

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

FEBRUARY, 2004

"*Exciting Church Meetings*" --is that an Oxymoron?"

* * *

A BASIC PRINCIPLE: "It is always more or less detrimental to the ascertainment of truth to allow our previous conclusions to assume the position of fixed and fundamental truths, to which nothing is to be at any time added, either in the way of correction or enlargement. On the contrary, we ought rather to act under the conviction that we may be wiser today than yesterday, and that whatever is true can suffer no hazard from a candid reconsideration. In this view of the subject, I am accustomed to examine all questions, moral or religious, because I am, from much reflection and long observation, constrained to regard it as the only safe and prudential course."

—Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, 1842

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

A New Writer We were glad to have Nick Boone submit some articles to us. He is currently enrolled in a doctoral program in English at Auburn University. His interests include hermeneutics, ethics, aesthetics and, of course, religion and literature. His wife, Lauren works as an instructor in Auburn's program in English as a Second Language. They both attend the Auburn Church of Christ. He also is a grandson of Buford Smith, who is known to many of our readers.

Julius and Claudia Hovan now live at 3124 Sarah Lane, Danville, KY 40422. Their phone number is 859-936-9718. Julius is available for meetings or to conduct leadership training, though he is quite booked up for the next few months.

Returning to Zimbabwe Robert and Joy Garrett are scheduled to fly back to Zimbabwe, leaving from Louisville on April 25, Lord willing. Pray for them, and all the people in that troubled land (especially the believers), and for God to overrule the government and economy.

Heading for an Indian Reservation: Working with the Cheyenne Indians Tom Schreiner has returned from service in Kenya as a missionary doctor. Now he -- and of course Sharon and the children -- have gone to Montana to serve among the Cheyenne Indians for a year. After that Dr. Tom plans to take advanced medical training and then hopefully visit Africa again, off and on, to give such training to African doctors there. He believes this will be more helpful than being a resident doctor overseas. Pray for Tom, Sharon and their five children,

in their new mission field. As is common on most reservations, drunkenness is rife.

A LOVER'S QUARREL -- *My Pilgrimage of Freedom in Churches of Christ* That's the title of Leroy Garrett's autobiography, recently published. He tells his absorbing rags-to-riches story: a boy who never graduated from high school but later earned post-graduate degrees from Princeton and Harvard. More than that, a legalistic, sectarian young man whom God freed and used to spread the message of His grace, His great big family, and of freedom in Christ. You'll learn a lot from his story. This 306-page, paperback book may be ordered @ \$14.95 from Leroy himself: 1300 Woodlake Dr., Denton, TX 76210.

Stand in Awe of God A free Bible study tract on the need to reverence God's name is being offered by Ken Wells. Its title is, Hallowed be Thy Name. Any church requesting the tract will be sent 15 free copies each time they request them. Write Ken Wells, 7517 Little River Tnpk.—Apt. 102, Annandale, VA 22003.

Available Minister Moving to Louisville: My name is Logan Heeke and I am searching for a full-time ministry position. I grew up attending the Tell City Church of Christ in Southern Indiana. In May of 2004 I will graduate from Crowley's Ridge College in Paragould, AR with an Associates Degree in Bible. Upon graduating, my wife and I plan to relocate so that I may attend the School of Biblical Studies in Louisville, KY. If you are searching for someone or know of a

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THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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Exciting Church Meetings!

Church Meetings with Widespread Participation

A.V.W.

New Testament scholar Leon Morris called 1 Corinthians 14, especially verse 26, “the most intimate glimpse we have of the early church at worship.” In many ways churches of our background have stressed the “pattern of New Testament worship.” So let’s look again at Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 14: 26, NIV.

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”

Five recent issues of W&W have focused on the importance of spiritual gifts. We’re not going there again, except to raise some questions. Apart from the debate over how many gifts are still available today, here are other major issues: Why do we experience so few gifts among us? Why do most of our folks not know what their gifts are? Why do we use the gifts to such a limited extent? When the New Testament scriptures mention them so prominently, in a number of passages, why do we think so rarely about spiritual gifts and their importance in our church gatherings?

Wrestling with such questions, I believe Bible teacher, writer and former missionary Howard Snyder hit the nail right on the head. He wrote the following out of his own experience:

Paul emphasized spiritual gifts, but there seemed to be no application of this teaching to the contemporary church. Then slowly the reason for this dawned on me: The contemporary church in its institutional form **makes little room** for spontaneous spiritual gifts. Worse yet, often it **does not need** spiritual gifts to function. **When the local church is structured after an institutional model, spiritual gifts are replaced by aptitude, education, and technique.**

Do you see his point? If a congregation is organized in such a way that “the preacher” is expected to do most of the work, then the majority of the members will not develop their spiritual gifts. Or if church meetings are always formal and follow a set pattern, there will be the same result. How can a believer with the gift of teaching, exhortation or evangelism improve it unless he is given a chance to use it?

“But,” you ask, “shall we let a raw rookie, who has never preached before, preach the sermon at our morning meeting -- with visitors there (and members too) who’ll be totally turned off by his goofs and immaturity?”

No, the place to begin is with a small, friendly, appreciative audience. Let him teach or co-teach a Sunday school class, for instance. Or on some Sunday evening let two or three young men each bring a brief message (perhaps on some assigned topics, with coaching ahead of time). Brother Boll did that a time or two with three teenage boys, including me. Occasionally the midweek meeting was used in that way, too.

Then about a decade ago at Portland, we had “sharing-meetings” once a month on Sunday nights. Any brother could participate with some insights from God’s Word, lessons learned from personal experience, or a testimony of some recent blessing. Sometimes such meetings proved truly edifying and exciting. But usually they weren’t, frankly. Some younger brethren who could have edified us were overly reluctant to pray, prepare and speak up. Two or three older brethren fairly often gave messages which were boring and too long. Perhaps we who were leaders in the church were mainly at fault. We didn’t know well enough how to lead the group into a deeper experience of God’s Word and being led by the Spirit in such meetings.

After some months we stopped this approach, replacing it sometime later with twice-monthly fellowship groups in homes or at the church-building. These have proved very valuable (though not perfect). I believe with all my heart that every church should provide on a regular basis **opportunities for members to participate freely and informally**, as believers did in Corinth and other early churches. “Mutual edification” Churches of Christ practiced this for years. (Do they still? And did they -- do they -- truly experience the leading of the Lord or merely go through a routine? Can any of our readers answer those questions for us?)

Really good Sunday school classes encourage a lot of input, which is helpful -- especially if practical problems and applications are shared. But most churches seem woefully weak in this area. 1 Cor. 14:26 provides a vital principle for us, which we neglect at our peril. It’s not just a matter of methods or techniques, of course, though certain methods tend to restrict the flow of God’s power and others enhance it.

I fear that 1 Cor. 14:26 plus Howard Snyder’s opening quote stand as a warning and indictment of us and of the vast majority of churches. “Aptitude, education and technique” are *not* to be despised

-- please note that fact. But they are **no substitutes for the leadership, experienced presence and enabling power of the Spirit of the Living God.** Let us seek the Lord regarding these matters.

O Christ, stir our hearts: Make Yourself manifest in our midst. Let us stand in awe of Your Holy Love and Power! Work among us in life-changing ways which cannot be explained away by eloquence, psychology or methodology! Build Your Church. Save the lost. Glorify Your Name. Amen.

Dear Readers, I hope you will read and consider all the articles this month. And once again we invite your feedback. Tell us of any helpful way(s) in which your church (or others that you know of) carry out the Biblical principles and practices we are studying. Lord willing, the May W&W will carry your input.

A few points need to be made very clear. Nothing that is written this month is meant to imply that we are against preachers or preaching. I thank God for the high privilege of being a preacher and teacher of His truth. But we need much more **besides** the sermons and meetings we usually have.

Again, don't let recent W&Ws cause you to think we're promoting Pentecostalism in itself. No, only those strengths they have which we have overly reacted against (just as they've overly reacted against strengths of non-Pentecostals). Let me say once more: it seems to me that God's truth and power are in the middle between their extremes and ours.

By the way, I hope you read Alexander Campbell's needed counsel on this month's front cover. May we experience both God's peace and God's shaking up of our lives and churches – as needed.

* * *

SORRY for being so V – E – R – Y late with this issue. We were already behind when our printer's computer crashed, losing Everything! Ahhhh, computers. Can't live without them; wish we could.

Church Houses, Churches IN Houses, and Let's Hear It for Smaller Meetings Too

We share with you a short quotation and then several articles related in various ways to the matter of church meetings. Former W&W editors Stanford Chambers and Gordon Linscott challenge us about mutual edification rather than passive spectatoritis during "church." Then a symposium offers insights and instances to stretch our thinking still more on these subjects. And Leroy Garrett presents some advantages of meeting in homes.

There is no "one-and-only-right-way" of conducting church meetings. But there are certain basic principles to follow as we seek to meet people's needs and churches' goals. Usually no one weekly meeting can fulfill all those needs and goals. That is why attending more than one gathering is urgently important -- if the gatherings are not carbon copies of each other. If we are to stand in these evil days, we shall need more than ever to grow strong in worshipping the Almighty, studying His Word, ministering to one another and reaching out to the perishing with His love.

A QUESTION ANSWERED

Stanford Chambers

(This is the quote referred to in the following article.)

Does not the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians, the 12th also, show that the N.T. church was very democratic in the public services? "Each hath a psalm, hath a teaching {doctrine}, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. See 14:26.

There was, indeed, much mutuality. The true, spiritual edification of the body depended and depends upon each several member performing its purposed function. Even with Paul the great apostle present at Troas, it is written that he "discoursed with them." They were therefore not mere listeners. Mutual edification is certainly the scriptural way. But to be spectators or guests attending the services, services rendered by one or a few at the most, that is quite agreeable to the many and is an easy way of avoidance of responsibility. Let the Minister (the Reverend Doctor or the Priest) do all the "officiating." How easy then to fall into the unedifying habit of sitting back, looking on, listening in, and criticizing! Yes, the Head of the church would have every member of the body feel that he is significant.

Mutual Edification

Gordon R. Linscott

Several years ago I read some remarks on "mutual edification" by Brother Chambers. I'm glad he has spoken on this topic, for it is one that has long been on my heart. It is one area in which--in my opinion--the majority of the churches of Christ are still a long way from the Biblical pattern. Before you judge that statement to be either right or wrong, consider the basis for it.

What is "Mutual Edification"?

"Mutual" of course, means simply "one another" or "one to the other." "Edification" is "building up." "Mutual edification" then is the edification of each other. Ephesians 4: 16 clearly states that "each several (individual) part" of the body contributes to "the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love." So the edification of the church is not the responsibility of a chosen few. Perhaps the responsibility resting upon elders and teachers is heavier, but every Christian has his own personal responsibility for the spiritual growth of his brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Paul uses the word "edification" in a slightly narrower sense in 1 Corinthians 14, where he deals with the assembled church. "When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (v.26). Usually, when we hear the expression "mutual edification," it is with reference to this same setting--the church assembled, each member edifying the others. Some would restrict "edification" still further, to include only the ministry of the Word -- preaching or teaching -- but we see from the verse above that the definition is not quite that narrow. Singing (Eph. 5:19) is certainly included, although the scriptures again place the emphasis on the individual, rather than on the congregation as a whole.

Is It Workable?

In recent years I have discussed this matter with a number of preachers and church leaders. Not one ever questioned that it is the Bible pattern. But almost all raised this objection: "It won't work!" To that objection there are two answers. First, if we agree that God says do it, we would do it, regardless of what we think about it. Our responsibility is to be found faithful.

The second answer: It does work! Not a few of us have worshiped with congregations who follow this pattern. Some churches have gone on so for years, with the evident blessing of the Lord. Others, though

still following the same "pattern" have pretty well reduced it to a "form"; perhaps several members participate in the service, but it is all very cut-and-dried and the work of human planning. Indeed, if we should merely exchange one form for another, we would gain nothing.

The chief point is this: Who is in charge of the meeting? Is it a man, or is it the Holy Spirit? If the Holy Spirit is truly in charge--and all are waiting expectantly on Him to direct--he will make it plain enough who is to speak and who is to pray and who is to sing. No, there will be no confusion (1 Cor. 14:27-33). There may be times of silence--a thing most unbearable to the children of this age of noise and hurry--but hearts that are conscious of the presence of God do not need a musical background to their meditation. Instead of a single sermon by one preacher, one brother may present a fine study from the Word and another rise to add suitable words of exhortation (Rom. 12:8). Such I have witnessed many times, and the discourses of the two or three brethren fit together as nicely as if they had all studied together the whole week before!

The Consequences of Obedience

All of this may sound strange to him who hears of it for the first time. A congregation whose worship has always been directed by one man will feel much disconcerted at an attempt to do otherwise. We most easily become slaves of customs, and the chains of custom become heavier with time. In spite of the fact that most of "our churches" are very dependent upon one man (or a very few), I think we should diligently seek the mind of the Lord on this matter, with the foregone resolution that we will follow His leading, whatever it be. While we may now be enjoying a measure of the Lord's blessing, will not a closer adherence to His word open the way for even greater blessings?

Many years ago, Moses E. Lard--one of the "greats" of the Restoration Movement whose Commentary on Romans is still in use--made a comment on Romans 12 that went something like this:

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ will never perfectly fulfill its mission in the world as long as we expect one man to be a spiritual jack-of-all-trades. God has ordained that we should be endowed with and should exercise various gifts given according to His own wisdom. As long as these gifts are ignored, buried, and unused, the church cannot but be poor in its spiritual life and in its testimony to the world.

We would not be in favor of beginning a "mutual edification party" among the churches, saying "this is the way services must be conducted if you would have fellowship with us." We would, however, strongly encourage a growing spirit of discontent with our turning the worship of our blessed Lord into a "spectator sport," a well-planned and well-executed show, presented by a few trained performers while the most are passive on-lookers. If you are convinced that the congregation with which you meet is "rich and has need of nothing," continue on as you are. If, instead, you feel that something is lacking, give this matter further consideration. Diligently study what the Word has to say (the subject has hardly been touched in this article), and earnestly pray for understanding until you are convinced that your conclusions are God-given. Perhaps this is the answer to the lack of spiritual vitality of which we hear so much. Be it so, or not, may God give to us a renewed awareness of the Holy Spirit and of His ministry to the assembled church.

* * *

“It is absolutely essential that Christian groups **develop a community mentality** when they begin to experience [spiritual] gifts, **because it is the only environment in which it can be okay to fail.** If we do not have [a sense of] community undergirding the exercise of the gifts, then there is no place to begin learning how to exercise them. It is the foundation of community life that provides a nurturing base for new experience.

“We’re trying new things. We are learning how to do them, often through our failures. Of course, it is also okay to succeed: that’s our goal.” --John Wimber

A SYMPOSIUM ON "MUTUAL EDIFICATION" MEETINGS

THERE IS MORE TO CHURCH THAN SERMONS

We usually think "the main purpose for which Christians meet is to listen to sermons. Most of the time the audience is largely passive. We have tended to see ministry almost exclusively in terms of preaching and teaching. This naturally limits the scope of ministry to a few people. Since many people judge the effectiveness of a church almost entirely by the minister's performance in the pulpit, the every-member ministry is restricted."

The above is a quotation from a contemporary writer in England. Its truthfulness is verified by the common response if someone asks, "How was church today?" "Bad -- it was a lousy sermon," might be the reply. Or, hopefully, "Excellent; the preacher really gave us something from God's Word to think about and apply." But both responses treat the congregational singing, praying, the reading of Scripture, the Lord's Supper, etc., as just preliminaries to be rushed through while waiting for the main part, the sermon.

What a lopsided approach! 1st, it minimizes important elements of a balanced diet. 2nd, it produces passivity, and people learn and grow far less when they are passive than when they participate. 3rd, it makes too much of a church's success depend on only one man, the preacher. If he is mediocre, the congregation's progress will probably be slowed to a crawl.

Here is one possible solution or at least a partial solution: Have an "open" or "mutual edification" meeting regularly. Once a week, or month, or two months, encourage a number of the brothers to teach, exhort or testify.

Ponder the following excerpts for more about this, especially the sections by Bill McRae. Since we include quotations from various writers there is unavoidably some overlapping, and even some differing views. But that should merely stimulate our personal study.

OPEN MEETINGS: MUTUAL EDIFICATION

When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 1 Cor. 14:26.

It seems evident that the meetings of the early church were on the order of 1 Corinthians 14, or what has been called "open meetings."

Older brethren tell us that the meetings in early days of those who gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus alone were open meetings for "prayer, praise and prophecy" (*prophecy* being understood for today in the general sense of being the Lord's mouthpiece and messenger to His people that they may be edified). One has said that as the power diminished these assembly meetings lapsed. It is to be regretted that in many places such a meeting has been relegated to the meeting for the Breaking of Bread, which meeting is of necessity restricted in its character.

A (recent) writer has advocated the advisability of groups gathering together without any platform or chair suggestive of a chairman, with no one coming to that meeting [firmly resolved] to speak and no one determined to keep silence. He suggests that when such a meeting is too large for this face-to-face gathering there should be the formation of smaller such meetings.

W. Hoste says, "To make up our minds not to take part is as unscriptural as coming with our thumbs in our pet hymn, or the leaf turned down at our favorite chapter, determined to have our say. In the first case we fail to edify; in the other we tempt the wordy to take part to no profit. I believe that **clericalism [i.e. making one man responsible for almost all the preaching, teaching and leading] has arisen as much from the laziness of the majority as from the ambition of the few.** Unless there be more energy of faith and more preparedness of heart, we shall run high and dry on the reef of ministerialism. Already ominous bumps are felt."

Such open meetings may assume a different character in keeping with the exercise of the saints and the leading of the Holy Spirit. At times, particularly at times of trial, a burden of prayer may be manifest. At other times much time may be spent in ministry of the word. (William Pell in *The Christian Assembly*)

The next three sections (7 paragraphs) are all by Bill McRae:

NEW TESTAMENT MEETINGS WERE OFTEN EXCITING!

It must have been exciting to attend this type of meeting. You never knew what was going to happen next. A person may have begun the service by requesting a psalm to be sung. Then you would wonder what would be next. Will it be another psalm? Will someone pray? Perhaps five or six will pray one after the other. One of the brethren could give a word of exhortation from the Scriptures. Or will it be the exposition of a passage? It may be a word of testimony or a prayer request. Perhaps someone will give thanks for the bread. There was no possibility of boredom because everyone was involved.

IT CAN HAPPEN TODAY TOO

Following the pattern of the New Testament church, in our Sunday evening meeting at Believers Chapel there is just such freedom. There is always opportunity for the discovery and continuing development of spiritual gifts, Just a few weeks ago, one of the highlights of our Sunday evening meeting was when a high school lad read the first three verses of Psalm 1 and shared with us some thoughts from the Psalm .

Sometimes I leave the Sunday evening service elated. I see a man who has become a Christian and then he stands up and he gives out a hymn or he prays. It thrills my heart because here I see a man who is growing. He has taken his first public step and it is a sign of spiritual growth. Men talk to me about wanting to discover their spiritual gift, wondering how to discover it and how to develop it. My response is: in the [open] meeting of the church. One major purpose of it is for the Spirit-led exercise of spiritual gifts.

PREPARING FOR SUCH MEETINGS

Participation in the meeting demands preparation of heart. That is what makes it so different from every other service. You could come to the Sunday morning service with no preparation of heart, but the effectiveness of the Sunday evening service, humanly speaking, depends upon your preparation. I generally spend many hours preparing for my Sunday morning message. If it is delivered in the energy of the Holy Spirit, then it is a blessing to God's people. But in the Sunday evening service, when we gather together the effectiveness depends upon the preparation of *every* "priest" that attends.

But *how*? We will want to come in full fellowship with our Lord. That means with our sins confessed and cleansed (1 John 1:9). We may come with a hymn on our mind for meditation or for giving out. We may have a particular portion of scripture on our heart to teach or to meditate upon. We may come with an experience that God has brought in our lives this past week and be ready to share it in the service. Can you imagine what would happen at the service if we all came ready to give? . . . That is what the meeting of the church should be. It comes only by preparation of heart.

The final phase of our preparation should be those five quiet minutes just before the service begins. To say then: "I am available to You, Lord; I have something to give You and to Your people. Lead me to give it if it is Your Will" -- *that* is to be prepared. Finally, it requires the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is a Spirit-led meeting. We are dependent upon Him to lead, and we can be sure He will not fail us.

"But," you ask, "how can I know He is leading me?" Some simple suggestions may help. First and foremost, come prepared. Then, make yourself available to the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the meeting. A strong desire in your heart may indicate the Lord is leading you to take part. I have often prayed, "Lord, if this desire is from you, intensify it just now." The direction or mood of the meeting may confirm your desire to participate. Often I have come prepared with a verse or a hymn and found it fits perfectly with what someone else says before. That is a great encouragement to take part. (Excerpted from William J. McRae's booklet, *The Meeting of the Church*)

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE IN OPEN MEETINGS

We speak frequently of the leading of the Holy Spirit in relation to church life, and yet this is a much misunderstood subject. Many minds are in complete confusion as to the precise meaning of the term and still more as to the recognition of His leading when the church is met together. How are we to discern His leading? How do we differentiate between our own desires and the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Is any person who so wishes at liberty to participate in ministering in the church?

The clue is to be found when we observe, firstly, that the Holy Spirit is not once mentioned in the whole chapter dealing with the gathered church (1 Cor. 14). He has been spoken of earlier as the One who has been behind the distribution of spiritual gifts, but here, when it comes to the actual exercise of gift, prominence is given rather to the personal responsibility of the brethren. With primary reference to praying or singing (v. 15), the principle is shown to be the words "with the spirit," and "with the understanding also." Spirit allied to understanding (or intelligence) is our guide here.

The believer who habitually walks in the Holy Spirit's power will be brought under His influence almost unconsciously when in the church. There is to be the use of the reasoning faculty, the intellect, when gathered together, as to the fitness and general suitability of any part that might be taken in the meeting. To hear a hymn quoted is not sufficient reason, of necessity, to announce it to be sung by all. At all times we should use spiritual judgment as to our participation before hastily making any contribution. This will ensure that decency and order will distinguish all the proceedings of the church though there be no presiding person. The open meeting is not for an any-man ministry, but is subject to godly order at all times. . . . The one essential is that believers should be under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit in their meetings. A Spirit-controlled gathering becomes its own evidence of the presence of the Lord and onlookers will confess "that

God is among you indeed" (ch. 14:25). (G.C.D. Howley in *The Church: A Symposium*)

SOME CAUTIONS TO HEED

One item being recovered today is an emphasis on mutual edification. Frequently this includes a Bible study in which everyone is encouraged to share his own thoughts about the passage. However, we need to be careful that our practice does not nullify the Scriptural function of teachers. While all are to teach one another (Rom. 15:14; Heb. 5:12), not all are to be teachers (1 Cor. 12:29; James 3:1).

Mutual edification is not a new discovery. Around 1800 Wm. Balantine and some others in the Independent churches of Scotland and England urged that "mutual exhortation" was not only the privilege but the duty of the members in general. Labeled as "church order," this practice resulted in many divisions and much disorder. It has allowed anyone to speak who wanted to do so, leading some very incompetent members to become "public teachers and exhorters." Robert Richardson observes that "in these cases the most ignorant are generally the most forward" (*Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, I, 180-181).

Alexander Campbell favored mutual edification, even to the point of preferring small congregations in which it could be best practiced (II, 599). However, many of the churches of the movement which he led also fell into an abuse of the principle. Debates and dissensions frequently arose, and also numerous occasions of discipline, due to the excessive "watching-over" and admonitions which almost amounted to an Inquisition. Fully admitting that all members are equal and at liberty to speak in the congregation "at proper times and under proper regulations," Campbell and Walter Scott insisted that the gifts of all members should be properly directed and that only those capable of edifying should teach publicly (II, 126).

While we are not bound to the opinion of tradition, we do need to learn from history so that we will profit from rather than repeat the mistakes of others. (C. Ermal Allen)

UNPROFITABLE MEETING? WHO IS TO BLAME?

[In such gatherings] of the Church there was a full recognition of the priesthood of all believers.... The fact that everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, is responsible for the ministry in the meeting produces a different attitude. If there is lack of liberty and power, none can say, "The pastor was not at his best today." It is realized that the fault is in the congregation, and the matter will be taken to the Lord in prayer in the following prayer meeting.

Usually, the whole service is of a piece, all the prayers, readings, hymns and messages fitting together in one clear message from the Lord in a way that makes it evident that the Holy Spirit is in control. But there are occasions when it is not so. *This meeting is a true barometer of the congregation's spiritual state.* The spiritual life cannot wane without it being evident in this gathering. Thus the Lord can deal with His people.

We have seen newly baptized converts greatly blessed as they have had some passage to read or word to give in the first communion service in which they participated. They have found that from the very beginning the way was open for them to enter into their responsibilities as members of the Body of Christ. (Alex R. Hay, in *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary*)

A PRACTICAL WAY TO START

How can a church which has never practiced mutual edification meetings get started? First, with prayer and teaching by the leader(s) - to impart a vision. Then a simple way to proceed might be for him or them in prayer to pick a Biblical subject--maybe faith, or prayer, or the example of Christ. A week or two before the open meeting will be held, explain its procedure again to the members. Then announce the topic and ask the brothers prayerfully to ponder it and come prepared with a scripture, or a song or poem, or an illustration or personal experience related to the topic.

After doing this for a number of times, they may progress to the point described above, of not having a prearranged topic but of every one in prayer seeking direction from the Lord about the part each one should contribute in the gathering. (avw)

“Exciting Church Meetings” --is that an Oxymoron?

Dale Bruner

F. Dale Bruner is an outstanding Bible teacher and author whom we were privileged to get to know while in the Philippines. He wrote a book entitled, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness* (Eerdmans, 1970).

This is an exhaustive examination of the teachings of both the Pentecostal Movement and the New Testament regarding the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit. He appreciates various strengths of the Pentecostals but finds several of their major distinctive doctrines flawed.

We quote here some of his explanations of *Paul's teaching* about church assemblies, and current applications of that teaching. Then we see his observations regarding some strengths and weaknesses of the *meetings typical of many Pentecostals*. Then I offer some *evaluations of our congregations based on his analysis*. --avw

* * *

It appears [in 1 Cor. 14] that Paul sees the highest expression of spiritual gifts in the free, helpful discussion of Christians together and their contribution in thoughtful speech to each other. It is, in fact, our impression that expressions such as ‘*thoughtful speech*,’ ‘*testimony*’ or even ‘*counsel*’ better translate the word rendered archaically ‘prophesy.’

In the congregational meeting, there should be ample opportunity for discussion. Central to the nature of the church in 1 Cor. 12-14 is the prominent place of the knowledgeable, shared, spontaneous utterance in some kind of thoughtful conversational format.

The goal of the total participation of the church (‘for you can **all** prophesy one by one’) was ‘that **all** may learn and **all** be encouraged’ (v.31). The three-fold use of ‘all’ in this verse, underlining at least something of the nature of the ministry of the church, is impressive and should be convicting. **The congregation’s active sharing of ministry is the most impressive lesson for the historic churches from 1 Cor. 14 -- and from Pentecostalism.**” (Pages 300-301)

* * *

In the Pentecostal assembly 1 Corinthians chapters twelve to fourteen suddenly come alive. Here the varied gifts of the Spirit are of-

ferred expression. The Pentecostal church meeting has been described as **pew-centered**, and the description is apt. In contrast to generally **pulpit-centered** Protestantism and **altar-centered** Catholicism, Pentecostalism finds its center in the believing community. The Pentecostals are concerned, as one put it, that 'we never reach the point where our congregations are composed of on-looking spectators rather than participating worshippers.' To avoid this deflection Pentecostals attempt to offer every believer an opportunity actively and personally to participate in the church's life....

Most of those in attendance at the meeting seem glad to be there. The Pentecostal often asks why joy and its expression should be permitted to almost every kind of human convocation except the church.... The Pentecostal church is a house of prayer for all members. 'No church,' one Pentecostal leader has written, 'can call herself a church which depends upon trained leaders to do the praying'....

"The individual member of most Pentecostal churches must feel as he comes to the meeting that *he* may have something worthwhile to share with the whole assembly if the Spirit should prompt him; and if not, another brother or sister should have something inspiring to share with him. Most meetings include what is called a time of testimony in their schedule. Individuals are encouraged to share from their Christian experience for the benefit of all and for the praise of God. The testimony is often of personal spiritual experience during the preceding week; of answers to prayer; not infrequently the testimony concerns some kind of healing; occasionally the subject is an evangelistic experience; sometimes a Bible passage is shared; ... and the result is, as far as we have been able to observe, real edification....

"Many Pentecostals may be seen waiting in great expectancy as the Bible is preached (and in its way it is), but they are convinced that they need to hear the Word from more than a solitary professional, that 'they need the inspiration that comes from actual persons who, by song and testimony, tell of what God is doing for them.' As Buntain explains, **The laity, 'if encouraged, will by their testimonies and life preach greater practical sermons than [the minister's] messages from the pulpit. Prepared addresses must continue to be the prime source of teaching, but those who reject the practical teaching of free-hearted "fellowship" are standing in the way of men and women who need something beyond the solemn pulpit utterances to keep them in victory.'**

"The Effects of the Meeting: There is a sense in the Pentecostal meeting that the divine is not only (as in our churches) an *object of worship* but that He is also, and especially, a *subject of action* ... [that He] speaks throughout the entire service in a special way through, at

different times, in different manners, and by different persons, the entire congregation. The result is the Pentecostal congregation's feeling that heaven is open not only in the preacher's proclamation but in the assembly's participation."

Bruner goes on to mention drawbacks too. Unless leaders maintain limits of some sort, there is the "danger of rank confusion," that highly-charged emotions might "explode into chaos." "The perennial problem is raised again ... of **ardor or order** -- which should be sacrificed? How can there be a responsible ministry of gifts and right participation by the entire congregation and yet the decency and order which Paul requires." [End of quotes from Brother Bruner's book.]

* * *

I (avw) would like to follow up the above analysis with an examination of our typical meetings. Bruner classifies typical Protestant services as pulpit-centered, Catholic services as altar-centered, and Pentecostal services as pew-centered. What about us?

Pulpit-centered? We probably fit that category most of all, wouldn't you say? May we always keep good-news preaching and scripture teaching at the heart of our gatherings. *Altar-centered?* Well, that term (or rather, *Table- or Supper-centered*) is truer of us than of most denominations that take the holy meal only monthly or quarterly. Thank God that we have the Supper every Lord's Day, reminding us that Christ and Him Crucified is the core of our faith. But may He grant that I, for one, and all of us may be touched much more deeply by His love at that time.

"Pew-centered?" Well, at many of our congregations other brothers -- not the minister, or at least not *only* the minister -- often call for prayer, lead in prayer, give a meditation at the Lord's Supper, make the announcements, and perhaps occasionally perform the baptisms. Contrast the nine months that I served as a fill-in chaplain for a small U.S. military chapel in Manila. They told me I was expected not only to preach, but also give the call to worship, present the Lord's Supper meditation, make the announcements, and lead the prayer for the offering plus the main and closing prayers. Whew -- no wonder I was tired! Since I was only temporarily filling in for a friend, it seemed useless to buck the system. But probably the passive listeners did not grow much, though several appreciated the teaching.

Yet, though we may be better than some others at balancing the pulpit, the supper, and "lay" participation, it seems to this observer that we still need much improvement. Most especially in the third department. Thus the theme this month. Dare we change?

WE MUST DISCOVER THE GREAT LOST SECRET

Leroy Garrett in *Restoration Review*

Let's face it, the Churches of Christ are in the doldrums. Our services are often boring, lifeless, gloomy. I'm convinced that our most loyal members attend regularly because they are just that, loyal, and not because they find it joyous and exciting. We are not growing. An outsider would never see us as imaginative, creative, or innovative. Except for some encouraging exceptions, we are not a changing people and we are not out on the cutting edge. We are going to have to get with it or we will not be "saved" [i.e., we won't survive].

That other denominations are in the same predicament does not justify our own stagnation. As a well-known automobile executive says on TV: *Lead, follow, or get out of the way.* It is not all that different with the churches. If we don't get with it, we will not have to worry about what will happen to us. We'll be left behind.

At the heart of our problem, as well as other churches, is that we are caught in the trappings of our own institutionalism--or churchism might be the word. We have expensive edifices to pay for and to maintain, staffs to support, programs to fund. Our Achilles heel is the System. The System resists change, except occasional cosmetic change. Nothing real or substantial. The System demands conformity, and it is uneasy with thinking people around, especially a thinking preacher or a preacher that says something.

The System must maintain the status quo, and it must preserve itself at all cost. This is why it seeks to keep everyone satisfied by reacting rather than acting. And most significantly, the System is tied to the building. Regular church attendance, along with generous giving, is the essence of "faithfulness."

This brings me to the one thing above most everything else that we must do to be saved. We must recover--or is it *discover?*--the great lost secret of primitive Christianity. That secret was the dynamic of joyous, Spirit-filled gatherings in homes. Primitive Christianity knew nothing of buildings that never seem to get paid for. They did not have to bother with building an educational wing or getting the parking lot resurfaced, which are major tasks for the modern church. The early churches were house churches; as they grew they took in more homes. It wasn't until the third or fourth centuries that they had edifices and eventually "sanctuaries." This is the great secret of the early church

that we are indifferent to--they were house churches while we are cathedral churches. They had a Holy Spirit-complex while we have an edifice-complex.

The edifice-complex has pews lined up one behind the other where we look behind each other's ears and may not even know the people who sit on the same pew--and may not even speak to them, week after week. The Holy Spirit-complex expressed itself in the home with sisters and brothers gathered in a circle, sharing their stories from out there in the world, drinking and eating together, rejoicing together. They were usually a persecuted people who took refuge in each other in the family circle, which was truly the Body of Christ.

Acts. 2:46 tells us about them: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts;" There are four references to "the church in thy house" and at least 20 instances in Acts and the letters where Christians met in homes. They were in the temple grounds, in synagogues, in the streets, in homes, but they never "went to church" in a building set apart for that purpose, not for at least 200 years. This does not mean that it is wrong for us to have buildings, but we need to realize what we have allowed the System to do to us.

In home gatherings they knew each other and grew close to one another. Everyone could take part. They didn't have to *worry* about a woman "getting in the pulpit" since there was no pulpit. They shared together, with each part functioning unto the edifying of the Body. They did not look to an employed functionary to deliver sermons; there were no sermons. They didn't have to worry about how to dress; if one came in smelling of fish it was OK. If a congregation needed to expand, it took in another home; if it needed to be dissolved, no problem since it had no mortgage to pay off. In the home they were "members of one another," rejoicing in the Spirit. The great lost secret of the primitive church is that they were empowered with the Holy Spirit in home gatherings.

I do not conclude from all this that we should close down our building. We cannot be the first century church, but as the 20th century church we can discover the great lost secret of the primitive church and make it applicable to our own time. Our buildings can be used for small group gatherings as well as large congregational meetings, but they should be more intimate and open to the leading of the Spirit than the usual Sunday school arrangement. Let eight to ten men and women gather in a circle each Sunday and Wednesday evenings long enough to get intimately acquainted. They could start by sharing what Jesus means to them, and from there they could talk about their fears, hopes, problems, family, etc. They would learn to pray together

as a family of sisters and brothers, and they would eventually unburden their souls to each other.

Along with this we could get away from our buildings and into homes more than we now do. A congregation could take a Sunday evening each month to meet in homes, with something like ten to twelve people to each home. We need to be in each other's home, come to know each other better, love each other more, learn to pray and share together in a way that cannot be done in the big "sanctuary" at church. In such an atmosphere the Holy Spirit can teach us more about the meaning of unity and fellowship.

The same circle could continue meeting on a long-term basis, but in time the circles could rotate so that a greater number in the church would know each other more personally. It is when we can share our long-kept secrets with each other, along with our hang-ups, that we really become "members one of another" where when one suffers all suffer and when one rejoices all rejoice. This is Body life and this is the great lost secret of the primitive church.

These small groups are also ideal for friendship evangelism. Outsiders can often be introduced to spiritual things in the informal atmosphere of a private home rather than in a church setting. The joy and spontaneity of the home gatherings can also transfer to some degree to the public assemblies if only we will be less rigid. When our services are revived there is "a sweet spirit that fills this place" we will be more inclined to share it with others. Who wants to invite a friend to a boring service?

To discover the lost secret we must be more open to change. We must get beyond the institutional church to Christ himself. We must become vulnerable to each other as sisters and brothers, fervent in the Spirit, serving the Lord.

To do this we do not need to think big in the sense of huge congregations and mega-churches. The lost secret is not big programs, large crowds or huge budgets, just as it is not necessarily big government and big business that makes a nation truly great. We may rightfully become disillusioned with "big" things. Our hopes might better lie with quiet processes and small circles where transforming events may take place.

[Brother Leroy's long-awaited autobiography is now available. You'll want to read it. See News & Notes. -avw]

George Galanis

(1922-2004)

Word was received this week of the death of our beloved missionary George Galanis in Athens, Greece. He died of a brain stroke at the age of 81. How shocked each of us were who spent a week with him about a year ago in Greece. Then his concern was for his dear wife Sophia who was suffering from Parkinson's. He himself appeared to be in good shape filling each hour of the day with activity. While we were there he walked with us all over Greece, and talked untiringly and constantly of his concern for his people and love for his Savior.

Bro. George came to America and to SCC in the late 1950's with the desire to learn more about the gospel. When he returned to Greece he was very active in distribution of tracts and Bible studies. He was instrumental in starting a congregation called Coridallos in 1964. We had the privilege of worshipping there with that congregation last April. Bro. George was then sharing the responsibility of the preaching with several other men of the congregation.

We will remember so fondly how lovingly Bro. George went out of his way to show hospitality to us. Our arrival, due to the Iraqi War was unexpected, but Bro. George did not allow us to feel at all like we were imposing. He worked out all the arrangements to provide for seven of us including our lodging. He changed all his plans for the week to accommodate us. And what a host he was!

The most vivid memory I will have will be of his reminding us of Paul's words to the Corinthians as we stood in old Corinth with the ruins of the temple of Apollos behind us. He loved the Word and loved sharing that Word with everyone he met. He was truly an evangelist.

His burden was for his people and he spent much time sharing this with us. His desire was that all should free themselves from tradition and legalism that binds and know the truth at that sets men free. His prayers were for the salvation of those he knew and loved.

We got word of his death from Bro. Nick Tsagarakis who came to the full knowledge of the truth through Bro. George's tract ministry. Bro. Nick lives on the isle of Crete and witnesses to those he contacts in his work. Bro. George encouraged Nick and his prayer was that there could be enough financial support for Nick to go full time into the ministry.

A service of celebration was conducted Friday, March 12 in Athens by several men of the Coridallos congregation and Bro. Nick.

Our prayers now go to Sis. Sophia whose health is declining. We also extend our sympathy to his daughter Emie Paschou and son Costas Galanis.

Submitted by Bennie Hill

VOICES from the FIELDS

Michiya Nakahara, Shizuoka City, Japan Jan. 2004

[Bob Yarbrough, the Nakaharas' treasurer in the U.S., persuaded Michiya to give an update on his health—"though he was reluctant to burden us with his personal problems. We assured him that many of God's people want to lift him up in prayer." Michiya's letter follows, adapted.]

January 2003 I first felt some pain in my left shoulder. I just dismissed it thinking I probably did something to my muscle while exercising. This condition continued. One day in May I noticed that I had very little grip in my left hand. I had to consciously think about holding on to an object or I would drop what I was holding. After this, the whole left side of my body including my left foot and toes became numb. An x-ray and MRI showed there was no fluid left in my 5th and 6th vertebrae. Additional tests showed I have lost 40% of mobility in my left side. The doctor said if this condition keeps getting worse, I will have to consider surgery. But back/neck surgery in Japan is quite different from that in the U.S. Doctors here feel if you have such surgery, there will be severe side effects so they are very reluctant to perform such surgery—only as a last resort.

I do not stay in one set position for a long time. I also do exercises to stimulate my neck to recover some of the lost fluid. I take lots of pain medicine. In these ways I have somewhat stabilized my condition. It often gets worse with the weather. Humidity plays a big role. At its worst I cannot do any desk work.

I thank God for giving me strength to endure this (Phil.4:13). I covet your prayers. As I think of your prayers. Knowing you will pray for me gives me great joy, but also brings tears as I know you did the same for many years for my parents, Shichiro and Teruko. Thank you for your partnership in the ministry with us.

[To get the Nakaharas' newsletters, write 19930 County Road 324, Terrell, TX 75160.]

Mark & Candy Garrett Senegal, West Africa Dec. 2003

In recent weeks our colleagues working among the Kaffrine people have been focusing their weekly prayer time on the believers'

wives. About a dozen men in that area are Christians but till last month only one of their wives had decided to follow Him. Then Grand-ma Boi delivered a letter she had painstakingly written out declaring that she, too, wanted to become a Christian. Our co-workers questioned her carefully about her intentions. She made it clear that she had done her research into the matter and was convinced that following Jesus is the true Way. She said, "I've seen in God's Word what I've been looking for." Now she is studying some discipleship materials. Her husband says she is becoming an active witness to her friends and is studying the Bible regularly. We praise God for this, and pray that soon many of the other wives will ask for baptism.

"The first caller with the correct answer wins a prize!" Our radio broadcast will soon get a little more interesting with a call-in contest. The purpose of the contest is to motivate some of the anonymous listeners to meet a Christian and find access to Christian literature and resources. Hopefully some of those will begin to seriously search and study for themselves and choose Christ. The plan is to try this as a pilot project in January or February and see how it works. Then we can branch out into other cities if we see it is effective. Pray we will contact many new people who need the Savior!

[Mark's newsletter had much more news, especially about a self-help project. To receive their occasional reports write Garrett Grapevine, 399 College St., Winchester KY 40391 or call Betsy Garrett, 859-744-5233.]

Martin Brooks

Team Expansion

Jan. 2004

My job involves overseeing the existing missionary teams we have on the field and trying to open new fields. During 2003 that took me to places like Bosnia, Afghanistan, Italy, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Tanzania.

Wayne Meece and I visited Ghana in December. We were asked to help mobilize the students with missionary hearts at Ghana Christian College. They currently have about 100 students. From that invitation has grown a vision to open a Team Expansion sending base in West Africa, to mobilize the believers to reach into the pockets of unreached peoples. The believers of Africa understand their own culture much better than Americans ever will. Many are already multilingual, so learning additional languages is usually not a great challenge. Anti-American sentiment makes placing American families in North Africa more difficult than placing Africans and it costs much less to mobilize the African churches than to place Americans in the region.

Some of my time will be spent working out the logistics of opening this sending base. That may involve my family moving to the continent for a few months. [They now live in Louisville, where Susan teaches at Portland Christian School. --avw] Will you help us seek the

Lord's counsel for this decision, and also for someone to direct this sending base?

This year I also need to rework Team Expansion's security policies. I need to answer questions like "What needs to be taken, left behind, or destroyed if a team needs to evacuate?"

What do I do if a team mate is kidnapped? How can I identify landmines?" Not all of our teams need such information, but some do.

[To get Martin's letters, please write 3700 Hopewell Rd., Louisville, KY 40299.]

Robert & Joy Garrett Jan. 2003 In Louisville till April 25

Zimbabwe continues its headlong plunge into economic chaos. Inflation and unemployment are unreal, many people go hungry. There are serious shortages of the two basic staples – flour and corn meal. Shortage of fuel makes movement difficult, sometimes impossible. Pray for adequate rain that people will be able to grow enough food to see them through.

Some have asked as to our vehicle needs. When we return to Zimbabwe we will need to purchase both a car and a pickup truck. It's not advisable to try to take a car from here due to the difficulty of obtaining spare parts and proper service.

With funds contributed by churches in Harare and also in the U.S., 8 tons of maize was distributed to believers in the areas hardest hit by famine.

Retirement? No, we have no plans or desire for retiring. As long as the Lord gives us the necessary health, strength and ability, we want to be used of Him. There is much work to be done.

[To get the Garretts' newsletters, write 16111 Plum Creek Trail, Louisville, KY 40299.]

Dan Wilson -- Some excerpts about last summer's mission trips to Russia:

How was my summer [in 2003]? Almost any adjective would fit at some point along the way: long (I spent a personal record 13 straight weeks there), busy, thrilling, tiring, depressing, frustrating, exciting, boring, fulfilling... But as the big picture comes into focus I can only stand amazed at how God continues to do such life-changing work through his people. Thank you to all who have prayed for us. God blessed us with 87 team members on nine teams. Five of those teams arrived on the same day ("The Invasion") and for the next two weeks Masha and I rarely sat still. We were constantly on the go, taking care of visa registrations, delivering water and Bibles, meeting with camp directors and other tasks that fill our days.

This year one of our teams had five team members who were recent Russian immigrants to the U.S. and who all spoke fluent Russian. It was fun to watch them speaking to the children at the camp without needing interpreters.

One thing that has become clear from this summer is that God is bringing us into contact more and more with orphans and orphanages. It is such a blessing to work with these loving and needy children. It is also usually much easier to follow up with them than with non-orphans because the orphans live in groups and we usually get to know some of their caretakers. For the past three Januaries [2000-02] we have taken teams to minister in two orphanages with which we came into contact through the summer camps. We are currently looking to the Lord to see if and how we should increase this orphanage outreach. It is said that "about 60 % of the orphans do not live beyond the age of 30 because of their destructive life-styles -- prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction and crime."

[avw now:] Online you may learn more news about these ministry trips, including another one by the Borden Ind. Church — with pictures too. Go to www.ismissions.org. Here are a few other tidbits: One of the teams that went to Russia in '02 and returned to the same camp in '03 found that a Muslim boy who came to believe in Christ the previous year had been baptized. And "the kids had literally worn out their Bible story books by re-reading them so many times during the year! In '02 the kids memorized 5 Bible verses, and many had heard about becoming part of God's family for the first time. This year they memorized 19 Bible verses (including the 10 Commandments), and gained more understanding about how to live as a Christian.

One team spent 6 months thoroughly preparing Bible stories, testimonies, a mime, crafts and several Christian songs in Russian. But they were not sure what the camp administrators would allow them to do. "To our amazement, they offered for us to share with each of the 21 groups of children in the camp, a total of 550 campers. Keep in mind that this is a secular camp! For the next four days we taught Bible-school type classes with four to five groups each day. By the time we left for our day off in St. Petersburg we had established relationships with nearly every child in the camp." Not only did they share testimonies and Bible stories, they also distributed a Bible to each camper, with a strong challenge to read it—not just put it on a shelf. They also gave shoes to the campers.

Dan told us (his parents) how it takes time to reach many of the Russians, due to their long years of Marxist atheism and secularism. About 10 years ago the principal of a Russian school visited Louisville along with a group. He was an atheist then but now has a strong

belief in God and seems close to faith in Christ. But his journey has taken 10 years, and his health is very bad. Pray for him. In another case the response came sooner. Maybe 3 years ago a boy was on an exchange team from Moscow to Portland Christian High School in Louisville. A few months later a PCHS team went to that boy's school in Moscow. Not long ago he told Dan that during his visit here he became a believer in God. Then during the Portland team's visit to Russia he became a believer in *Christ*. And now he is *working with youth in a Russian church!* Among those touched by the Lord this summer were several deaf orphans, plus a number who saw the "Jesus film" (the older one from the Gospel of Luke), and twin older ladies at a children's sanatorium.

[Earl Mullins Sr. and Paul Kitzmiller recently ministered in Russia again. We hope to have a report from them by next month.]

What's Going On in Middletown, Ky.?

a.v.w.

Recently Kevin Youngblood, a newly-found friend of ours who is minister at the Middletown Church of Christ, sent me a copy of an encouraging letter sent out by that church's elders and himself to a number of churches. Observe the emphasis on prayer, willingness to change, and—most of all—loving cooperation instead of isolation from and competition with other believers.

"We at the Middletown Church of Christ are entering into a time of intense prayer as we reevaluate our ministry vision and our service to the Lord Jesus Christ. After the first of the year, we will begin the process of appointing new shepherds to assist our existing three shepherds. Once these new shepherds are installed, we will undergo a thorough restructuring of our ministries and their leadership in accordance with a new, focused vision. This will involve laying aside some ministries in order to pursue others more diligently and faithfully.

"We solicit the prayers of our sister congregations around Greater Louisville as we experience this transition. Among our new priorities is to avoid isolationism and to pursue a kingdom vision. We desire to see all congregations where Christ is worshipped and served in accordance with Scripture to thrive. We want you to view us not as competitors, but coworkers in the cause of the only person that matters — the Lord Jesus. For this reason we wanted to inform you of what God has laid on our hearts and to ask for your prayers as we enter what promises to be a difficult but exciting time.

"In the meantime we are praying for all of you. Please let us and other area congregations know if there is anything specific for which we can pray or with which we can help." [Signed as stated above.]

Are you familiar with MAP?

What's Growing On in Arkansas?

Dennis Roysse, youth minister at Sellersburg, Ind. Church of Christ

Jamie, Beth, Ashley and I headed for Paragould, Arkansas after Sunday morning services on December 28, 2003. Expectations were high since the four of us had brought in the New Year at our destination a year ago. We knew there was much spiritual food and brotherly fellowship waiting for us there. We were not disappointed.

However, classes brought by Don and Deanne Williams, Norman Childs, Sonny Childs, and Vera Ratliff (a missionary) were not the highlight of my experience. Challenging discussions and debates with the above and my friend, Eddie Olberding, also were not the highlight.

Maybe it's a trait brought by my occupation, but **what caught my attention and thrilled me the most was the growth I observed in the young people that I had seen there a year earlier.**

I will not mention names or descriptions of those whose growth not only impressed me but brought me a sense of warmth. It's very encouraging to see such noticeable growth in a year's time. Growth such as a calmer and happier spirit while becoming more focused.

How often we give the younger generation the eye of scrutiny and see only what they could improve upon. Let's try looking back as little as a year ago and see the positive growth with that same scrutinizing eye. It will make us all feel better. But better yet, it will give us a better appreciation of the Lord's working in these times in which we consider everyone younger than ourselves to be a part of the present moral and spiritual decline.

--Sellersburg Church of Christ Chronicle. [What Dennis attended was a year-end conference of Sonny Child's ministry, especially with youth. Sonny holds gospel meetings, renewal meetings, and VBS (he's led teen VBS for us at Portland Ave. the past two years and we look forward to another one this year). He will be the main speaker at the high-school week at Woodland Bible Camp June 6-11. But he also takes teams of teens on a 2-week long MAP: Missionaries for America Program. There will be 3 of them this summer. Sonny and others teach the team-members but, more than that, they get hands-on training in evangelism and Bible teaching/preaching. Each guy prepares and preaches a sermon to a considerate audience, and each gal teaches a VBS class for a few nights. By-products include learning to live with others as you travel together, and having good Christian fun. Like Dennis, we recommend this ministry to you. For more information call 870-239-5934 or 501-455-8460, or write 579 Greene 518 Road, Paragould AR 72450. This is a ministry worthy of support.

A Paradox in Prayer:

BOLDNESS out of humility

Nick Boone

Over and over again the Bible emphasizes the necessity of humility. In Luke 18, Jesus provides a parable that specifically demonstrates the importance of humility in prayer. In this parable, a respectable Pharisee thanks God for who he is while the lowly tax collector can only beat his breast and cry out, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus tells us that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, “went home justified before God.”

This sense of the need for humility in prayer can be contrasted with Hebrews 4, in which the writer tells us to approach the throne of grace with “confidence” (some versions say “boldness”). How can one approach God in prayer with humility, but also with confidence, or boldness. This seems like a paradox, but it actually is not. Boldness can actually spring from humility, and there are plenty of examples from Scripture that suggest this.

Let’s explore the idea of humility first. When I think of what Christ has done for me, I think of my position as much like that of the tax collector. It’s what I call a radical asymmetry—God is the highest of the high, and I, in relation to him, am the lowest of the low; God is infinitely higher than I, and I am infinitely lower than he. This position I am in is a position of absolute humility, and it is a humility that will accept nothing less than silence. What could I say that would be worthy? What could I even ask? How could I presume to ask?

But, like the tax collector, I do not remain silent; for even as this humility threatens to silence me, I can see the powerful love of Christ. This powerful love creates a desire in me, a desire for contact, for a relationship with Christ. It forces me to see and feel my deep need, and out of that unquenchable, tortuous thirst inspired by Christ’s love, I am forced to speak, to plead with God out of my humility.

This speech that springs forth out of humility is a bold speech in its very essence. Since I see myself as utterly lowly in relation to God, anything I say to him is already foolishness. It makes no sense that the lowest of the low should speak to the Almighty, the All-Knowing Creator. Anything I say is, therefore, bold. How dare I say anything? I cannot provide God with any new knowledge through my speech—he knows everything! If I request something of his great power, I do not deserve anything that might be granted. So how can I presume to ask? Anytime a person sees himself as ultimately low, his prayer will be the most bold, because anything spoken to God out of

such a lowly condition is said with boldness—it cannot be otherwise. Both prayers in Luke 18 are offered with boldness. The Pharisee's prayer exhibits a boldness that springs forth from pride. He is confident that God will hear his prayer and accept it since he is a respectable man, a Pharisee.

But the tax collector's prayer exhibits a boldness that springs forth from humility. He has no where else to turn—no recourse to himself, nor the world. His only hope is in God's willingness to hear his prayer. He knows he is undeserving, so his humility nearly forces him into total silence. But forced to speak out of unquenchable desire for God's love, he beats his breast and cries out for mercy. This, from his perspective, is a bold prayer. It is a risk. The lowest of the low dares to ask something of God. But this is precisely the kind of boldness that God requires of us in prayer—the boldness that comes from a person knowing who he truly is in relation to God—a lowly sinner—and knowing how desperate he really is, and knowing he has nowhere else to turn.

This boldness that springs from humility can be seen throughout the Bible. Numbers 12:3 says that Moses was the most humble man on Earth; yet in Exodus 33 he makes perhaps the boldest request recorded in Scripture: he asks that God would reveal to him His glory. How is it that the most humble man makes the boldest request? I think that what has been outlined so far tells us that Moses could only make such a bold request precisely because of his humility. Moses knew his position, he knew his need for God, he was desperate for God—this made him bold. And, amazingly, God granted Moses' request.

The book of Ruth gives us another view of this phenomenon. Ruth, in her humility, her absolute need, was driven to do something very radical. She enters the threshing floor at night, where only men were typically allowed to sleep, and she uncovers Boaz's feet and lies crosswise at his feet. What boldness! But this was Ruth's only recourse, her only hope; her humble position made her bold. Of course, the book of Ruth tells a historically true story, but the story of Ruth is also true in an allegorical sense. We are all Ruth; we have nowhere else to turn, but to the one who can be our redeemer. Our helplessness, our humble position, allows us to be bold in reaching out to our Redeemer. And out of mercy, he grants our request.

In the New Testament this humble boldness is seen in the faith of the Canaanite woman Jesus encounters in Matthew 15. As this passage makes clear, though Jesus' message was eventually for everybody all over the world, during his lifetime Jesus concentrated his efforts only on the Jews, and occasionally their cousins, the Samari-

tans. The Canaanite woman calls after Jesus, but he ignores her. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." When the woman boldly kneels before Jesus, he in essence calls her people dogs: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

But because this woman is so humble, because in her lowliness she has no where else to turn, she takes Jesus' metaphor and turns it into the most effective extended metaphor in history. She says, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answers her request. This was indeed a bold move by a desperate woman. Hers was not a boldness that sprang from pride, but out of abject humility. Christ sees such boldness and grants the request. He can work with hearts that are so desperate for him that they resort to boldness.

We need to realize that because of our lowliness in relation to God, any prayer we offer will be bold. The question is, with what kind of boldness do we approach God? Is it the boldness of the Pharisee? This boldness comes from pride, from a sense that God has blessed us with all kinds of ability, so we'll just thank him and go about our lives as we see fit. Such arrogant boldness really asks nothing of God in prayer because the attitude of the person praying is one of confidence in his own ability to do what is best. These are prayers that ask for things that we can really already do on our own. But the prayer of boldness out of humility is a desperate prayer, from a person who has no hope in himself or in anything else. This is the type of prayer that can be powerful and effective, the type of prayer that, though bold in its premises, God will be happy to grant. We need to see ourselves as the tax collector, or as the Canaanite woman if we are to come to Christ with the appropriate brand of boldness. The most bold--and therefore the most powerful--prayers come from hearts that fully understand humility.

EVEN CHRISTIANS GET ***The BLUES***

Some people suggest that the remedy for depression is to get out and help others. While this may help people with mild depression, it is a poor solution for the severely depressed who can barely function. Giving them the wrong advice will only add guilt to their pain.

The medical community cannot always pinpoint the cause of severe depression. The causes can be varied: loss (such as that of a job or loved one); emotional issues (such as difficulties in a relationship

or poor self-esteem); heredity; hormonal imbalances; physical illness; medications; even the changing of the seasons (the National Institute of Mental Health says that 10 million Americans experience seasonal affective disorder due to the reduced number of daylight hours in the winter months). The causes of and cures for depression are unique for each individual.

Severely depressed people experience real psychological changes over which they have no control. The mildly depressed experience the same changes to a lesser degree. They feel sad and irritable; lose interest in everything (even pleasurable things); experience changes in eating habits; have difficulty sleeping; are anxious; cannot concentrate, remember, or make decisions; frequently contemplate suicide; avoid the company of others; feel hopeless and helpless; have increased headaches and ailments; have low energy and low resistance to disease.

By their words and actions, Christians can either help or hinder the severely depressed. If they judge them or merely direct them to a spiritual solution, the severely depressed will only withdraw into isolation and despair. If Christians seek to accept, understand, support, pray for and encourage the severely depressed to seek professional care, they can help them find a remedy and a renewed life. Just one person who shows love and commitment to a severely depressed person can set that person's feet back onto the road of normalcy.

Perhaps a church of loving people can even prevent mild cases of depression. Taking time to praise effort, to listen to problems, to help with an overload of responsibilities, or to inquire about a person's well-being can make a person feel valued and energize him or her to go on with life and even to minister to others.

Few people never experience any type of depression. The severely depressed get caught up in a downward spiral from which they may never recover. Christians can help! They must first remove the stigma attached to depression and then, create a safe, sheltering place for those who have lost their joy.

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

-- adapted from an article by Susan Nikaido in the Discipleship Journal, via the Cedars Church of Christ; symptoms of depression taken from study guide for Marriage Works by the American Association of Christian Counselors. Reprinted from The Glen Rock Light, bulletin of Glen Rock, PA Church of Christ, December 7, 2003.

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congregation who is, please contact me at (870) 335-9619.

Late-breaking News: Another young man, Brent Heeke (cousin of Logan Heeke just mentioned) also feels the Lord's call to preaching ministry. He too grew up in the Tell City church. Though he now lives in Texas (Houston), he's willing to leave there and move elsewhere! Any interested church may learn more from him at: vw215@juno.com or 281: 208-8063.

School of Biblical Studies' Lectureship was held March 19-20 and hosted by the Buechel Church of Christ in Louisville. Guest lecturer was Dr. Bill Flatt, professor of counseling and former president of Harding Graduate School of Religion. He presented very helpful sessions on overcoming fear, anxiety and depression by faith in the Lord and the resources He provides. The Portland Christian School Chorus sang Friday night.

Kentucky/Indiana Fellowship is being planned for the first week in August (2nd- 5th) This year's theme: "God's Word Deals With Today's Problems" Start making plans now to attend the 57th Annual Fellowship. The program including topics and speakers will be forthcoming.

"The Defense of Marriage requires a constitution amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman," President Bush said last week. "Amending the Constitution is not something to be taken lightly," he said, "but it's the only recourse for the people's voice to be heard, given the recent rulings of activist judges."

LeCompte, Louisiana (Dillard Fontenot) On May 1st the congregation at LeCompte will have its annual barbecue to honor all seniors (kindergarten- elementary & college) for their scholastic achievement. Then from May 7-11, Bro. Mike Abbot of the Borden, Indiana congregation will be the evangelist for our revival meeting. Note this is Thursday through Tuesday to encourage the local churches to support the meeting.

Church of Christ Mission (Bob Morrow). Several needs have come to our attention through Bro. R.W. Hunda who is from Africa but currently living and working in the United Kingdom:

Bible tracts for teaching and personal evangelism; Bibles & songbooks; someone to come and start a church. There is a considerable number of Church of Christ members from Africa who do not have a place of prayer. Bro. Morrow also reports of a need for workers in Barcelona, Spain. For further information, & to learn of available resources via your church, contact Bob Morrow, Box 406, Glenmora, LA 71433, (318) 215-1297

Buechel Church of Christ (Louisville) recently had a "Friends & Family Day" that saw 64 in attendance. It is encouraging to see members inviting others to come. This is an excellent way the church can grow. Bud Ridgeway shares his testimony: "I was a young sailor far away from home on board a ship - just living a day to day life. There were no goals, no purpose, just doing whatever I wanted and acting like other sailors. One day while sitting on the mess deck of the ship another sailor approached me and

asked: 'Do you want to go to church with me?' 'Sure, I don't have anything else to do.' So I went to church and eventually got started in a Bible study with a friend, Gary, who later baptized me. Since then, I have been preaching the Gospel of Christ for over 25 years because of the invitation of one person. Let's keep inviting people."

Heart of the Passion... "If I be lifted up - I will draw all men unto myself." (John 12:32) Some went to find a deeper appreciation for the suffering of Christ. Others went out of curiosity. Still others went to judge the movie for themselves. The Passion opened in over 4000 screens in over 3000 theaters and has officially beat out the Return of the King as the top 5-day grossing movie for a film. Yet, many local newspapers had minimal coverage (if any). Controversy? Yes, much but not surprising because Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-38 His life would bring controversy.

Want to Study More about Church Meetings, etc.? If you want to study the main theme of this issue in greater depth, past issues of W&W may help you. "When Christians Gather" (3/89); "A Balanced Diet" and "Fellowship Groups" (8 and 9/90); "Doing Things Differently" (7/93) plus several issues during 1992 carry stimulating material. Some of these are still in plentiful supply; others are almost extinct! You may order them @\$1.25 plus postage. Allow time for us to send them to you.

Our Filipino Brothers Face a "Dangerous Situation" [This news item got lost in a stack, so is over 6 months old. But in general the conditions are probably the same. -avw] Brother Clemente Alegado in Mindanao, Philippines, reports that in his place there are two groups of armed

rebels: the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Muslims) and the New Peoples Army (Communists and/or bandits). "The MILF hate the Christians and are against the Bible, and the NPA group does not believe in God [any god]. Because of this problem our brothers and sisters decided to evacuate near the headquarters of the Army so they can be protected, but their farms are very far away and it is hard for us to get their food."

Talks were held to Improve Relationships between the International Church of Christ (originally called the Crossroads movement & later the Boston movement) and "mainline" Churches of Christ. This occurred at Abilene Christian University. According to the Christian Chronicle, "The ICOC leaders apologized for the authoritarian discipling techniques and 'judgmental elitism' that led many of their members away from the movement and created friction with mainline church members. Representatives of mainline churches apologized for using the word 'cult' as a careless label in referring to the ICOC and for years of mistrust between the two groups.

"Although the late-February meeting was not an attempt to merge the two groups, it provided much-needed dialogue between movements with common roots — movements that had grown distrustful of each other during years of little or no communication, said ACU president Royce Money. 'We are here to begin a conversation,' he said, adding that it would serve as the 'first step toward healing.' The ICOC and the mainline churches of Christ parted ways in the early 1990s. ICOC sources [said] that current membership is about 135,000 people in 434 churches in 159 countries. The ICOC underwent a major transition with the resignation of longtime leader Kip McKean in late 2002. Since then, the ICOC has un-

dergone a period of change and reassessment.”

avw now: Let us pray for these brothers & sisters, who for years were bound in an extremely zealous but mainly legalistic, sectarian and regimented movement. Recently things have changed very rapidly. I imagine that the many who've left differ widely among themselves: some holding on to legalism & sectarianism but fed up with the ICOC; others discovering God's grace & great big family as a result; and still others turning from Christ altogether due to bitter disappointment after Kip McKean's confession & resignation. Moto Nomura was asked to counsel many confused members of the Tokyo ICOC.

Feedback on "the Gifts" I have read the July and August issues and am now in the middle of the September one on Prophecy. I am finding what you have presented on gifts of the Spirit to be what I consider to be a well-balanced understanding. Because I have found it conforming to my views so far, I guess (chuckle).

If you still have these issues available, I would like you to send me another set. There is a brother in Christ and a good personal friend with whom I would like to share these. Years ago both he and I had a season of involvement in the Charismatic movement (he more so than I). We are both of Church of Christ heritage, he having for many years filled various pulpits. I would like to give him your booklets. —A new subscriber who ordered back-Issues

when he learned of the series regarding spiritual gifts

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GOOD MANNERS? Remember when a man got up to give a seat to a woman? When the young showed respect for their elders? When it wasn't a sign of "superiority" to put someone down?

On one occasion General Robert E. Lee was seated at the rear of a train. All seats were filled, mostly by soldiers. A poorly dressed woman entered the coach. She walked all the way from front to back. When she neared him, Lee immediately stood and gave her his place. Every soldier in the car then stood to give the General a seat. He refused. He would not accept a courtesy which had been denied a poor lady.

Good manners demand courtesy to all — not merely our superiors. If you don't possess courtesy, your Christianity is suspect.

The bungling inefficiency and "don't care" attitude seen in many businesses has us talking about the "good old days" when people took pride in their work. But we seem to have forgotten that in those "good old days" there was also a different kind of person on the buying side of the counter—one who was courteous.

When shoddy work and "careless" attitudes characterize a business, I don't have to patronize it again — BUT I still have no right to retaliate discourteously. Because I am a Christian.

--Joe R. Barnett, via Linton bulletin