the news of the birth of a baby whose mother has had complications over the past few weeks. Cox encourages people to join in the worship at their own comfort level. Most of the nearly 250 people remain standing during the half-hour or so of singing and dramatic Scripture reading.

The 30 or so children present are then assembled for a lesson on the "seed" and the "word," and each child is given a seed. The high point of the lesson comes after the seeds have been planted and a seven-foot canvas is raised on which a tree and fruit have been painted. The children then go to a Bible class.

A Nigerian family tells about how the mother was cured of cancer following prayer and fasting. She was provided money by the President of Nigeria for a trip to a London hospital where prayer turned her near death condition into one of health.

Then Smith brings a lesson from Mark 1-3 in which Jesus is shown acting in the lives of people who acknowledge that they are



helpless before him. (Passages of Scripture and this message will be discussed during small group sessions on Sunday evening where communion also will be served.) No invitation concludes the sermon, but families are stationed in all corners of the building, so that people may go there for prayer after services. If anyone is interested in knowing more, he or she is invited to Sunday evening sessions at someone's home.

"Seeker-sensitive," is how Cox describes the congregation. He believes that the unchurched in Abilene do not feel comfortable in a traditional church setting, or even with a traditional church name. He wants this Sunday service to be a bridge to the unchurched, so that a deeper relationship with God can follow. "I'm excited that we can do real live evangelism in Abilene, Texas," says Cox. The church has met since May and has had several baptisms.

Noting too, that people had been praying for a year concerning this work, Cox says, "This church is about prayer. Every day from 5 to 7 a.m. a group prays. This is the missing link in most church work."

A seventy-generation descendant of the Restoration Movement and the son of a preacher in the Middle West, Smith emphasizes that he is working "to restore wholeness to a broken world by the power of Jesus Christ." He believes that in North America, authentic community is almost unknown.

One of the innovations in the church concerns the use of women. The five-member group song leaders are made up of three men and two women. The teacher of children's class before the congregation is a woman, and the reader of the Scriptures over the public address system is a woman. Smith believes that in North America in the 20th century for women to read Scriptures or help with the singing is not usurping authority.

The Minter Lane church, Abilene, planted the Mission church. Its leaders meet once a month with the Minter Lane elders to discuss the work and pray together.

The Abilene Mission church tries different strategies and abandons those which do not work. At the heart of this effort is an attempt to provide some ideas for *congregations wanting something more than they presently have, but without violating Scripture.*

--Christian Chronicle 2/93

# FIRE OR ASHES?

Lynn Anderson

*"Let us take from the altars of the past the fire not the ashes."*

An elder friend recently suggested that we should levy a fine of one dollar every time any person in our church used the word "change". Change *is* a scary word loaded with tons of troubling baggage. One of my favorite hymns is Abide with Me, written by Henry F. Lyte. However, in one of the lines Henry did a number on us. "...change and decay in all around I see..." To me, that line is an oxymoron. Change and decay do not belong together. *Death* and decay are bed-fellows. Change belongs with *life* and vitality. In fact, responsible change may be one of the most hopeful words for the future vitality of our fellowship.

The word *change* carries negative baggage. When we talk about change at church, it sounds like disloyalty to heritage, like criticism of traditional and older churches and their leaders. I confess, I'm hungry for change, but *I see change as building on our past, not destroying it.*

To call for changes in the church does not imply disrespect for the past. Call me a change agent, but don't ask me to declare open season on our heritage. The current generation of Christians was nurtured in churches which were built a long time ago and at great cost. Back then scores of preachers spent their life-times building up churches, without ever having the assurance of a regular salary.

We're deeply indebted to those people. And I love the church they planted. Most of those pioneers devised creative and innovative strategies to connect with the culture they were trying to reach. Frankly, they did an infinitely better job reaching their culture than we're doing in reaching ours!

But their strategies, methods, forms, customs and vocabulary cannot be imitated in our day with effectiveness. They do not fit our times and were not meant to. Let's remember them with affectionate nostalgia. Good sense says we need our roots. But when we wake up tomorrow morning it will not be 1870, nor 1930. Not even 1960. Times have changed swiftly and radically. Working harder at out-moded forms, methods and strategies will not produce more success. Only more frustration! In the spirit of our forefathers, we must devise strategies which connect with our place and time.

Yes! We must change--significantly--to reach major segments of our culture. Even to keep our own children. But then, is change anything new?

### Paul's Curiosity

Oh look! Here comes the apostle Paul riding up Central Boulevard on a donkey asking for the church.

*"Well," we explain, "there is the church at the corner of Fifth and Highland, and the Madison church and North Richland Hills, and...."*

*Paul's eyes widen, "What are the brethren doing there?"*

*"Oh," we explain, "because that is where the buildings are."*

*"Buildings?"*

*"Church buildings, of course."*

*Paul leans forward with curiosity, "What is a church building?"*

*"Where the pews are, and the pulpit."*

*"What are those?"*

*"Well, the pews are where the people sit when the communion trays are passed," we answer.*

*"And what are communion trays?" asks our bewildered apostle.*

*This line of talk is getting us nowhere so we shift directions, "Well, the song leader stands in the pulpit and ...."*

*"What is a song leader?"*

*"He opens the hymn book and leads us in praise before we go to our classes in the educational wing."*

*Poor Paul doesn't seem to understand church at all. "And what are hymn books, classes and educational wings?"*

This guided tour rambles on as we lead Paul through the baptistery, the foyer, the nursery, the fellowship hall, youth ministry, VBS, gospel meetings, etc., etc., describing "church"--at least what we think of when we think of church--and what we definitely do not want changed! What we're describing however is actually only one way to "do church"--one cultural expression of the church--designed primarily for 19th century rural America. Paul knows it is not how "church was done" in New Testament times. Nor is it designed to "connect" in Mainstream, U.S.A. in 1993.

But, someone asks, does not the Bible describe an eternal and universal pattern for the church? Well "yes" and "no".

**No.** The New Testament does not blue-print one way of expressing the church to be bound in all times and in all cultures.

**Yes.** The Bible describes how church was done--but in many different ways fitted to a variety of cultural settings. The large gatherings in Jerusalem look very different from the house churches of Rome. In Ephesus Paul taught in a school, in Athens at the town square.

Again, the church on Crete is scattered among rural and village settings on a remote island quite unlike the sophisticated urban Ephesus. Even Paul's list of elder qualities for Crete (Titus 2) differs from the Ephesus list (1 Timothy 3) Paul's preaching strategy was far different in Athens (where he quoted pagan poets), from his preaching in Jewish settings (where he appealed to the Old Testament). Timothy is required to be circumcised in one setting, while the church is forbidden to circumcise Titus in another.

Change is written all over the New Testament! In fact, the very message of the gospel calls us to become "New Creations," to change "from one degree of glory to another into His likeness." Paul was willing to undergo enormous and painful change, even "become all things to all men so that by all means he might reach some."

### **Change--But What and When?**

Well then, Lynn, what changes do you mean? What exactly will this renewed, changed, culturally updated church look like? I cannot tell you--specifically. Unless you tell me a lot about where you want to plant this church and who you want to reach. It may wear a number of different faces.

*Of course a church must be faithful to God and to Jesus and to the scripture. But it must do so in the forms and language of that congregation's local setting in today's culture. The working vocabulary may vary from place to place. For example, academic language may fit well in a college community, business jargon in an urban Boomer community, or the nomenclature of the factory in an industrial community.*

The *music* of that church's worship connects best when the musical idiom is the "heart-language" of the people. Congregational singing of classical hymns, from books, directed by one song leader may fit some settings, while using an over-head projector to display contemporary music led by a worship team (with occasional special solos or groups) may fit in another.

Traditional Sunday morning Bible classes might work well one place, while Sunday evening *home Bible studies* might work better in another. Off-site learning experiences at different nights of the week may work better in yet another, maybe even teaching with drama!

Although many external factors must vary from place to place, eternal issues and foundational values are never to be compromised. *The message of the cross, the plan of salvation, scriptures, the call to holiness, love, worship and service.* These are the bedrock reasons for a church to exist in the first place.

What should the "church of the future" look like? It may dress like many things. And in our changing culture it may need to constantly update its wardrobe. Yet in loyalty to God, Jesus and the Bible--the church is *never* changing.

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## Harmony Needed in Church Music

Excerpts from an editorial in *Christian Standard*

A reader wrote last year concerned about the division occurring in some congregations over what he called "*praise worship*." He referred to some of the hand-clapping, repetitive choruses that are being widely used. Traditionalists are disturbed by some of these experiences, he observed.

One of our writers suggests that we remember that God permitted a variety of methods in the days of Old Testament worship. He correctly notes that "the problem with tradition is that it sees change as non-Biblical."

We agree with his point, but we would go farther. Both the more traditional *and* the more modern types of music can be included in our services. Why must it be an either-or choice? Younger worshipers need to come to understand and appreciate the significance of lyrics like, "pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise."

At the same time, their parents and grandparents need to sense the heartfelt worship that can come as members sing, "Jesus, we just want to praise You," while reading the words from an overhead projector. Both are acceptable.

Even if we personally feel uncomfortable with a certain form of musical expression, we need to take care that our preference is not seen as a Biblical mandate. At the same time, we should be considerate of those to whom *our* kind of music is troubling.

Indeed, a far more serious concern is the *theological content* of what is sung.

# UNITY REQUIRES *SENSITIVITY*

Charles Moore

Countless churches have been torn apart because members with different opinions were insensitive to each other. Paul condemned the "overbearing" attitude that led to such divisions. As Saul of Tarsus, he had been extremely overbearing himself, but his daily walk with Christ produced a caring, loving, sensitive person.

When Paul came to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey, he was greeted by James and the elders (Acts 21:17f). They reminded him that there were many thousands of Jewish believers who were zealous for the law. These believers were understandably suspicious of this man who had spent so much of his time among the Greeks. They had heard that he was teaching Jews to abandon their "customs." In order to counteract this false report, the elders urged Paul to involve himself in certain Jewish rites along with four of their men who had taken a vow. Paul willingly complied. Among the Jews, he functioned as a Jew; among the Greeks, he functioned as a Greek.

Paul did not "turn the world upside down" by pushing the latest fad for church assemblies, but through his consistent emphasis on the cross of Christ. In his efforts to meet the people on their level, Paul followed the example of Jesus. Jesus taught in the synagogues (Matt. 9:35), he spoke to crowds in the open areas (Matt. 13:1-3), and he taught in the temple courts in Jerusalem (Matt. 2:23). The point is, Jesus did exactly what other rabbis did. And yet he made such a difference in the world! This difference resulted, not from the way he did things, but from the content of his message and his life--what he said and what he did.

The Jews and the Greeks did things very differently when they assembled together. Greek assemblies were so informal that they sometimes became disorganized and unruly. Paul had to encourage them to be sensitive toward everyone in the assembly (1 Cor. 11:17-22) and to do things in a "fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40). In contrast, gatherings of Jewish Christians were very structured and controlled, with elders ("rulers") in firm control, patterned after the synagogue service. It is significant that Paul did not feel it necessary to force changes on either group. There were far more important issues to be considered.

One of the great tragedies facing the church today is the division that has resulted over differences in opinions, procedures and methods. Advocates of change and opponents of change frequently talk past each other. Sometimes our agenda for change becomes stronger

than our sensitivity for people, and we attempt to force others to abandon their customs and the way they feel about certain things "for their own good." We can resist change by digging in our heels and refusing to give an inch, or we can attempt to force change by agitation or by "surprising" the congregation with an abrupt change from traditional patterns. Staunch resistance to change will likely lose many of our younger members who do not feel bound to the way we have always done things. And rashly pushing through unwanted changes will at the very least result in confusion and discomfort, and the worst scenario may produce a split in the fellowship. Either way, bad feelings are almost certain to result, and the two (or more) factions will eye each other suspiciously.

Helpful changes can take place only in an atmosphere of love and sensitivity. Much time and personal involvement are prerequisite to suggesting change. Only after I have met with a body of people over a period of time; after I understand how they feel about things and just where they are in their thinking; after I have come to really know them (not just a few of them, but also those quiet ones who have little to say) and they have come to know and trust me; after I have been involved with them in Bible studies, assemblies and service projects so that they know I value the things they did before I even came on the scene--only then am I in a position to recommend changes. And *recommend* is the operative word. I never have the right to try to force change on others. This was not Paul's way and it was not Jesus' way. It is not the way of love and sensitivity.

The devil must be pleased when he can harden our hearts and dry up our sensitivity and disrupt our fellowship over an issue as relatively insignificant as how we do things in the church assembly. There are far too many truly important issues that ought to occupy our attention and energy: How can we effectively communicate the message of the cross to a materialistic society? How can we learn to embrace the "unattractive" in our society and treat them as Jesus treated lepers, beggars, tax collectors and even prostitutes? How can we learn to love each other with such a love that opinion differences cannot possibly disrupt our fellowship? How can we show the love of Christ to the starving people of the world? These are absolutely vital issues. *We must not allow ourselves to be sidetracked by things of lesser importance*

If we are to be a living, vital force in our communities, it is certainly true that *changes in our ways of doing things must take place*. Culture does not remain static, and the church must not. If it does, it will die. We must understand that while truth is absolute, methods of communicating truth and relating it to our lives are not. And changes can be refreshing and stimulating. *But change for the sake of change.*

*forced change and overemphasis on how we do things in the assembly tend to confuse and frighten people and obscure more important concerns. We must remain sensitive to every segment of our fellowship.*

May God give us the wisdom and the sensitivity to focus on the real issues facing the church today. We must realize that the true mark of followers of Jesus Christ is our love for one another. When the love of Christ controls our hearts, issues based on tradition and opinion cannot divide us and destroy our fellowship. Rather, we will "in honor give preference to one another."

--From IMAGE Magazine

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## ARE CHANGES UNCOMFORTABLE?

(The following was written by Ben Rake, Jr. in a bulletin of Belmont Church of Christ in Winchester, KY It is reprinted by permission.)

The normal Christian WILL GROW, and growth necessitates change. We see our children grow and they acquire new abilities and need larger clothing. Their interests change, and their motivations, while not particularly better or worse, are changing, too.

So it is with Christians. Our Father wants us to grow. We want to grow. In His love, however, let us be sure that we do not let something new become an arbitrary "growth chart" that pronounces that somebody else has not grown as much as we have.

For example, some of us at Belmont love the use of heart songs in worship. Some prefer the "blue books." Over the last year or two we have moved more and more toward freer use of the heart songs, but notice that we have not in any way abandoned the blue books. Please dear brother or sister, don't fear such changes. The key word here is "freedom," and it is a very scriptural and spiritual concept. Our spiritual leaders have talked much about the direction of our congregation's progress, and every precaution is being taken not to do anything that hurts anyone. We seek freedom to "stretch" as much as the word leads us to stretch. But the freedom to stretch does not force me to stretch if, for some reason, I can't stretch today.

Some among us lift hands in praise to the Lord. Fine. Some do not. Fine. No precedent is being set that you must conform to. Precedents are important in courts of law and in churches that are legalistic. Jesus came to set us free within Himself. You are free to worship with uplifted hands here if you want to. If the Lord is not leading you to do so, no one will look down on you for not doing so. Love the Lord as He loves us. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. He is Lord.



# Can Worship be Improved and still be Biblical?

Bailey McBride

In an era when there seems to be a great push to change only for the sake of being different or making a change, I am really making an appeal that we focus our attention on the *purpose* of worship and its *value* to those who are worshipping.

I have friends and family who worship in churches of Christ which seldom use song books. The songs are projected onto a screen so that the whole audience can see the words without looking at a book. I really like that process, because it lets the church sing two or three additional songs in the time that would have been spent in looking up numbers in the hymnal. Furthermore, not having the book in front of them encourages most people to sing enthusiastically.

Not long ago, I worshiped with a church in Tennessee where the evening service was devoted to reading aloud the book of Philippians. The church stood and read together from the text as it was flashed on the screen. Several times the audience sat down and sang songs related to the ideas in the reading. There was tremendous power in the communal reading of the Word. I saw and heard things in this familiar text that I had not thought about in years. I was reminded again that there is power in the Word. At my congregation in Oklahoma City, a minister has started asking the church to read aloud with him key passages which he has printed on the work sheet he distributes when he preaches. It has been thrilling to hear voices in unison affirm the testimony of the Holy Spirit in great passages.

A lot of discussion has been taking place about people clapping their hands in church. I confess that I belong to the generation which never thought we'd see the day when "the church would be desecrated" by applauding people. Yet, when I examine the arguments I hear against clapping hands, I am not convinced. The most common argument is that applause is used in response to entertainment. And that is true. But we use applause in many other ways, as well.

Last year I was in a crowd meeting President Bush. As he made his entrance, he was greeted by thunderous applause, from Democrats as well as Republicans. The people were using their hands to honor the President of the United States. In our society, people clap their hands to show approval, respect, love and appreciation and to honor people or achievements.

The church I attend does not have applause, and that is alright with most of the members. When new members are introduced, the person making introduction says, "If you are glad to have the Browns as part of this church, say 'Amen.'" Everyone shows approval with a loud amen. The church commonly sings, "We love you with the love of the Lord" to those who have been of special service, or to couples who have been married a long time. We simply use verbal affirmation. It would certainly not be wrong for us to applaud them.

Public worship is an important aspect of life for any church. I am happy that we live in an era when creative people are thinking about helping us worship more effectively. I certainly do not want to trivialize our tribute to our Creator and our Savior. I don't want to practice anything just because it is novel or different. I want as little distraction from the heart of my communion as possible.

In conclusion, we all need to remind ourselves that we are worshipers before God. If we think of the theater as an analogy, we are the actors and God is the audience. We come to worship God, and it is He alone whom we must please. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." As worshipers, we must give the best of our heart, our minds, our words and our spirits.

--Christian Chronicle, 2/93 (condensed).

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## "WHILE WE STAND AND SING"

Rick Atchley

All of us who preach struggle at times with the traditional invitation expected at the end of our sermons. Sometimes the transition to the invitation is forced. Sometimes it is rushed and hurried due to time restrictions. We all look for fresh ways to invite people to respond to the preached Word of God that are free of cliches and signals that "it's time to wake up and reach for your songbooks."

This whole business of "offering invitations" has troubled me for years--long before I became a pulpit preacher. On more than one occasion I have seen real needs surface without being met. What was offered and what was provided were two different things.

I can remember being in high school and having one of my friends "go forward" one evening after the sermon. Her tears manifested a real desire to unload her burdens and experience renewal with God and his people. Instead, she received a "token prayer" by someone

who had never spoken to her in his life, and then the service was dismissed so we could all go about our business. I'll never forget seeing her sitting all by herself on the front pew that night, alone and lonely, while everyone else milled around seeking their friends for a quick chat before going home.

As I watched her sit there with her head bowed, something inside me said that a grave injustice had been committed that night. My friend was not ministered to at all; in fact, I wondered if the whole experience didn't leave her feeling worse.

I have had those feelings many times since in my own ministry. Having always preached for congregations with multiple morning assemblies, I often wondered if the time constraints our scheduling imposed didn't put me in the position of offering what we couldn't really deliver. Recently, the ministers and elders where I now preach decided to address this issue. We all agreed that people should be given the opportunity to respond in a personal way to the sermon if that was their choice, but we also felt that mere tradition was inhibiting us from genuinely meeting the needs that our worship together was surfacing. After much thought and prayer, we implemented a new way of inviting people to respond that has been a blessing to our congregation. We continue to invite those who desire to be baptized into Christ to come forward, and we always try to take the time to make those baptisms special moments for the individual and the congregation. However, we now encourage those with prayer requests, those seeking counsel, those who want to place membership, and those with other needs to go out into our hallway during the invitation song, where they are escorted to our chapel. There they are met by several of our ministers and elders who discern how they can be helped. While we have only been doing this a few months, we are encouraged by the way our congregation has responded. Already we can identify several advantages of this new approach.

1. *It allows us to spend the time necessary to truly minister to those who come.* No longer does anyone feel rushed. The respondees do not have to pour out their hearts on the back of a card during the third verse of some song. Instead, they can take all the time they need to express exactly what their burden is. The minister or elder listening does not have to rush through a response, but can spend a minute or an hour with the individual, depending on the need. The result has been fewer "cliche" responses and prayers and more real ministry.

2. *It allows us to give more specific attention to the individual or family.* I am now relieved of the awkward experience of bouncing back and forth across the front of the auditorium trying to visit with three or four people at one time. Our new procedure allows every respondee to visit with someone who can give them individual attention.

The result is often the beginning of an ongoing relationship that ministers long after the initial response.

**3. It permits us to involve mature women in the ministry of prayer and counseling.** One of the realities we have long recognized is that many burdens expressed during an invitation time are best understood by another sister in Christ. So my elders sought out several older, godly women who had the respect of the entire congregation--several were their own wives--and asked them to help in this ministry. If a woman responds, she is met by a minister or elder who takes the time to understand her burden. If she has a need that a mature sister might be able to speak to, she is given the opportunity to meet with one of these women. The response of our women to this attempt to be sensitive to their needs has been wonderful. More of our sisters are responding with struggles they were once reluctant to share

**4. It encourages those to come who are unwilling to walk before an entire congregation to expose their need.** This might be a benefit to our congregation that is less necessary in your church family. Our auditorium is quite large, and each morning assembly might have 1300-1500 in attendance. We are seeing many respond now who would never have walked in front of a sea of strangers to share their problems. Not only are more people responding, but they are being more specific with their confessions and requests than they would be on the back of a card before a lot of people they don't know.

Our new approach to the invitation has worked well for us. Our only disappointment is that mere tradition kept us from doing something different much earlier. I do not mean to suggest that our approach is right for all churches. The purpose of this article is simply to encourage thought about what we are doing. Offering an invitation is itself a tradition; churches do not have to do so, but if they choose to, they should be sure that they deliver what they promise. Integrity demands no less anytime we say "while we stand and sing."

--IMAGE Magazine, 7-8/93

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**"The secret to a happy life  
is to accept change gracefully."**

# Holding Hands With God

Jeff Nelson

**"OK. I'll hold hands with God!"**

This was the unspoken worship language of four-year-old David Vanderpool, as he raised his hands in the air. At his "ripe old age," he had outgrown holding hands with his family during meal-time prayers. His mother gently negotiated, "Either hold hands with us or hold hands with God." Quick as a flash David's hands reached upward! The family smiled, bowed their heads and gave thanks--probably for more than their food

And this was not to be the last "hand-holding" for David. He kept holding hands with God at every prayer-time--even at school when his class prayed! "Yes," his teacher confirmed, "most of the kids bow their heads and fold their hands, but David raises his hands and says he's holding hands with God."

I think David is on to something big and beautiful!

Worship, simply stated, is holding hands with God. God reaches from his sovereignty to the heart of humankind and invites us to come as close to him as we will allow him to come to us. "come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4:8). the more we sense the presence of God, the more we want to be in his presence.

God's presence cannot be manipulated. We can only acknowledge it and choose to live in it. Life reaches its intended height when we grasp the reality that God is constantly with us--and wants to be. A favorite hymn states our potential relationship with him:

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*My God and I go in the fields together.  
We walk and talk as good friends should and do.  
We clasp our hands; our voices ring with laughter.  
My God and I walk through the meadow's hue*

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Can you imagine--a God so near you can hold hands? Michael-angelo's breathtaking painting shows the hand of God touching the hand of the first man he created. The touch of the Almighty. God "holding hands" with humankind

**Four-year-old David stands in a long line of worshippers who lifted up their hands to God**

*...For strength--*"As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. Aaron and Hur held his hands up so that they remained steady" (Exodus 17:11-12).

*...For worship--*"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer" (1 Timothy 2:8).

*...For healing--*"People brought their sick to him, and all who touched him were healed" (Matthew 14:35-36).

*...For equipping--*"They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

Why hands? Hands speak eloquently! Without hearing someone we interpret conversation simply by watching their hands. Hands rival faces as the most expressive part of conversation. Some people literally could not talk if their hands were tied.

Hands express emotions. Have you ever seen a touchdown when hands weren't thrown into the air? Did you see any hands expressing victory or defeat in the Olympics? When you see someone giving a "high five," you see celebration for the glory of that moment. A child who needs attention instinctively thrusts hands toward the parent. A loving parent can scarcely refuse to respond. I wonder if God uses his hands when he talks about us?

*Assessment--*When we come together to communicate with God as his body, we tend to "sit on our hands." Is it the fear of man standing in the way? Do we have nothing to express?

A few Sundays back as I led a lengthy period of praise and worship, the church stood. A time of high-spirited praise songs shifted toward a more reflective and worshipful mood, so I motioned for the people to sit down. One man remained standing on the second row with his eyes closed and his hands raised, unaware that everyone around him had sat down. He was deeply involved in the worship he was offering. All eyes were on him as he continued standing through another song. His wife, seated by his side, chose not to disturb him. Some of the teens giggled a bit; then they stopped. The entire church seemed to sense a "teachable moment." Without saying a word, our new preacher had taught a strong lesson that will make a difference in shaping this church.

*Proposal--*In the privacy of your home, worship the Lord using your hands. Clap for joy as you sing songs of praise. Raise your

hands as you pray, giving him honor and receiving his touch. See if your communication with him is not enriched.

Peek into a church sometime where you hear silence. You may think nothing is being said, but the hands may tell a different story. Hands touching eternity bring into focus a God who has come near. You may never raise your hands in a public assembly, but to feel the release in your heart to do so is to celebrate the freedom of Christ and to sense the nearness of a Father who reached farther than you'll ever understand to touch you.

Hands are for giving and receiving. Hands may respond when words are not appropriate. God's touch is as real today as it ever was. He's as close as he's ever been. God's hands are extended. Are yours? Are you "holding hands with God"?

--Condensed from May 1992 Wineskins, by permission C.

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## REVIVAL--OUR GREATEST NEED

# SOME CHURCHES THAT ARE LEADING THE WAY

Leroy Garrett

*[Introductory note by AVW In the last 20 issues of his magazine, Restoration Review, Leroy Garrett wrote a series of thought-provoking articles with the title, "What Must the Church of Christ Do to be Saved?" He did not mean "saved" from hell, of course, but from irrelevance, deadness, futility and fruitlessness We reprinted his first article of that series in our Feb 1992 issue Now we share with you his concluding article, condensed.]*

In this last installment on what the Church of Christ must do to be saved, I want to tell you about some congregations that are saving themselves. Their example could lead to the salvation of other congregations if they will have the courage to go and do likewise, each according to its gifts and calling

### Dallas

It is noteworthy that some of these churches are in Dallas, long considered a bastion of Church of Christ orthodoxy where any significant change would be unlikely. It was hardly predictable, for example, that the Preston Road Church of Christ, the sponsor of the once hard-line Preston Road School of Preaching, would open its facilities for a

workshop on change, as it recently did. Or that the Skillman Ave. Church of Christ, always to the right of center, would in 1992 sponsor Restoration Forum X that hosted Christian Church leaders across the land, treating them as equals in the Lord.

Then there is the Richardson East Church of Christ that shares in special services with other churches. In one instance, a number of their members went across town to worship with a small black Baptist church. This congregation has attracted city-wide attention, being written up in the press, for its outreach in the disenfranchised, including AIDS patients.

If I named but one church that exemplifies the changes I've pled for in this series, it might be the Lake Highlands Church of Christ in Dallas, particularly in terms of its Sunday worship service. It has made impressive strides toward the kind of Body life that the Scriptures call for, such as creating an environment where people feel free to share.

They have a sharing time of some 10-15 minutes where people move about the congregation praying, confessing and praising God together. One can see small huddles of people, circled arm in arm, all across the auditorium that seats about 600, which, by the way, they are filling. The minister explains to the visitors that this is not a time for small talk or Cowboy talk, but a time for spiritual fellowship.

A "praise team" made up of two men and two women lead the singing while the congregation stands. An overhead is used rather than hymnals. There is a choir and solos by both men and women. Testimonials are often deeply moving. Prompted by the sad news that one of his children was getting a divorce, a longtime prominent Church of Christ preacher, one of 18 former ministers in that church who are burned out and now doing other things, got up and confessed that he had been an absentee-father and had failed his family. It was one more emotional moment for a congregation that is learning to be a confessing church, one that is learning to be compassionate. Our churches must cultivate this kind of Body life if we are to be saved.

Lake Highlands is able to move in these new directions because it has leaders who are shepherd-like and have learned to pray together. The elders gather an hour beforehand to pray for the service they will be leading. The church takes time with its rather long prayer list, with an elder leading the prayers. The church sees its elders, not as business men who are running the church or like a corporate board that hands down decisions, but as *spiritual* leaders. The minister, who teaches more than preaches, goes through the Bible, a book at a time, relating what it says to present day needs. Aware of the great diversity



in his congregation, he avoids controversial "issues," allowing the Bible itself to speak to the people.

Their position on instrumental music is that acappella singing, which they do very well, is their tradition, one to be prized, but not a biblical injunction, and they do not make it an issue. In fact they use instruments in special praise services, as well as instrumental recording with solos.

Lakes Highlands is an outreach church. Due to a large contingency of Cambodians in Dallas, it supports a separate church of these people. They have a "children's church" during their main assembly. *They encourage their people to come up with their own ministries with the church helping out.* One sister, a former airline attendant, came up with the idea of persuading American Airlines to send one of their out of service planes to Croatia full of food. It was done, with the church filling the plane with food! A child in the church thought it would be a good idea to give gloves to homeless children in Dallas. They soon had 700 pairs to distribute!

Much of the church's solidarity come through their more intimate home gatherings, cell groups, which they have two Sunday evenings a month. They are trying to get away from their building more in their ministry and outreach.

While they do all this, they do not want their congregation to be "a neat church" where Church of Christ folk can go who are bored with where they are. They are not interested in entertaining the dissatisfied. They want to be the church, serving, witnessing, meeting people's needs, including those beyond their four walls.

### Escaping Sectarianism's Paralysis

Then there is the minister who recently applied for a job at the Southern Hills Church of Christ in Tulsa and brought a "Position Paper" along with him, which he passed out to the congregation. In it he stated that he favored acappella singing, but he would not be preaching against instrumental music if hired, that "It is not a biblical subject and certainly not a matter of fellowship." There were also disclaimers to a legalistic position on baptism, the ministry of women and the Holy Spirit. He also said that he was not "a Church of Christ preacher" and stated that he was open to fellowship with other churches. He said he is proud of his Restoration roots and wants to stay with Churches of Christ, but not controlled by them. He wants to help lead our people out of "the paralysis of sectarianism." I tell you all this to tell you the big news. He was hired!

I've saved the best for the last, or at least the most unusual. Hold on to your seat for this one. The Quaker Avenue Church of Christ in Lubbock, a Non-Sunday School congregation, sent the following letter to the Broadway Church of Christ, the largest and most influential Sunday School church in the same city:

We, the elders of the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ, have for some time been grieved over the separations within the Body of Christ. While there have been steps taken in recent years to move away from the animosities of the past, there are still settled divisions among us. We, for instance, from those churches which do not favor or employ Sunday Schools, have not had much fellowship with those who do. We have frequently been regarded as "anti" brethren, and sometimes scorned as being backward and legalistic for a position we take on the basis of genuine concern for scripture. It is true that we differ in this respect from many other brethren, but we do not feel that such difference should keep us from brotherly relations in the numerous areas where we hold mutual ground.

They went on in the letter to refer to the debates of the past and all the ugly divisions. They did not want to judge on who was responsible for the divisions, but that they felt responsible "to bring about greater unity in our day." They stated that while they had not caused the divisions, they had helped to maintain them. "We repent of that and seek the forgiveness of God and all our brethren," they went on to say. While they regretted all the grief that some of their people had caused in the past, they were thankful for their heritage and all the good things handed down to them.

They said that while they sought closer association "with brethren who differ with us on the Sunday School, we do not renounce our fathers in the faith." They went on to make a statement that should be heralded among all our churches, one that beautifully reflects what the Stone-Campbell movement was all about:

From this time forth we want to be known as a people who love *all* the brethren. We believe that honest difference need not divide us, that we can enjoy sweet fellowship in all that we mutually hold dear while allowing for some diversity in interpretation and practice. Our plea for reconciliation is not by any means a repudiation of our position on Sunday Schools, but a recognition that such issues are less important than the blood of Jesus that made us one.

They went on to ask for "the right hand of fellowship" from the Broadway church, and added, "May our rich heritage in the Restoration Movement, which began as an attempt to unite all Christians, be rekindled today in new demonstration of the noble principles of our past. More importantly, let us fulfill the prayer of our Lord, who wanted us all to be one in order that the world might believe." [*The*

*full text of their letter was reprinted in W&W, 6/92, in an article entitled "Jailbreak!"—AVW]*

I understand that the Broadway elders were delightfully surprised to receive such a letter and responded in kind. The two churches will be looking for things they can do together, but what is important is that they have accepted each other as equals in the Lord in spite of differences, which happens to be the only way to accept each other in the Lord!

I consider this one of the most significant documents of our Movement's recent history. I hope either the Quaker Ave. church or the Broadway church will put it in pamphlet form and distribute it far and wide. It will serve to heal the wounds of our fragmented people. Let each faction among us have the spirit of Quaker Ave. Each division among us could and should write the same letter, and in place of "Sunday School" insert the "issue" that is the cause of rupture, whether instrumental music, Herald of Truth, Premillennialism, Plurality of cups, etc.

### **Conclusion**

These are but a few of the changing churches among us. What does all this mean? It means that we can all change for the better if we have the will. It also means that the Churches of Christ are a beautiful people with lots of creative diversity. It means that we should recognize our diversity and accept the liberating truth that oneness does not mean sameness.

We can have churches that have Sunday School and those that do not; those that support Herald of Truth and those that do not; those that have instrumental music and those that do not; those that use plurality of cups and those that do not; churches that are premillennial and those that are not, etc., etc., and yet be united in the essentials of the faith and doing at least some things together. And no one has to compromise any truth or violate his or her conscience!

If we are to be saved as a people and recapture our heritage as a unity movement, we have no choice but to get with it.

# QUESTIONS ASKED OF US

Carl Kitzmiller

*If some tragedy befalls a Christian, doesn't that prove that he has failed in some way to live up to the Lord's standard?*

Maybe. Maybe not. All cases are not necessarily alike. There are evils that come as a result of sin, to be sure. These evils could have been avoided if the individual had lived according to the standard God has given. There is a law of harvest that says: "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." We have no way of knowing just what percentage of troubles arise from harvesting the kind of seed that was sown, but we suspect it is rather high. There is just something about human nature which, when trouble comes, likes to forget the times God's word has been ignored, the delight with which we did wrong, the choices we deliberately made, etc. God does chasten those He loves, as well as allowing a bad sowing to bear fruit, so we should keep in mind that there are troubles we can avoid by being faithful, obedient children of God. Some troubles do arise because of our sins.

There are promises God makes to His people which, if taken absolutely with no exception allowed, would seem to say that troubles are always caused by sin. We need to be careful, however, that we do not isolate God's promises from the total truth of scripture. It is always the sum of God's word which is truth. Let's take a few of those promises for consideration.

In Matthew 6:33 we read: "But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." "All these things" refers to the necessities of life earlier mentioned. Hence, if someone is hungry or destitute, thrown out of a place to live, does that not prove that they have not sought first the kingdom of God? If we had the means and the wisdom to investigate all such cases we would likely find that in most cases the kingdom of God had not been put first. But is it possible for the righteous to lack necessities? Does God never allow or use such a thing? David, of old, observed: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). If a man must beg bread, does that prove that he is not righteous? Generally, yes! But I believe these are general promises and observations, not absolutes. If God sets them aside for some reason it is that higher good may come. Consider Lazarus, the beggar of Jesus' account in Luke 16:19ff. He was begging bread, but he was righteous enough that when he died (starved to death?) he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Such a one as the apostle Paul could say that he knew what it

was to be "abased" (Phil. 4:10-12), explaining that he did not actually want. The reason he did not "want" was that he had learned to be satisfied with very little. By many human standards he would have been considered in want.

We might examine another kind of trouble--sickness, untimely loss of loved ones, financial disaster, physical violence, etc. Is the Christian who walks in the will of God exempt? There are certainly promises which speak of a great difference between the servant of God and others. With the Lord as our Shepherd we need "fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). Those who abide under the shadow of the Almighty are told that "a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it (destruction) shall not come nigh thee"(Ps. 91:7). Surely the Father who knows of the sparrow's fall and who knows the very hairs of our head (Matt. 10:29-30), who is working all things together for our good (Rom 8:28), will never allow anything that we might call tragedy in our life! Of, if it comes, must we not assume it is because of sin and rebellion? One could make out a pretty good case that any such suffering is because of our failure to honor God as God, to obey Him as we ought. But then "again it is written" and there is the man Job, a model of righteousness. Job in one brief period experienced financial disaster, the untimely death of his children, and tragic physical affliction. It was not Job's sin that caused it, in a sense it was his righteousness. But even Job's friends tried to tell him that there was some sin back of his troubles. In many cases, yes. But in this case God was glorifying Himself and moving Job to even greater understanding of spiritual things. Don't forget also the man who was born blind (John 9). Who sinned, this man or his parents, that such an affliction befell him? Jesus answered plainly that it was neither this man nor his parents who were the cause of the man's affliction. Not every sufferer has disobeyed God or rebelled against Him

There are great natural disasters which come to mankind. I recall a tornado which some years ago thoroughly tore up a small town, destroying all the church buildings in town except one at the edge. Human nature being what it is, there were those who saw that as divine approval of the one religious body and condemnation of the others. If such were always the pattern in every tornado, then we might indeed begin to think God was trying to tell us something, but that is not the case. Sometimes God's people suffer too. It may be that they were unfaithful and invited chastening. Or it may be that He had other purposes in view. We need to recognize that this type of thing is not imposed altogether on the basis of righteousness or unrighteousness. Jesus discussed judgments on occasion (Lk. 13:1-5; Matt. 11:20-24), pointing out that God does not now always render the same judgments on unrighteousness. Generally we can observe that even in natural

disasters God has a way of caring for and blessing His own, but it would be a grave injustice to declare that all loss, destruction and death in such events would have been avoided if there had been faithfulness on the part of His people.

All of which says that tragedy (as humans define it) can come to the child of God and that not every event of this sort declares some wickedness on the part of the sufferer. In fact, there is a type of suffering which comes to the child of God *because* he is a child of God and because he is faithful. We speak, of course, of persecution. For the sake of greater good God sometimes allows His people to be shamefully treated and misused. Some are imprisoned and some are killed. None of this makes void the promises of God which speak of His care, but some of it may be misunderstood by those who observe. We need to realize, to be sure, that there is enough unfaithfulness in any one of us to offer God an honorable exemption from His promises. Many of them, however, are meant to be general statements and not something with which we try to back God into a corner. If we are seeking first the kingdom of God, then we are ready if and when it serves Christ's purposes to experience troubles for His sake.

Satan was right about Job--God had set a hedge about him. But it is not Job alone He has set a hedge about. This is true of every child of God. It is a reality. But just as God saw fit to remove a portion of that hedge from about Job, so He may see fit to remove it from any of us--always for His purpose and always with our good in mind.

Now, having noted that God uses suffering in a variety of ways--including the maturing of the child of God and bringing glory to God Himself--we do need to come back to an earlier note and recognize that a lot of serious and grievous afflictions and tragedies are self-inflicted so to speak. God does chasten. Just as the disobedient child invites chastening from a parent, so God's children invite chastening. Moreover, He does allow our folly to bear fruit. He does allow those who sow to the flesh to reap a harvest therefrom. While we may need to be careful about how we judge others and declare them to be "getting just what they deserved," we do need to examine our own disappointments and tragedies to see if God is speaking to us. After all, it must have been God's love that sent a famine to the prodigal son in the far country!

# **An Open Letter from the Jennings Church**

Have you ever considered what it would be like to live in an area where there are very few Christians? Where you would have to drive for several hours in order to have fellowship with others who love the Lord? We are very fortunate here in America to live within short distances of several sister congregations. We can have fellowship three times a week at least and in some cases, even more, if we desire.

It is not that way with Bro. Motoyuki Nomura in Japan. Bro. Moto came to Kentucky Bible College in the early 1950's to study the Bible and to prepare himself for work in the Lord's vineyard back in his native Japan. After his studies, he returned to Tokyo and began a work for the Lord, meeting in his home. That work grew in number as well as in knowledge and love.

Along with my family, I was able to visit with Bro. Moto twice, and each time we came away impressed with the love and dedication of the Nomura family and the church in Tokyo. Without designated support from any congregation in the U.S., Bro. Moto worked at odd jobs to keep his family going. Several years ago, they moved from Tokyo to the mountains to begin working with the folks in that area. Each Sunday Moto would commute to Tokyo for services with the group there.

This year at the CENTRAL LOUISIANA CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, the afternoon sessions will be devoted to "Missions: what's needed; what's going on; how can we help?" It was suggested that we invite Bro. Moto and his wife to come and talk about the work in Japan. Bro. Victor Broaddus will be in charge of the sessions and will use Bro. Moto and other missionaries.

We are inviting our fellow Christians to help us bring Moto and Yoriko here in the fall. The tickets will cost approximately \$3000. We believe that it will be good for them to come and visit old friends and meet new ones. If the Lord leads you to be a part of this effort, you may send your gifts to: Church of Christ Worldwide; P.O. Box 54842; Lexington, KY 40555. Mark it "Nomura Travel Fund."

Finally, plan to come to the November 15-18 Fellowship at Glenmora, Louisiana. Many homes are available for housing overnight guests. You will be blessed and will be a blessing!

--Douglas Broyles, elder

# VOICES from the FIELDS

Joy Garrett

Zimbabwe, Africa

July 10, 1993

Yesterday we went to the funeral of a faithful Christian grandmother at Wuyuwuyu. In 1930-31 her husband, Brother Mafawi, was the cook to Bro. Dewitt Garrett's family when they lived at Wuyuwuyu. He and his wife were faithful members of the church there. Robert was born while the Garretts were at this foundation church. Bro. Mafawi died in 1945 leaving the wife to bring up the six children alone. With God's help she did this. She taught the younger women at Wuyuwuyu which is a congregation of many sisters-in-Christ.

At the end of last year she came to her son's house in Glen Norali because of serious illness. While there she preached to her visitors and the local Harare women were impressed by her love for the Lord. She recovered and went home. She harvested a good crop of corn. But suddenly she fell asleep in Jesus.

Hundreds came to her funeral. She had many grandchildren and great-grandchildren; most are still serving the Lord. Robert preached her funeral.

The Lord has blessed us with 300 bags of cement from the factory and the work goes forward at Kuwadzana church building.

We are to go to Kadoma tomorrow. Every month we've had baptisms there and the church has been full (over 200). They are working hard for the Lord.

Today is Robert's monthly Saturday Bible Class on the Creation. The church is full of adults and the big classroom is jammed with children for their class.



# NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaas

## Disregard Those Prices! (Blush)

In the May issue we listed books for sale through our office. But by mistake an outdated price list was used. Disregard it, please. For some time *A New Creation* has been \$1.40, not 1.00. And *Romans* is 1.50, not .15 (that was a typo)!

To make up for our mistake, we will offer the hardback book by Sister Mary Knecht, *One Thing is Needful* (for the Christian Home) at a tremendous discount: \$1.00 (plus postage) rather than \$6.75 (and that's no mistake). Get a copy for yourself and your church library.

Please pray for W&W: its editor, writers, and printers.

## Doing Things Differently

At Portland Ave. Church a "persecuted-church Sunday" was held, to increase appreciation for disciples around the world. Only the songleader used a hymnal & only the preacher used a Bible, since many Christians lack these things. The sermon was about persecution, & quoted verses from 19 NT books on the subject. Prayer-times were given to intercession for specific persecuted believers in over 20 lands. (This information was provided free by the Open Doors ministry.) At our regular fellowship meal no meats or desserts were allowed, so we would sympathize a little with the world's malnourished masses

The Lord used that day (which many churches in the U.S. observed) to deepen our sympathy & challenge our commitment to Him. We have many comforts and conveniences that can so easily become idols--God forbid! --Alex Wilson

## 2 Examples Of The Above

*Scarce Bibles:* "Bibles are so scarce in Vietnam that people are required to recite Psalm 119 verbatim in a few days after receiving one, in order to keep it. If they don't get it right, someone else receives the Bible!" *Poverty & Hardship:* A letter from the Philippines in April says, "Many times in our city we go for 6 hours a day without electricity; in some areas it's 8 hours. And in Manila where it's hotter and more humid, they are having 10-hour daily brownouts. You can only imagine the inconveniences: no computers in offices, the post office doesn't sort mail, traffic signals aren't on (causing huge traffic jams), no air-conditioning, the water company can't get water to homes, etc, etc. The Philippines' economic level has dropped to the lowest in Asia, tied with Vietnam."

Americans, count your blessings & pray for those living in hardships.

## Spiritual Growth Anyway

"95 children and highschoolers came during VBS [in Manila]. During VBS "graduation" around forty parents came. Please pray for us as we follow them up. . . The young church in Maligaya is growing. 8 people were buried in baptism during April. Attendance now averages 70 people excluding children. We have 3 home Bible study-groups plus a new one." --David Moldez

## Sermon Topics

Bulletins reveal some interesting series of sermons have been preached. At Southeast, Nathan

Burks had a night series on OT leaders and prophets: Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Malachi, Samuel, Eh, and at least 4 judges.

At Borden, Mike Abbott had a series on forces that influence us (TV, music, current views re:gender); a 2nd series on the Bible (its inspiration, development, canonization, preservation, translation, reliability, influence & uniqueness); a 3rd on Revival (what it is; prayer; from defeat to victory; the issue of change); a 4th on the Christian Life (its relationships; its roots in baptism; being Spirit-filled; its priorities); and a 5th on God's Answers (to suffering, to sin & Satan, and to stress). All that within a 4-month period. Sounds good, Mike.

### **An Update On Sis. Virginia Ramsey**

Sister Ramsey thanks everyone for their prayers and love during her recent surgery. The tumor in the pancreas turned out to be benign, and she is rapidly recovering her strength after the operation. The Ramseys are praising the Lord for working in her behalf. --Words of Life Newsletter

### **Southeast Church of Christ**

We are pleased to announce that God has answered our prayer and provided an Associate Minister, Youth. Alan Woodward, a 1991 graduate of Roanoke Bible College, joined our staff on May 24, 1993. Alan and his wife Dena, come to us from King William, VA. They have already helped at Woodland Bible Camp. He is planning a "Youth Emphasis Week" at Southeast for July 5-11.

God blessed us greatly on "Parent Commitment Sunday" when three of our couples pledged to raise

their babies to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and our elders pledged spiritual support to these families. We ask you to rejoice with us as we have seen seventeen additions (seven baptisms, ten transfers) January - June 1993.

We ask you to pray with us for our Fall revival Sept. 19 - 24. Gary Serago from Glen Burnie, MD will be our evangelist. Brother Gary is an effective evangelist, often used at the "National Prayer Clinic," Grundy, VA. --Nathan Burks, Minister

### **Gallatin Church of Christ**

The Gallatin Church was happily surprised on a recent Sunday morning when Ken Rideout and Ruth arrived unannounced. He was given (and he took) opportunity to inform the congregation of how God is working in Thailand. Gallatin welcomes such surprises!

Linda and Walter Allen of Gallatin Church minister to children who have special needs. The church is contributing to provide items especially needed for the care of such children as state funds are not adequate. Pray for this couple and find out how you may help.

### **Highland Church of Christ, Louisville**

Recent visitors: Hollace and Ida Sherwood of Bryantsville church spoke of the High Lysine Corn Project to feed third world countries. They will bless any church. Call them if they have not visited your congregation.

David and Colleen Brown, Russellville, Ky., former missionaries in South Africa. David spoke at a Sunday morning service. Later David and Colleen returned with Edwin and Marianne Froize, fellow workers of the Browns in Africa

who now are in charge of that mission work. Edwin is a fourth generation missionary.

Under the hand of God and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Highland ordained and set apart Thomas Kelley to the ministry of the gospel, and he was installed as the minister of the Highland Church of Christ.

### **Jubilee 1993**

A recent uplifting experience for wife Ann and me was an evening at the Jubilee 1993 at Nashville. We estimated 5,000 in attendance and were thrilled to join in the singing with such a "throng." The evening's speaker was Prentice Meador and his theme was "He Opened the Lifegates." I was impressed with his spirit of meekness through which a compassion for Christ and the souls of men were apparent to all as he preached that evening. Prentice is the pulpit minister for the Prestoncraft Church of Christ, Dallas, Texas, an adjunct professor for Abilene Christian University and Oklahoma Christian University, and is managing editor of the *21st Century Christian*.

The Jubilee received coverage in the *Tennessean*. They quoted Joe Spivey attending from Fairmont, W. Va., "Jubilee offers a refreshingly positive, not negative, emphasis on

faith questions. It's nice to hear what God's Word says, instead of what it doesn't say. It's nice to talk to Jesus as if He's alive right now and not someone who died 2,000 years ago."-- J. B

### **Junior Worship At Southeast**

May 10th brought to a close another year of Junior Worship. The Lord has been gracious to us with an average of 14 young people for each Junior Worship. A special thanks to several men who willingly used their talents to teach our children, Jonathan Niestadt, Will Nethery, David Wood, Tim Rowe, Darren Istre and John Seay. They each brought their own unique teaching methods to make God's Word real to the children. Junior Worship will resume in September with Alan Woodward taking the leadership role.

### **Mrs. Lura Jones Bornwasser**

Mrs. Lura Jones Bornwasser, (1899 - 1993) Bible teacher at the Ross Point (Harlan Co.), Kentucky Church of Christ was promoted to "be with Jesus" her Lord, June 12, 1993. She served the Lord as a teacher in Portland Christian School for 39 1/2 years, and later taught a Bible class at her home church for 28 years. A very special lady. More will be said in a later issue.

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## SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

Schedule for Fall, 1993

August 30 - December 21, 1993

Course Title	Time	Teacher
Life and Work of the Preacher	Mon 9:00 - Noon	Mike Abbott
Scientific Creationism	Mon 1 00 - 4:00 p m	Paul Estes
Romans/Galatians	Mon 6:30 - 9 30 p m	Jerry Carmichael
New Testament Church	Tues 1 00 - 3 00 p m	Nick Marsh
Interpreting the Bible	Tues 6 30 - 9 30 p m	Alex Wilson

2500 Portland Ave., Louisville Ky. 40212

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### KENTUCKIANA LADIES OVERNIGHT RETREAT

Sept. 24 - 25, 1993

Camp Kavanaugh, Crestwood, Ky (not far from Louisville)

Theme: **PRAISE and WORSHIP**

Speakers: Jodell Seay, Shirley Schreiner Taylor, Nell Bruce (former missionary who now heads a prayer ministry)

Panelists include Janell Lewis, Ruth Wilson, Joyce Zimpelmann, and others to be announced.

Stay tuned for more information,  
but set aside the dates now.