

# Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

August, 2005

## The Simple Faith About the Love of the Father

My granddaughter, Sophia, will be four months old August 15. She has already learned to spread her arms and lift them up when she wants to be picked up. Mommy or Daddy look at those big expectant eyes and even bigger smile, and she is scooped up. Sophia grabs a fistful of hair or clothing and hangs on.

She expects love because her parents love her and express that love to her. She is learning about love. They first loved her, and she responds to their love. They delight in every bit of progress she makes in her developing mind and body. They make every effort to provide whatever she needs to be healthy and happy. But their love for her does not diminish when she's in pain and can't be consoled. Their love doesn't depend on how much progress she makes or how fast she makes that progress. Their love for her grows day by day as they sacrifice for her and serve her.

Our Heavenly Father loves and delights in his children in even greater depths than we love our own children. "We love because he first loved us." (I John 4: 19 NIV) "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (I John 4:9-10 NIV)

Sophia fights being restrained in her infant car seat. She can not understand it is for her safety. All she knows is that she is separated from her parent. She can't see Mommy or Daddy in the driver's seat. Sometimes her cries become so urgent and insistent

her mom has to find a place to park, and often takes an hour to feed and comfort her until she falls asleep. Only then can their journey resume.

We often can not see our Heavenly Father in the driver's seat of our life's journey. His discipline, although for our good, is never pleasant at the time. When God disciplines us, he does so because we are his children, greatly loved. (Hebrews 12:5-13) But when our cries to him become urgent and insistent, he will pull over with us and assure us of his love before our journey can continue.

We can rely on the love God has for us: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (I John 3:1 NIV)

There is much we do not know or understand, just like Sophia doesn't understand the need for the car seat. But we can know the Father loves us and is taking the best care of us.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

His love does not depend on our imperfect efforts to please him through obedience or our work for the Lord. His love is his gift to us. "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." (I John 4: 16 NIV) So let us spread our arms and lift our hands up to our Heavenly Father. Let us look to him with expectant hearts and cling to him as he scoops us up.



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# Camp Outreach a Success!

What do you call 21 people who pay their own way, travel hundreds of miles, work long hours in hot, humid weather without air conditioning doing hard, physical labor for people they don't know?

Happy. Fulfilled. Excited. Charged with a rekindled sense of purpose and meaning!

Camp Outreach was designed to connect young people with the Christian values of service, giving, hard work, cooperation, and loving concern for others. The camp itself was a cooperative effort between the Lexington Church of God, LifeResource Ministries, and Common Ground Christian Ministries. Running from Sunday, July 31st through the following Sabbath, participants worked four days, hiked one day, spent a refreshing Sabbath together, and hosted a celebration BBQ for everyone involved, especially for the senior citizens who benefited from everyone's labor.

During the course of the work week we worked on the homes of six senior citizens. Four were widows, one was a widower, and the last was an elderly woman whose husband was in a nursing home recovering from a fall.

We remodeled two kitchens, putting in new kitchen cabinets, sinks, building a new interior wall (you could see through the siding into the kitchen), framed and hung a new window, repaired siding, painted the exterior trim on three homes and the siding of one, tore out and replaced a porch, washed and cleaned walls and floors, repaired holes in floors, laid new floor coverings in a bathroom, repainted rooms, washed siding, did yard cleanup,

poured a concrete wheel chair ramp, repaired drywall, re-hung window air conditioners, repaired stopped up drains, put in new hand rails, patched leaky roofs, cleaned gutters, and repaired a damaged screen in a crawl space.

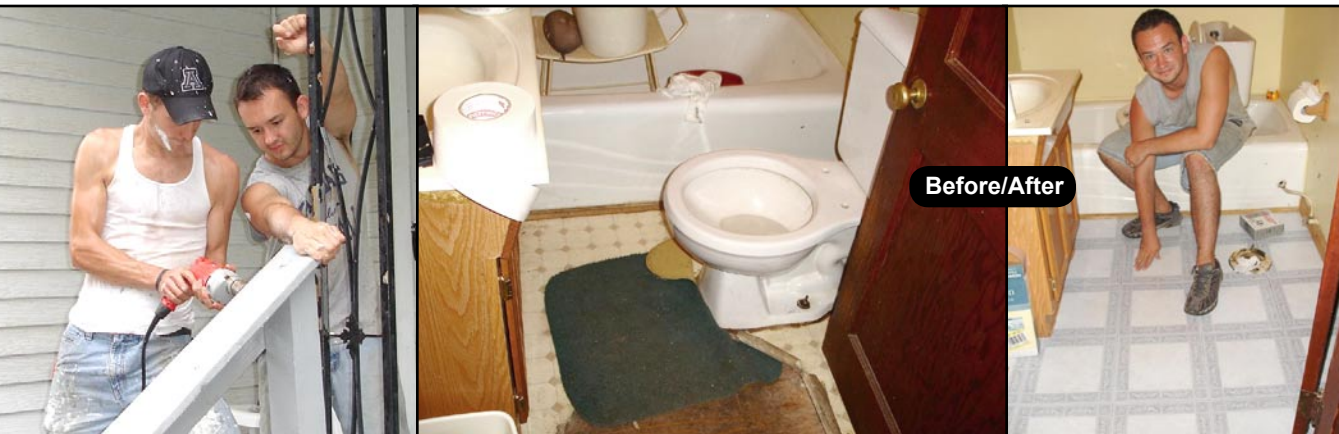
Not bad for a week's worth of work! Plumbing and electrical work was donated by local businesses. "Repair Affair," a community redevelopment effort, helped by cosponsoring our efforts and providing a donation to Camp Outreach. Each day a local realty firm or builder brought lunch and iced water and drinks for the workers.

In addition to some time every evening for recreation, one day was set aside for hiking in the Red River Gorge in the Daniel Boone National Forest. For accommodations, workers slept two to a room in an air conditioned motel and took their breakfast and dinner at the home of James and Linda Sexton, church members and owners of a local home building company in Georgetown, KY.

There was a spiritual side to Camp Outreach. One of our goals was to introduce the workers to tools for the greater mission of the church, which is evangelism. We didn't attempt to directly evangelize the community at this time—rather we sought to develop tools for evangelism, including small group dynamics, communication skills, and understanding how to engage others in spiritual discussions. Learning was done through direct experience.



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Faith Networks is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Networks by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.

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Our theme for the week was "Discovering Authentic Christianity." The theme was selected from earlier discussions with young people about why young people left the church when they grew up. One of the reasons given was a disconnect between the professed faith of parents and their actual conduct—a perceived lack of authenticity in Christian faith.

In our group discussions we explored Biblical examples of authentic Christianity, what constituted authentic Christian values, and how one could identify authentic Christians. We overcame obstacles. Something that is difficult for many in our church culture is praying out loud—so we created a safe environment where people could choose to pray out loud for others. Another common barrier to authentic relationships is a resistance to sharing needs in our lives with others. Through small group dynamics people became more open to doing so, and did it in a way that was meaningful and uplifting.

By the end of the week the workers were conducting small groups by themselves. Getting a better intellectual grasp on authentic Christianity from a Biblical perspective, sharing our lives in a meaningful manner, practicing intercessory prayer for the needs of others, and working together in service to widows and the elderly gets to the heart of what Jesus said would separate the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25.

And what about evangelism? A necessary first step in evangelism is connecting with the community and establishing credibility. We have open invitations to come back and visit in the homes of those we served. Some of their grandchildren have invited us to visit with them and expressed their appreciation for doing what they did not know how to do.

A city council member heard about what was happening and asked for our group to speak to the city council about our group and what we were doing. He said in the council meeting that he would like to join our group and work along side us next year. A newspaper reporter heard about us from another reporter who was at a council meeting and came and interviewed a number of us while we were working.

Neighbors came up to us and asked us what we were doing. Some





offered to put us in touch with others in need. Every time we serve, we can open doors of communication with people with whom we would otherwise have no connection. Other churches have used this approach with great success—we've taken the first step toward opening up opportunities for the Lexington Church of God in the Georgetown area.

Another fact is that a significant number in our group have not made a covenant with God through baptism—yet. Gaining a better understanding and practicing another dimension of authentic Christianity is a huge plus for them. Adding this kind of “taking care of the poor” and service to them gave them a personal taste of how authentic Christianity nourishes the soul.

One interesting comment came from one young man who said he had never felt like inviting non-attending friends to any church camp. After spending a week in service to others, he said, “Next year I am

going to invite my friends to come.” This is another connection that can be made because of focusing on serving others rather than simply enjoying one's self.

This year's Camp Outreach was a pilot program—we will hold another one next year. If you or your congregation want help in conducting this type of outreach, connecting with people in your community and using the experience to learn small group dynamics and essential tools of evangelism, contact us at Faith Networks.

We are willing to share with you anything we can to help you be more effective in the great commission and expressing love to our fellow man—essential values in authentic Christianity.

Finally, several of the widows said that they had been praying for help. It is humbling and encouraging to find out that our efforts were an answer to their specific prayers.



## Christ and the Sewer Worker

When my son's basement became backed up with sewer water, I rented an electric snake to open the drain. I had to trudge into sewer water, kneel down in the gunk, and feed the snake into the sewer line. I'll leave it to your imagination as to what some of the gunk was that I had to get into. It was disgusting!

But as I worked in that flooded basement thoughts kept coming to my mind of what I should be learning from this experience. I kept feeding the snake but encountered no significant resistance. There are times I've opened blocked drains where I've run into something that required a lot of work to get through. And as soon as you break that blockage everything flows. I equate that with a major sin in our life blocking the flow of the Holy Spirit which is a type of flowing water. (John 7:37-38)

In this case, however, there seemed to be nothing big blocking the drain. Nonetheless, when I finished feeding the snake and pulled it back, the drain opened. So what was blocking the flow of water?

Apparently, just small "average" sewage was building up on the walls of the pipe. This is much like plaque building up on the walls of an artery. The blood is restricted but the person may know nothing until the final piece of plaque blocks the blood completely and a heart attack occurs that can kill him.

We can have "low grade" sins in our life that don't seem so bad. But they are restricting how the Holy Spirit can work with us. They may be bad habits. They can be sins of commission or sins of omission that other people don't know about, but which trouble our conscience. Those sins can build up over a long period of time to the point that the Holy Spirit can no longer be active. This can be fatal!

### Who is the Sewer Worker?

But the biggest lesson I learned from this experience is who the sewer worker is and what kind of a person he is.

Jesus is the center of Christianity, and if we de-



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emphasize him we stab ourselves in the heart. We don't let him work "to clean out the sewer"—the sins in our lives. "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory ... ." (Luke 9:26)

"Moreover the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him." (John 5:22-23)

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

The book of Hebrews is all about Jesus. Most of the New Testament is about Christ. The holy days emphasize what person? Moses was a type of whom? Who is central to our salvation? Should we be ashamed to even speak of "Jesus"?

If we are to have progress in our churches we must repent of our sins. What greater sin can there be than dishonoring the Son—our brother, Savior, High Priest, King, and God?

Every Christian at times becomes convicted of personal sins and feels motivation to change. Who does that convicting? Is it the Father or the Son? You may do your own research on who is the unseen head of the church.

Jesus got down in the gunk with us when he was human and suffered for us. But he still gets into the gunk within us to convict us and help us to become pure. He is not aloof from us. He knows us well, yet he is not there to condemn us.

Do you know of any earthly kings that help clean out sewer drains? Yet we have such a king. Is he not worthy of great honor?

If we want life in our churches we have to honor and emphasize Jesus who will clean our "sewers" and put life into us.

## God Doesn't Play "Gotcha"

Last summer my boyhood town in Upstate New York passed a parking ordinance that forbade parking on certain sides of the street on certain days of the week. The city council had their reasons for passing that law, and one benefit was an increase in revenues from cars ticketed for violations. The city, you see, didn't post warning signs on the streets in question. In answer to queries from the local newspaper, a city spokesman pointed out that they had published a notice in the newspaper, and legally that's all they had to do.

Maybe in this case the law was on the city's side, but the concept of fair play was not. Ironically, many people see God's justice in the same light. Conventional wisdom tells us that God has published his way for salvation, and that way must be honored in order to gain eternal life. But there is a problem when we realize that the majority of people who have walked this earth have never had a chance to consider that way of life. On the surface, at least, it would appear that the devil is winning the contest for souls, for billions have never held a Bible. Countless has been honestly, sincerely, yet totally deceived by theologies and philosophies other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And many have been legally barred from even being exposed to it.

God has his message, it seems, but he never got the signs posted, and ignorant or not, people bear their guilt and have a price to pay. And the way some would tell it, God is just in punishing the deceived in an equal measure with the rebellious.

But people who believe such things have some scriptures to explain.

Jesus said, "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he, who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." (Lk 12:47-48 NKJV)

He also said that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the judgement than for the people of his day, for "if the mighty works,

which were done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matthew 11:24-25 NKJV).

If we take these passages at face value, it would appear that God makes allowances of some kind if people just don't know better. It will be more "tolerable" for them in the judgement. God is not like that Upstate New York city. He doesn't purposely keep people ignorant so that he can get some benefit from a penalty imposed by the law's violation.

The author of Hebrews makes a curious statement. After discussing the faithfulness of many Old Testament heroes, he says they were looking for a "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35). Conventional theology teaches that the dead will rise at Christ's return and that judgement will be made on the righteous and unrighteous at that time. Yet the book of Revelation (chapter 20) tells a different story. And it is a story that is filled with hope for those of us with loved ones who never understood God nor accepted Jesus Christ. And it is hope for the billions of people of all times whom the Gospel never reached.

Revelation 20:4-6 talks about a resurrection at the return of Christ of those who were written in the book of life. These are clearly "those who are Christ's at his coming." And the Bible uses a curious phrase to describe this resurrection. It's called the "first resurrection" (v. 5), and this resurrection is clearly a better resurrection, for those in it live and reign with Christ for 1000 years.

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished," at which time they "stood," that is, they are resurrected. "And the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life" (v. 12). The book of life is being opened again! More names will be written in that book. Those who didn't know better will have a chance to know better.

God doesn't play "Gotcha" with a little thing like salvation. He will make sure that everyone sees the signs and understands them. Then the decision will truly be theirs.



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## Your Gift—Is it a Flower or a Weed?

A few years ago, my wife and I planted a flower garden in front of our house. We purchased many different plants, including some yellow coreopsis. Just recently, we visited the Austin, Texas area and noticed that a similar coreopsis grows everywhere in that part of the country, in the wild. In fact, coreopsis (tickseed) even appears on lists of weeds that some chemical weed killers are guaranteed to kill. This gives me pause. To think that we paid good money to purchase and plant a flower that others consider an invasive weed. Which is it?

God made the coreopsis, and it is a gift to mankind. It is a beautiful gift to us, and to those who visit our home. But to some, in Texas, it is a weed. Can God's gift be a problem? Can a gift (which is good) turn out to be bad?

Notice Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 14. He points out that the purpose of any spiritual gift is to edify the body. (v 12) If used in a way that is not edifying, a gift can be a problem for a congregation. Paul commented that, in such a situation, a visitor could even come to the conclusion that a congregation is crazy! (v 23)

Amazing! A gift from God can actually cause a problem! How can that be? As Paul points out, the key is in how the gift is used. Spiritual gifts are given to be used to edify others. When not used for that purpose, they become a problem. How else could they be used, you may ask?

Paul gives us some clues in 1 Cor 12 and 13. God had distributed many gifts to the Corinthians, but the fruit was mixed. All too often, people were not being edified. Paul taught them that love was paramount, and contrasted love with human frailties present even in the gift-filled Corinthians.

- Sure you can speak in tongues, but are you long suffering?
- You have all kinds of knowledge, but must you act like a know-it-all?
- Yes, you are a good speaker, but why do you use this gift to draw attention to yourself?



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In addition to Paul's examples, let's explore a few others:

- Are you discerning? Great! Do you use this discernment to gently protect and encourage others, or have you become a reliable source of negativity that people seek to avoid?
- Has God blessed you with an organized mind and administrative ability? Wonderful! Do you use these gifts to build, or to control?
- Are you an effective and willing servant and helper? What a blessing! Do you join with and involve others, or do you like to mark your territory and do it your way?

We should all learn what gifts God has given to us (He has, you know), and to meditate on using these gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ. That is why they were given in the first place! In addition, we must be careful that good gifts do not turn bad from misuse or abuse. The key is love.

A gift used in love for another is a gift used properly. Is coreopsis a flower, or a weed? It depends. It depends on how and where it is used. It is the same with spiritual gifts. Let all things be done for the purpose of building up others. (1 Cor 14.26)





## Flea Powder for Itching Ears Dealing with Doctrinal Novelties



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For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.  
— II Timothy 4:3 (NIV)

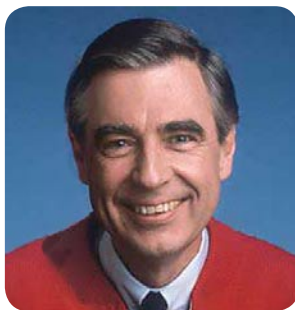
## All You Really Need to Know About Evangelism and Discipleship...

### ...you learned from Mr. Rogers!

When Fred Rogers, star of PBS's Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, died at age 74 in early 2003, I read a number of biographical sketches of him in the media. It turns out he was just the same in real life as he appeared on the show: soft spoken, patient, kind, dedicated to helping children face the challenges—both negative and positive—of childhood.

When Fred's famous program first went on the national airwaves in 1968, it was an amazing change from most traditional TV shows aimed at children. In the 1950s and 60s, standard kids' shows were hosted by fictional characters like clowns (Bozo) and cowboys (Buffalo Bob, Kenny Roberts—the Jumping Cowboy) who talked to a studio audience while the kids at home just watched the host interact with that audience.

Fred broke new ground. He wasn't a clown or a cowboy, he was just himself. And he didn't address a screaming "peanut gallery." He talked directly into the TV camera, addressing the kids in their homes watching as if they were guests right in the living room of his TV set house, and were his own neighbors. And he didn't stick to traditional fodder for children's shows such as slapstick and pratfalls and corny jokes. Instead, he filled his programs with real people young and old, living real lives, facing real problems and handicaps, and having real successes. Even the puppet segments on the show dealt gently with topics close to the lives of real children, such as disappointment, friendships, fear, loneliness, and sharing.



Some doubters may have assumed at the time that all this would be just too tame for most modern kids, and the show would have a short run, with the world soon forgetting Fred Rogers. They would have assumed wrong. With over 900 episodes produced, the show (still aired daily in re-runs on PBS) is the longest running show in PBS history. Over the years since 1968 Fred received multiple Emmys, and "Lifetime Achievement" Awards from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and the TV Critics Association. He was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame. His life and work were featured in articles in many magazines, including LIFE, Reader's Digest, and even Esquire. President George W. Bush presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2002, the nation's highest civilian honor.

But what on Earth does this have to do with evangelism? Just this—many, if not most, non-denominational Sabbatarian Church of God local congregations are very small and unassuming right now. And many church members are discouraged that they can't be part of a big, flashy "work" noticed by the whole nation. Some may even secretly envy just a little the impact of the huge national television ministries of flamboyant fellows like Benny Hinn—and the local huge mega-churches sprouting up around the country, that offer everything from exercise rooms to Cappuccino Shops in the hallways outside their "sanctuaries"!

What they may not realize is that for the people attending many such mega-churches, much of their



church experience is just like those kids watching the Howdy Doody show in the 1950s—they are mostly just spectators, not participants. And they may very well be almost anonymous and lonely spectators, who can get lost in the crowd as soon as the mega-church service is over.

Some day your local fellowship group really may grow big. But right now you can do something no big television ministry and no local mega-church can. Just as Fred Rogers tried to portray on his show, you can be personally involved with one new person at a time and give them special attention. You can focus on the quiet but very real issues in the lives of such persons, including their hopes, their disappointments, their fears, their unique ques-

tions about God and the Bible and salvation. You as an individual, and those you meet with as a small group, don't need to be like anyone else, and your church doesn't have to imitate a mega-church. You just need to be who you are, and love people who come along for who they are—and who they can become in Christ.

Yes, your local fellowship group may grow big some day if that's God's plan. You may even eventually have the kind of impact that Fred Rogers ultimately had. But meanwhile, as Mr. Rogers would have put it, people will "like you just the way you are." Don't worry about reaching the whole world right away. There are Neighborhoods to be reached right in your own home town.

## Striving for Perfection

Graham Robinson  
New Zealand

Back in the late 1980's, Kirk Penny was determined to be a part of the dance routine of his church's annual talent show. Although short for his age and much younger than the teens involved, his persistence paid off—he was in!

The audience loved it. Although it was one of the most hilarious routines ever, the people appreciated Kirk's determination, commitment, and enthusiasm. And for years to come, when the more perfect performances had faded from memory, the less than perfect performance of young Kirk was still fondly remembered and discussed.

But at the time, the minister in charge of the congregation said, "This must never happen again. The imperfections were an embarrassment."

It has only been in recent years that I have gained confidence for when I must stand before Jesus Christ on judgment day. What about you? Are there nagging doubts that you have not done enough buried deep within your sub-conscious mind? Have the years of being told you may not make it, you are not perfect enough, taken its toll?

1 John 2:29 states, "... everyone who practices righteousness is begotten of Him." Doctors and

lawyers call their business a "practice," and look at all the mistakes they make!

1 John 3:7 says, "... He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." Can you believe that? God the Father sees us as righteous as Jesus Christ. He knows we will continue to sin as long as we remain in the flesh. But what He is looking at is our desire to overcome sin, how much we delight in keeping His commandments. As the Psalmist said, "How love I thy law, it is ever with me." God is looking at our hearts. He is looking at what He is creating in us.

As I write, Kirk has just left New Zealand to compete in the American NBA. He always said he would be a famous basketball player one day. Through drive, perseverance, and commitment he has made it.

What about us? We have so much going for us we should be brimming full of confidence. We are indeed part of a wonderful practice!

1 John 4:17 "Love has been perfected among us in this; that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world."

## Growing A Generational Church

Many have been motivated to evangelize their communities without knowing where to start and what to do. Such things as newspaper ads usually have discouraging results. Then, what community service can you do that will bring results and grow your local church?

Sometimes the obvious is overlooked. The disciples made a mistake by not recognizing the importance of children in God's plan. Have we in God's church been guilty of that as well? Far too often, children have been left out, shunted aside, relegated to being less important to the church than adults, treated as non-persons, and thought of as being the "church of tomorrow." Nothing could be more important to church growth than realizing that our children are the church today! Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and don't prevent them. For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 19:14 TLB).

To grow a generational church, we must think of children as being the church today! We must believe they are, and begin to act like they are by teaching them, meeting their needs, and treating them as though they are. This means that children and teenagers should be included in every part of the worship of God.

A tried and tested way to make this statement to your church, the children, and your community is for your church to have a Vacation Bible School (VBS). It is a community service project that can uniquely accomplish all of these things.

The pastor of the First Baptist Church of Tyler, Texas, said in a recruiting announcement in a Sunday morning worship service that VBS is the single greatest family outreach his church does each year. And that is a very large church.

Why do Vacation Bible Schools have so much potential for growing a church? Kids love attending a VBS because it is fun. Parents love it because it gets their kids out of the house into a safe and productive environment for usually three hours, five days in the summer months—it's a free baby sitter. For many families, it's not even relevant which church

is having a VBS. VBS is considered to be a non-denominational activity by most people. So many children attend more than one every summer.

It may be too late for your church to plan and have a VBS this summer. But having ten months to educate your church about its advantages, recruit help, and plan a successful event for next summer can be a real advantage. Winging it is certainly not the way to a remarkable week kids will long remember. Yes, it will take educating yourself and your team, planning, and a lot of hard work. But it's well worth it if you want to make a difference in the lives of kids and grow your church.

So where do you start? The first thing you should do early next spring is to plan a trip to a Christian Book Store, such as LifeWay. Chat with the folks there and find out when they are expecting to receive their VBS kits. Mark that date on your calendar and visit them again a little after that date. Look through different VBS kits. Ask your helpful store assistant if she knows of any VBS seminars or workshops in your area. Attending one of these workshops will answer all sorts of questions and help you learn how to use their kit. So, write the dates of VBS seminars and workshops on your calendar and recruit every willing warm body you can find to go with you. These are usually free and may be on the Sabbath. But what's wrong with learning to grow your church on the Sabbath?

The kit may cost between \$75 and \$100 but it is worth every dime of it. These kits are usually very attractive and well presented. They have most everything you will need, including such things as: lessons for all age groups for five days, record keeping supplies, advertising materials, cassettes or CDs of music, posters, crafts, decorations or ideas, information about how to do your closing ceremony, information on how to follow up, etc.

Did you notice those words "follow up"? Any good sales person knows that here lies the secret to



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growing your church. You invite all of the parents and grandparents to the closing ceremony for show and tell. They can see the crafts and art work their kids have done. They learn what and how they were taught. They will gain impressions about you and what your church offers their family. Make sure someone on your team gets acquainted with every parent who attends. Then within two weeks, go visit them in their home. You already have something in common—their kids. You love them, and so do they. Tell them about your ongoing YEA Sabbath School

classes. Invite the entire family to a Bible study that is held at the same time, and to church. Send them invitations to potlucks, church socials, and other events. Stay in touch with them. If you learn of a death or an illness in their family, go visit them and see how you can help.

Vacation Bible School is a very basic church building block. It goes beyond analysis and talking. It's getting involved and making a difference in your community and in the lives of God's little ones. This is where the rubber meets the road.

## Winter Family Tournament 2005

# Lexington

The lineup of spiritual, social and recreational opportunities at the Lexington tournament in 2005 is outstanding.

There will be more seminars than you will be able to attend and they will cover a variety of topics. A Sabbath filled with stimulating and thoughtful seminars and discussion groups including our calling as Christians and the purpose of local congregations. There will be Sabbath classes for children and pre-schoolers.

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## Announcements

### Births

Orr, Minnesota: Tom and Jen (Johns) Burnett are happy to announce the birth of Jonah Thomas Burnett on August 11 at 11:30 PM. He weighed in at 6 lbs.12 oz and was 19 inches long. Jonah and his big sister Morgan are two of the six grandchildren (3 boys, 3 girls) of Jim and Sue Johns of Pennsylvania.



Cincinnati, Ohio: Todd and Julie O'Brien have added a new daughter to the family. Emma Grace joined sister Madison on July 14, weighing in at 8 lbs 7 oz and 21 inches long. Grandparents are Ron and Carol Froedge of Paducah, Kentucky, and Jim and Donna O'Brien of Cincinnati.



Lititz, Pennsylvania: Philip and Tammy Charles announce the birth of their third child, Justin Daniel James Charles, on July 7. He weighed in at 10 lbs. 6 oz and was 22 3/4 inches long. Brother Nathan and sister Leah are happy to see their new brother! Very happy grandparents are Jim and Sue Johns and Dan and Jeanette Charles.

### Baptisms

Kansas City, Missouri: Congratulations to Megan Curry and Daniel Frazee, baptized Sabbath, July 9, by Ramon Coleman. Megan and Dan both attend the Church of God, Kansas City, congregation.

stimulation when they are children.

George Will said of his son, “Jon lost, at the instant he was conceived, one of life’s lotteries, but he also was lucky: his physical abnormalities do not impede his vitality, and his retardation is not so severe that it interferes with life’s essential joy—receiving love, returning it, and reading baseball box scores.”

George Will is not the first parent I’ve heard say this. Down syndrome children—and adults—are among the most affectionate and loving of people. Jon Will’s father describes him as a happy person noting that “happiness is a species of talent, for which some people have superior aptitudes.”

True, but what surprises us is that so many handicapped people are so happy. George Will continued:

“When a child suffers a mentally limiting injury after birth we wonder sadly about what might have been. But a Down person’s life never had any other trajectory. Jon was Jon from conception on. He has seen a brother two years younger surpass him in size, get a driver’s license, and leave for college, and although Jon would be forgiven for shaking his fist at the universe, he has been equable. I believe his serenity is grounded in his sense that he is a complete Jon and that is that.”

Yes, and when I read that I began to understand why so many of us pursue happiness and never find it. We simply are not content to be who we are.

Jon Will is a baseball fan: “From his season ticket seated behind the Orioles dugout, Jon relishes rhubarbs, but I have never seen him really angry. The closest he comes is exasperation leavened by resignation. It is an interesting commentary on the human condition that one aspect of Jon’s abnormality—a facet of his disability—is the fact that he is gentleness straight through. But must we ascribe a sweet soul to a defective chromosome? Let us just say that Jon is a adornment to a world increasingly stained by anger acted out.”

One in every eight hundred children born in this country is a result of this “defective” chromosome. It is, in a sense, like the story in John’s Gospel of the moving of the waters. There was a kind of lottery in which the first person into the water was healed—the second man in was not. God sometimes

does strange things, but never without a reason. If we don’t understand, the deficiency is with us.

Jon Will has given me a new look at the question Jesus’ disciples asked Him about why people were born handicapped. Jesus answered, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3). Jesus then proceeded to spit on the ground, make clay and to anoint the eyes of the blind man with the clay. He then told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He went, washed, and came seeing.

There is a philosophical problem with the suggestion that God would cause a man to be born blind merely so that He could heal him of it. It seems to make the man’s blindness a kind of divine advertising scheme. But when I consider a Down syndrome child and realize that he is the way he is because of an accident of birth, I think something else may be going on. I would never suggest that God causes Down syndrome, but it’s hard to argue that He doesn’t make something of it. Perhaps it is that the works of God might be manifested in them. Jesus had the power to heal the blind man and did so. We have the power to love, care for, encourage, and otherwise help people who are handicapped from birth. From this comes a great deal of love, joy, and growth. People who have experience with Down syndrome children say that they are among the most loving of children and that the experience of bringing them into the world, raising them to adulthood, and sharing love with them makes it worth the pain of eventually losing them.

The works of God take many forms. Not the least of them is the greatness that is achieved in overcoming adversity. People are constantly asking the question: “What must we do that we might work the works of God?” It seems that God has placed in the world more ways to do His work than we might have thought.

Adversity is in the world to be overcome. It is one of the works of God. Down syndrome children are in the world to love and be loved. It is one of the works of God. The man born blind was not blind from sin. He was blind so that God could work. Perhaps we should spend less time worrying about causes and effects, sinners and victims, and more time working the works of God.

## Feast of Tabernacles Sites

Some of us will be keeping the Feast this year at these sites. Hope to see you there!

### Aruba

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: Services will be held at the Holiday Inn SunSpree. In Aruba, everything is close by: great shopping in downtown, the California Lighthouse, the Natural Bridge, Tierra del Sol Golf Course, and various water-oriented excursions. Sports enthusiasts can go scuba-diving in any of the 42 different diving sites, engage the incredible island winds by windsurfing, rent water-skis or parasails, or charter a boat and go deep-sea fishing. The island offers two golf courses, one of which is professional caliber, an ATP sanctioned tennis center, racquetball courts, trails to go horseback riding, even several bowling alleys.

Activities: To be announced

For more information: <http://bigsandychurch.org/bigsandy/FOT/sites/aruba.pdf>

[aruba@bigsandychurch.org](mailto:aruba@bigsandychurch.org)

Contact: Rick and Linda Pratt, 513-779-2675

### Angel Fire, New Mexico

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: Angel Fire is nestled in the southern end of the Moreno Valley in the Sangre De Cristo Mountain range of Northern New Mexico. It is situated at about 8430 ft. elevation with spectacular mountain views in all directions. Available activities include horseback riding, fishing, hiking, sight seeing, and golfing. There are several restaurants located in Angel Fire, Eagle Nest (11 miles north), Taos (24 miles west) and Red River (28 miles north). The cuisine ranges from traditional Western and Mexican to Italian and Fast Food. For those who are looking for a little slower pace, arts and crafts stores, coffee shops, and sight seeing are readily available.

Activities: To be announced

For more information: <http://bigsandychurch.org/bigsandy/FOT/sites/angelfire.shtml> [angelfire@BigSandyChurch.org](mailto:angelfire@BigSandyChurch.org)

Contact: Bernie and Paula Monsalvo, 903-845-4319

### Big Sandy, Texas

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: Services will be held at the COG—Big Sandy church building. Located in the heart of East Texas, Big Sandy is 100 miles east of Dallas and 90 miles from Shreveport, Louisiana. The Church of God—Big Sandy provides a traditional site in a coun-

try atmosphere where the whole family can enjoy the Feast of Tabernacles.

Activities: Adult Bible Studies, teen Bible Studies, Senior Citizens lunch, Pre-teen activities, pot-luck meals and festival dinners

For more information: <http://bigsandychurch.org/bigsandy/FOT/sites/bigsandy.shtml> [bigsandytx@bigsandychurch.org](mailto:bigsandytx@bigsandychurch.org)

Contact: Jim and Julie Wilkins, 903-769-4620

### Destin, Florida

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: Feast activities are centered at The Pelican Beach Resort hotel right on the Gulf Coast. Plenty of enjoyable restaurants and shopping in the area including a variety of water sports including fishing, kayaking, jet-ski's or waverunners, sailboats, cruises and, of course, swimming. The hotel hosts a kiddie-pool, a swimming pool and a jacuzzi as well as sauna and a weight-room with a sandwich shop. Beautiful sunsets on the beach with mid-80's during the days make this sight a delight for nearly anyone.

Activities: To be announced

For more information: <http://bigsandychurch.org/bigsandy/FOT/sites/destin.shtml> [destin@bigsandychurch.org](mailto:destin@bigsandychurch.org) Contact: Don and Michele Mischnick 800-946-5545 (days) 903-636-5080 (evening)

### Branson, Missouri

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: Services will be held at the Thousand Hills Golf and Conference Center.

Activities: To Be Announced

For more information: <http://bigsandychurch.org/bigsandy/FOT/sites/branson.shtml> [branson@bigsandychurch.org](mailto:branson@bigsandychurch.org)

Contact: Ed and Margaret Mitchell, 662-869-5831

### Rapid City, South Dakota

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: We will be celebrating the feast in Rapid City, South Dakota. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Activities: To Be Announced

For more information: <http://bigsandychurch.org/bigsandy/FOT/sites/rapidcity.shtml> [rapidcity@bigsandychurch.org](mailto:rapidcity@bigsandychurch.org)

Contact: Tim and Hope Lindholm, 763-262-0766

## **Ft. Walton Beach/Okaloosa Island, Florida**

(western Florida Panhandle)

Sponsored by: Christian Educational Ministries (affiliated with Ron Dart)

Overview: Worship services and other Feast activities for approximately 1000 feast-goers are held at the Emerald Coast Conference Center on Okaloosa Island, just west of Destin, Florida, one hour east of Pensacola. A wide variety of hotels, motels, beach houses, and condominiums are available within a mile or two of the Conference Center at excellent off-season rates. Activities: Opening night service and get-acquainted time, daily morning worship services, a daily seminar program with a wide selection of inspirational and educational topics, daily classes and a variety of planned social activities for youth from toddlers to teens, evening variety show, Youth Day service, golf scramble, more.

For more information: <http://www.rondart.com/Tabernacles/FOT%20Index.htm> For special rental rates from area realtors check the webpage at [http://www.rondart.com/Tabernacles/Housing\\_and\\_Travel.htm](http://www.rondart.com/Tabernacles/Housing_and_Travel.htm)

Contact: Christian Educational Ministries, P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791 1-888-BIBLE-44

## **Grand Junction, Colorado**

Sponsored by: Christian Church of God of Grand Junction

Overview: This feast site is in the beautiful Grand Valley of western Colorado, surrounded by high mountains, desert vistas, orchards and wineries. Attendance in the past has been approximately 75, coming from as far away as New York and California.

Activities: Get-acquainted social, complimentary senior luncheon, active open forum Bible question and answer sessions, complimentary family day at a fun park, variety show, western dinner dance.

For more information: Website: <http://www.geocities.com/gjfestival>

Contact: 970-858-9299

## **Fallbrook, California**

(Southern California, north of San Diego)

Sponsored by: Guardian Ministries (affiliated with David Antion)

Overview: This feast site is at the Pala Mesa Resort in Fallbrook. The resort has breathtaking panoramic mountain views, lush gardens, hiking trails and waterfalls. Special negotiated rate: Guest rooms (either 1

King or 2 Queens) \$99 per night plus tax. (Reg. \$185) Airports at San Diego, Ontario, and Long Beach are all within a one hour drive.

Activities: Sermons, seminars, fellowship, special music

For more information: <http://www.guardian-ministries.org>

Contact: Reservations for Pala Mesa Resort: 800-722-4700

## **Myrtle Beach, South Carolina**

Sponsored by: Church of God—Big Sandy

Overview: Feast services and activities will be held at the Bay Watch Resort in North Myrtle Beach. The resort is on the beachfront, with ocean front and ocean view studio units and 1, 2 and 3 bedroom condominiums from \$60 to \$150. Ask for the Church of God—Big Sandy group rate. In addition to a nice beach area, the resort has an indoor lazy river, 310' outdoor lazy river, 3 outdoor pools, 2 indoor pools, indoor tot pool, outdoor tot pool, indoor & outdoor jacuzzis, exercise room, game room, laundry facilities, and garage parking. The area features many attractions, including live entertainment theaters, amusement parks, IMAX theater, golf courses, and aquarium.

Activities: Children's activities and classes, family fun night.

For more information: Write or email Lyle or Kathy Kerby at the addresses below.

Contact: Lyle and Kathy Kerby [lyle\\_kerby@yahoo.com](mailto:lyle_kerby@yahoo.com)  
6065 Pine Creek Rd., Grantsville, WV 26147

## **Windemere, U.K.**

Sponsored by: Church of God in England

Overview: Feast site is in the "millennial setting" of the English Lake District, right on the shores of England's biggest lake. Direct flights from the US are available to Manchester, with train connections to Windemere.

Activities: Get acquainted meeting on the opening night of the Feast.

For more information: Email or write to address below.

Contact: [johnajewell@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:johnajewell@hotmail.co.uk) John A. Jewell, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London, WC1N 3XX, England

## Doing the Work of God

“Master,” they asked Jesus, “who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” The logic behind the question was simple. God’s creation was perfect; so for a man to be born handicapped, something must have gone wrong. Jesus’ disciples simply wanted to know what had gone wrong. It is an agonizing question—one faced by the parents of every child born handicapped. Yet most of these parents handle the question better than I would have thought.

George Will, in one of his editorials, made me reconsider the question. It was a piece written on the occasion of his son Jon’s twenty-first birthday. Jon Will was born with Down syndrome—a disorder caused by genetic abnormalities that develop before conception. The first complete medical description of the disorder came from Dr. Landon Down in 1866. He called it mongolism, but it later came to be known as Down syndrome.

A mere twenty-one years ago, a doctor told the Wills that their first decision must be whether or not to take Jon home. There was a time, you see, when children with Down syndrome were usually kept in an institution. Because of predictable health problems, very few of them grew to be adults, dying of congenital heart defects and failures of digestive tracts and immune systems.

But since the 1940s, more and more parents have decided to take their children home and work with them. The result is that the life expectancy of Down syndrome children is now about fifty years. The last few years of their life are often plagued with difficulties, but they often have good lives past age thirty-five. It’s an astonishing difference, and it comes from little more than good medical care, attention, and



Ron Dart  
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Continued on page 13

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