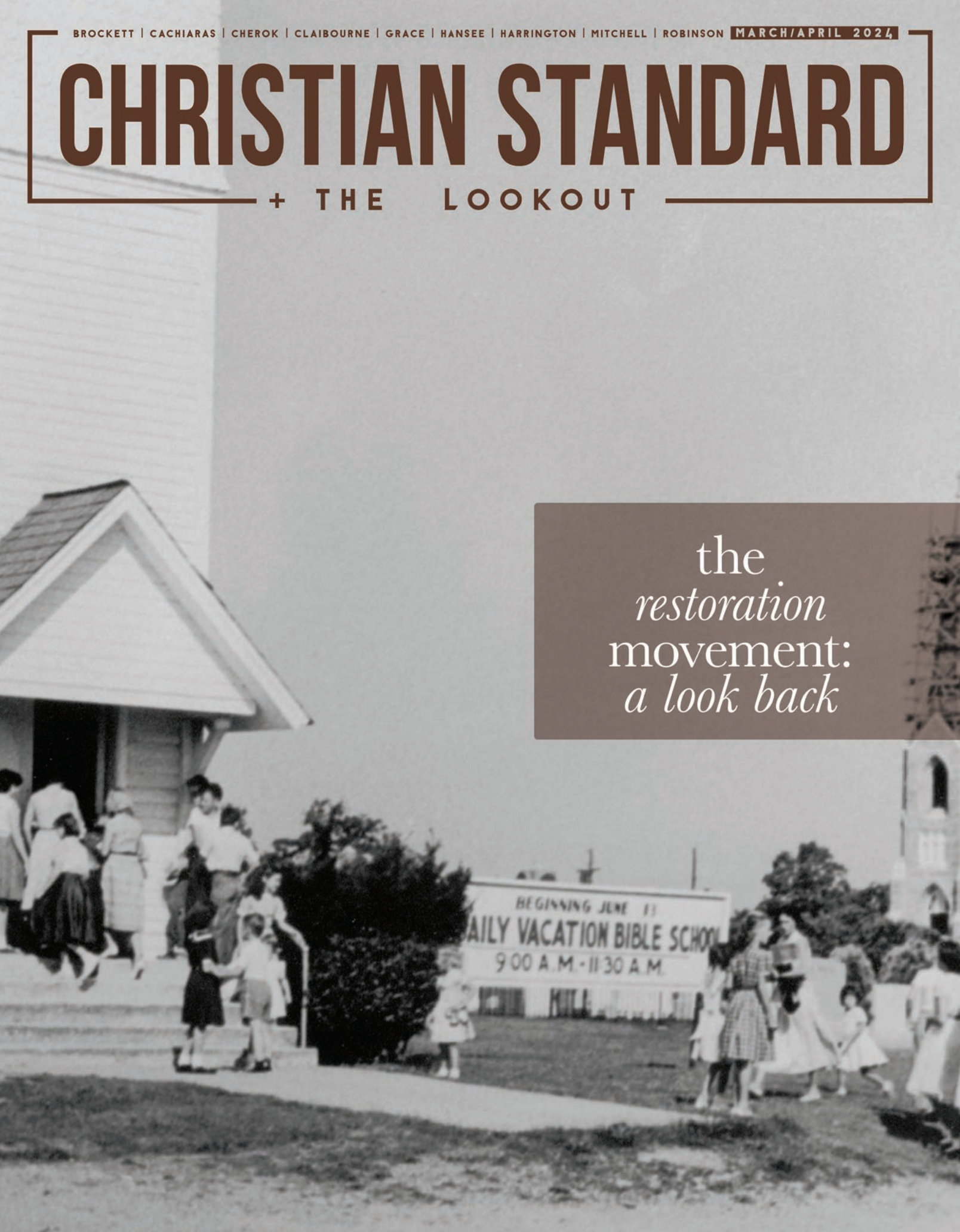


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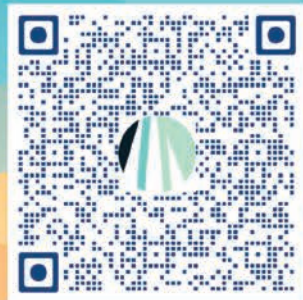
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FROM THE PUBLISHER



STORY

When I was in Bible college, Restoration History was required for my degree. It's a good thing, because a two-dimensional professor standing before a class at 7 a.m. was not a formula for student engagement! When you're 20 years old, you have very little interest in looking backward when there is so much mystery, excitement, and adventure in front of you. In my case, it took over 30 years for that seed planted in college to sprout, and that's when I finally began to understand there was more life behind me than in front of me.

Over the years, I came to see my life as a story. It wasn't very interesting at first because much of the plot remained undeveloped or incomplete. But as the years began to accumulate, more characters appeared, color and description grew more vibrant, and the narrative became much more interesting. My earlier years became more important than they seemed at first, providing structure to my entire life.

We all have a story; actually, we all have at least two stories. One is the "made-for-TV" version and the second

is the director's cut that contains scenes we would rather no one see. We'd prefer those portions to stay on the cutting-room floor so that our story is the exemplary version we want to project. That story is our testimony. That story chronicles our passage through life and the impact our faith has played in it.

The church we attend and serve also has a story. How did it begin? Who came together and cooperated to make it a reality? What sacrifices were made? What victories have been achieved? What were the defining moments and the conflicts? Who were the key leaders who shaped it? What was the Holy Spirit's role in that story and how have individuals and the community benefited because of it? All personal stories and church stories are completely unique.

Our movement has a story, too, and though I didn't realize it at the time, it's the story the 7 a.m. professor was trying to get me to appreciate. If we trace the story back to the Cane Ridge Revival, it is 223 years old! The story has regional, national, and world-changing

subplots. Each church and individual story is woven into it.

The next three issues of *Christian Standard* will explore the story of our movement. This issue concentrates on our past. Knowledge of the past is important because, without it, it's impossible to understand where we are now or to see the trajectory of where we're going. I believe we largely fail to appreciate our past as a movement. Who cares about long-dead, dusty, and forgotten old figures?

I do . . . at least I do now. I learned a lot about the shoulders I'm standing on in the last 15 years or so. It was kick-started when the church I serve, The Crossing, opened our fourth location in Hannibal, Missouri. Through research I learned that Restoration Movement founding father Barton Stone died in Hannibal. It led me to discover that Samuel Clemens based a significant amount of his writing and his own pen name—Mark Twain—on Stone's grandsons. Ultimately, it spurred me to have a new gravestone made for Stone's widow, Celia.

It led me to build friendships with preachers from the African American Church of Christ who taught me about Marshall Keeble, Fred Gray, and how our movement played a key role in the advancement of civil rights. These relationships and the stories shared with me found their way into *Christian Standard* as they became a part of my story.

A few weeks ago, Mont Mitchell called me to ask if I knew anything about the Restoration Movement in the United Kingdom today. My U.K. knowledge was limited to the distant past, so Mont informed me about what is happening there right now. I'm thankful he and Martin Robinson are sharing that story in this issue. At Spire Conference, I had the opportunity to learn about the Disciple Heritage Fellowship, comprised of churches

long associated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination that view God's Word as authoritative and infallible. I was excited to hear there are 180 DHF churches, and now we're doing a story on them as well.

If you want to know what this movement is, it's defined by doing Bible things in Bible ways and calling them by Bible names. Christian unity is our polar star. We recognize we are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only. We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where it is silent. We use the New Testament as our only rule of faith and practice. We have no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the Divine, no law but love. In essentials we have unity, in nonessentials, liberty, and in all things, love. And we seek to do it all in unity while celebrating our autonomy as individual churches.

This is our story . . . it has beautiful parts, ugly parts, painful parts, exuberant parts, times of growth and harvest and times of loss and repentance. But all of these parts make us who we are . . . a tapestry of both individual and collective stories that God alone could weave together to make sense and be a part of the church that Jesus promised to build. ■



Jerry Harris is publisher of Christian Standard Media and teaching pastor at The Crossing, a multisite church located in three states across the Midwest.

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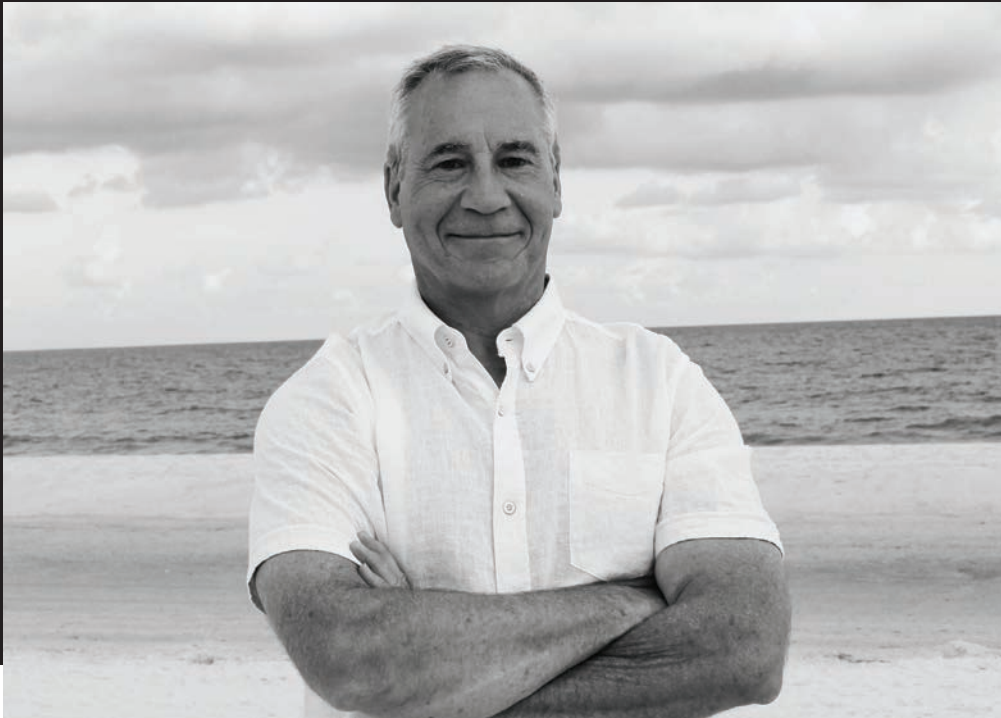
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HISTORY AND HOPE

This is the first of three consecutive issues of *Christian Standard* focusing on the Restoration Movement. In this edition we look at our past and ask what we can learn from it. You'll read here about churches that have long and rich histories within our movement. You'll learn about the origins and recent growth of our movement in the United Kingdom. We cover some less-than-stellar aspects of our movement's history as well. We reflect on the separations that took place among Restoration Movement churches in the 20th century and the factors that led to them. Our aim is to help us understand our past so that we can appreciate the present and plan wisely for our future.

This issue carries us into the Easter season as well. As we think about our movement's history and hope, let's also think about the history and hope surrounding the Resurrection, the history and hope of every follower of Christ. There is an account in the Gospels that helps us appreciate the way history and hope are intertwined

in the believer's life. It's a story about two disciples returning home from Jerusalem following Jesus' crucifixion. It's found in Luke 24.

The pair had been in Jerusalem to observe Passover. What they hadn't expected was to be in the city while their teacher was betrayed, falsely accused, and executed. We don't know if they were eyewitnesses to Jesus' crucifixion, but certainly they were aware of it. They knew he was dead and that his lifeless body had been taken from the cross and placed into a tomb just as the Sabbath was beginning. So, like the rest of Jesus' disciples, the grieving duo was left to spend a sullen Saturday in Jerusalem before making the journey home.

This is where Luke picks up the story.

It's Easter Sunday. Jesus had conquered death and risen from the grave, but the two travelers were unaware of it. Sure, there had been rumors of an empty tomb, but who could prove it? The tone of their conversation

must have mirrored their disappointment as they made their way back to Emmaus.

Suddenly, and seemingly from nowhere, a stranger approached and began to walk with them. Not waiting for a formal introduction, the intruder asked what they were talking about. Luke tells us, “They stood still, their faces downcast” (v. 17). When you’re having a somber conversation with a friend, the last thing you want is a party crasher.

The traveler named Cleopas asked, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” (v. 18). It’s hard to miss the sarcasm. Their world had just fallen apart and to add insult to injury, they were being forced to relive the pain and drama for the sake of an unwelcomed guest.

The two spoke about Jesus of Nazareth, a powerful prophet they hoped would be Israel’s savior. They called out the religious leaders who gave him up to the Roman rulers who put him to death. They talked about the morning’s confusion at the tomb and among the disciples, ending with, “but they did not see Jesus” (v. 24).

It’s interesting, isn’t it? Their world was engulfed in sadness and despair, in doubt and discouragement. And all the while, the one in whom they had placed their hope had just dealt their greatest enemy a blow from which he would never recover. Jesus had proved to be everything they had ever hoped for, and more. They just hadn’t heard the news.

Their review and analysis of the day’s events gave the stranger the perfect opportunity to interject. “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (v. 25). The newcomer’s firm but loving rebuke paved the way to a clear and compelling explanation of the purpose of prophecy and its fulfillment in Christ.

As the travelers reached their destination, they invited their guest to remain with them for the night. The stranger accepted. But in an interesting twist, at the

table during their evening meal, the guest assumed the role of host. “He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them” (v. 30).

Their initial surprise must have paled in comparison to what followed. “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight” (v. 31). Luke doesn’t tell us what happened here, but I wonder, as Jesus held the bread and broke it, did they notice for the first time the nail scars in his hands?

Can you imagine the healing that took place in the hearts of these two disciples when they realized the man they had been traveling with was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the resurrected Lord? Everything came together for them. “They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” (v. 32).

Their encounter with Jesus transformed the two travelers from browbeaten disciples into hope-filled, joyful followers of the risen Christ. We know this because of what happened next. They had just completed the long, seven-mile trek from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were undoubtedly tired, and evening shadows were giving way to the dark of night. But once they understood what was happening, “they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem” (v. 33) to spread the good news that Jesus was alive.

History gave way to hope.

People who don’t understand what happened at the cross and the garden tomb do not know this kind of hope. But for those who do, it changes everything.

May we who have this hope do everything in our power to help others find it too. ■



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GUARDIANS OF TRUTH

By Gary Johnson

I was a teenager in the late 1960s when my home church, a Disciples of Christ congregation, plunged into a debate about the Disciples' liberal doctrinal positions, Restructure (approved in 1968), church property ownership, and other concerns.

My seemingly peaceful home church soon became a verbal battleground as the debate ensued over whether we should withdraw and become "Independent" or remain with the Disciples of Christ. I heard the arguments both for and against and learned things I had not understood before. I witnessed strong opinions from folks who I didn't know had opinions. I saw consternation in faces where I had only seen smiles. I sensed fear in a place that had only known peace in the past. The elders were leading by being guardians of the truth.

The congregation was not *liberal* in its practices or biblical understanding. Consequently, when the decision was made to unaffiliate with the Disciples, not much changed outwardly. Thankfully, the church didn't divide and to my knowledge, not one person left. I remember thinking at the time, *How could something like this have happened so suddenly?*

DECADES IN THE MAKING

There was nothing sudden about it; that debate had been decades in the making. At the onset of the 20th century, discord was growing within the Disciples of Christ. The newly formed Disciples Congresses (started in 1899) became a platform to promote a growing liberalism. Baptism by immersion quickly became a point of contention. To the consternation of conservatives, many Disciples leaders promoted and practiced "open membership" (the acceptance of believers who had experienced an alternative baptism but not immersion).

Though Alexander Campbell had opposed such, the American Christian Missionary Society was created. Other missionary societies subsequently sprang up and in 1920, all merged to form the United Christian Missionary Society. This, too, became a major point of contention as the UCMS controlled the distribution of money to both home and foreign missions.

Whereas the Restoration Movement's plea had emphasized unity on the basis of biblical authority, that authority was now being questioned. Many in the Disciples' camp professed doubt about biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and consequently, scriptural authority. Biblical truth was deemphasized. These concerns eventually became irreconcilable.



AMONG THEIR MANY LEADERSHIP DUTIES, ELDERS MUST BE THE GUARDIANS OF TRUTH.

A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The death of J.W. McGarvey, a leading conservative, in 1911 coupled with the Disciples Congresses almost exclusively favoring liberal speakers, brought matters to a head. In 1924, as a conservative alternative, the newly formed Cincinnati (Ohio) Bible Institute merged with McGarvey Bible College (Louisville, Kentucky) to form Cincinnati Bible Seminary. And in 1927 the first North American Christian Convention, a conservative preaching/teaching conference, gathered in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Efforts seeking unity among the two factions continued, but the chasm was too great. By 1968, with the Disciples Restructure, the division which had been brewing for seven decades was officially recognized. And by 1971 the Independent Christian Churches had their own listing in the *Yearbook of American Churches*.

More than 55 years have passed since the elders at my home church led through that tough decision process. My teenage years are long gone, but what I'm seeing in the church's response to current American culture in some ways mimics the past. The divide seems to be widening among America's evangelical churches on how to address today's potentially divisive issues: women's role in ministry, same-sex marriage, abortion, the LGBTQ+ movement, and scriptural authority, to name a few. The truth is being stretched and strained in an effort not to broaden the chasm between culture and Christianity. Sadly, I even see a growing divide in our branch of the Stone-Campbell heritage.

GUARDING WISELY AND GRACIOUSLY

Among their many leadership duties, elders must be the guardians of truth. Yes, like Jesus, we need to be "full of grace and truth." Yes, as Paul admonished, we must "speak the truth in love." But the desire for unity or conformity must always be tempered by truth. I suggest these strategies for today's elders:

- **Know the Scriptures.** Distractions abound that keep us from spending time in God's Word. Know why you believe what you believe. We never reach a point in life where we know enough, so keep studying. The truth matters. How will you know what's true if you don't know the Truth?
- **Know what's happening in our culture and how it impacts the church.** The church is not a remote island protected from the forces of darkness. The church is to be a beacon of hope in the midst of the darkness. We can certainly compromise methods to be more relevant in reaching our culture, but we must never compromise truth to make the gospel more palatable to our culture.
- **Know your role.** Don't major in the minors. Many opportunities exist to serve, but you must focus your energy on guarding the truth in your congregation. No one else in the church is tasked with that responsibility. Guard it well! ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Gary Johnson served 30 years with Indian Creek Christian Church (The Creek) in Indianapolis before retiring. He is a cofounder of e2: effective elders, which he serves as executive director.

WHY THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT NEEDS SAINTS AND HOW TO BECOME ONE

By Tyler McKenzie

I wish we had “saints.” I was raised and currently serve in a Restoration Movement church, but I received my undergraduate theological training from Benedictine Catholics. Catholics do saints different. They had a feast for a saint almost every day! All Saints Day (November 1) was a student favorite because they canceled classes! We were *supposed* to spend the day in remembrance. God, forgive us!

Some Catholic teaching about saints is outside the bounds of biblical truth. However, the systematic way they sowed admiration for spiritual heroes stuck with me. Recently, I made it a discipline to read a saint story every day for a year. I learned about Dorothy Day, Festo Kivengere, Pandita Ramabai, Mary McCleod-Bethune, Desmond Tutu, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and many more. I found myself wishing we had saints. So, I adopted a few of my own.

A REMARKABLE LIFE

One of my favorites? Clive Staples Lewis—an intellectual giant who made a transgenerational impact. He was born in a nominally Christian home and experienced great suffering as a boy. His mother died when he was 9. His father, crushed by her death, sent him off to boarding school. At around 20, he fought in World War I. He came of age in a cruel world.

Lewis always had a predisposition for literature and the arts. He listened to operas and read Celtic myths, Norse legends, and Greek classics. Eventually, he excelled at Oxford and became a professor of literature there (1925–1954), then later at Cambridge (1954–1963). Initially, his studies made him an atheist until he befriended J.R.R. Tolkien. Over time, Tolkien played a critical role in Lewis’s conversion.



WHEN YOU CONTINUALLY CHOOSE GOD, YOU TURN YOUR AGENCY INTO HABITUAL RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SET YOURSELF FREE TO TRULY LIVE.

Lewis would then play a critical role in the Western church. At this point, there were only a handful of Christian intellectuals who had real clout at the world’s table. In the 1920s, there had been a split in the American church called the Modernist-Fundamentalist divide. There were big disagree-

ments over foundational doctrines. The Christians who held to orthodox belief about issues like the resurrection and the authority of Scripture withdrew from the academy and started their own institutions of higher education. Their curriculum had a heavy emphasis on Scripture, but often cut out the study of ancient classics and philosophy. By the 1940s, there were less and less Christian intellectuals who had the credentials to be taken seriously in the non-Christian academy.

UNDERSTANDING HEAVEN AND HELL

Into this gap, C.S. Lewis stepped. He was a unicorn. Not only did he have the résumé, he also had orthodox faith. Lewis would go on to bless a generation with fresh ways of imagining the Christian story and understanding its truths. One of the more resonant ideas he introduced to me was his understanding of heaven and hell. I take issue with some of his beliefs here, but in a nutshell, he understood the images of heaven and hell as more than final destinations. They described the journey toward spiritual formation or deformation. He wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before . . . you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature.

Heaven is a journey of formation. Hell is a journey of deformation. The eternal destinations immortalize the choices we've made all along. "Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom," Lewis once wrote. With every decision we make, we become people of hell or heaven, people of selfishness or love, people enslaved to sin or enslaved to righteousness. The basic argument is a widely accepted understanding of how human agency works.

1. **At first, humans have the freewill capacity to choose moment by moment.** This makes us unique. Animals do not. Beetles do not hire life coaches. Geese don't make lists of pros and cons before migration. They act on instinct. Not us, though. Humans determine the sort of people we become and things we do.
2. **Over time, humans diminish their capacity to choose based on what they continually chose.** With each decision, we are determining our character. We pick up momentum in one direction or the other. Eventually, our character builds enough momentum that the roles switch. Rather than our decisions determining our character, our character determines our decisions.
3. **In the end, our decisions become our destiny.** I heard it said, "We all make decisions, but in the end, our decisions make us."

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Duhigg brings this into the 21st century in his book, *The Power of Habit*. His thesis is that humans are a big bundle of habits. Our brains do this thing called clustering. It is the process of making complex actions into unconscious habits to save energy and increase productivity. This is why the first time you do something takes more attention than the thousandth time.

For example? Dribbling a basketball or pulling your car into your garage. I drive an SUV. It is 195 inches long and 79 inches wide. Our garage is 201 inches long and 83 inches wide. Do the math. My margins are tight! The first several times I pulled the car in, it was a lonnnnnng process, but by the end of a month I could sip coffee, send texts, and yell at my kids all while pulling in. It's the "power of habit."

A weightier example is if you've ever known an addict. It's hell. The addiction cycle starts with the addict getting pleasure the first time they use a substance. Over time, they need more and more of the original substance to get less and less of the original high until it consumes them. It's an illustration of the power of habit, human agency, and hell all at once. The Bible calls it the slavery of sin. First, you choose to sin. Soon, you *have* to sin.

“

WITH EVERY DECISION WE MAKE, WE BECOME PEOPLE OF HELL OR HEAVEN, PEOPLE OF SELFISHNESS OR LOVE, PEOPLE ENSLAVED TO SIN OR ENSLAVED TO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- You have to check your social media constantly. You do it without thinking.
- You have to drink a couple glasses of wine to sleep.
- You have to win every argument.
- You have to binge trash shows on Netflix before bed.
- You have to work 90-hour weeks to keep the business going.
- You have to travel a third of the year to afford the house you barely live in.

THE POWER OF HABIT

John Mark Comer says the tension here is that “Our strongest desires are not always our deepest desires.” Truth! In the moment of temptation, the desire I feel most is the strong one—the desire to sin, to lust, to gossip, to avenge, to purchase, to conquer. As I choose it again and again, the habit takes over with almost no inner resistance. Lewis says, “That’s hell . . . being enslaved to sin and its fleeting pleasure knowing you were made for something more . . . that’s hell!”

The flip side is that the power of habit can be leveraged for good. Rather than being enslaved to sin, we can be enslaved to righteousness. Rather than choosing the highway to hell, we can choose heaven. Strangely, this slavery to righteousness is what the New Testament calls “freedom.” When you continually choose God, you turn your agency into habitual righteousness and set yourself free to truly live.

This is why saints are so important. They show us that this principle works. It is possible to become a person of astounding love and holiness. By the power of God’s regenerating grace and the Spirit’s sanctifying guidance, we can begin to stack up days, then weeks, then years of faithfulness. And, just like them, our lives too can be swallowed up in freedom. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tyler McKenzie serves as lead pastor at Northeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

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LYDIA'S MISSION: EMPOWERING WOMEN TO IMPACT GENERATIONS

By Laura McKillip Wood

Jabulile started working at the dump in South Africa out of desperation. She sorted through the garbage to find plastic and other materials that could be sold or recycled to support her family.

She tells of a time when she opened plastic bags and found they were all full of diapers. “They were so smelly,” she says, “and I was so nauseous, but I had to do it because I knew at home I had such a bad situation. I knew I had to do it for my kids.”

One day an American woman brought her trash to the dump. Jabulile and other women there surrounded her car, each trying to get the best and most valuable items from her trash.

The young American woman, Claire Brown Kriel, was shocked at the conditions the women worked in; she felt God leading her to do something to help them. She tried to talk with Jabulile, but they couldn't communicate because of the language barrier. Claire was determined to find a way to speak with the women. The next day, she returned with a translator. After hearing the women's stories, Claire offered to visit every Wednesday to hold a Bible study for them. The ministry that would later become known as Lydia's Mission was born.

“At first, we were not very keen on it because we didn't really think a person like her could come to a place like the dump,” Jabulile says. “We were confused but decided to give her a chance.” Over time, the women came to enjoy the meetings, and they began to find encouragement to face their problems. “This really has made a huge difference in our lives,” she says.

A GROWING PROBLEM

People in low-income areas around the world often go to landfills and garbage dumps to pick through the trash to find things they can sell or recycle. Needless to say, it's not a lucrative endeavor, and they still struggle to provide for their families. The Bible study helped the women's spiritual and emotional health, but what about their physical needs? Claire Brown Kriel began thinking of ways to equip and empower women to thrive in their lives, not just enable them to continue barely to survive.

“We don't want to be an organization that just gives, gives, gives. We want to be an organization that equips and teaches skills and resources,” Claire explains. She acknowledges there is a time to provide emergency resources during crises. However, Claire says she hopes “to set the women up for success for the future, even if Lydia's Mission is no longer around, empowering them to make a brighter future for themselves and for their children or grandchildren.”

Lydia's Mission aims to help women break the cycle of poverty for their families.

"Before Lydia's Mission, our kids were starving because we as parents were also starving," says one of the women employed by the ministry.

A DREAM TO EMPOWER

Claire had very limited funds when she began employing these women. In fact, she could hire only one person at a time. She was honest in telling the women she could not hire everyone in the Bible study. The women chose the neediest among them to take the jobs as they came. Eventually all the women from the Bible study at the dump were able to work in the ministry. Today more than 35 South African women work full-time in Lydia's Mission.

The women are taught skills and disciplined, and they have become change agents in their communities. They have gained self-confidence and are facing life's challenges with strength.



WE DON'T WANT TO BE AN ORGANIZATION THAT JUST GIVES, GIVES, GIVES. WE WANT TO BE AN ORGANIZATION THAT EQUIPS AND TEACHES SKILLS AND RESOURCES.

Lydia's Mission workers do a variety of jobs. The ministry first started a sewing business, which teaches women to make stuffed animals that are then sold online and at craft fairs and events in the United States. Additionally, Lydia's Mission has a large garden that covers over an acre of land. Women work in the garden and care for farm animals, providing income that makes that work self-sustaining. Some of the food produced goes to Hope Centers, where children from the community can eat at least one meal a day so they don't go to bed hungry. Lydia's Mission partners with local pastors who oversee those centers. They provide food, Bible education, funds for school uniforms, and medical screenings for the children. They hope to begin providing educational support, financial help for education, and medical support for children with special needs.

GO GO CENTER

During the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lydia's Mission realized older people in their community were becoming depressed and anxious. Their needs were not being met during times of isolation. Claire dreamed of creating a place where these people could receive medical care and food, and also be loved and cared for. In 2022, Lydia's Mission built a center where about 75 older people gather to socialize and have some of their needs met. These "go go's" are where grandmothers and grandfathers in the community can go daily to share their lives together.

"It's given them a purpose in life, and you can feel it there," says Ineke, a nurse in the ministry. People attend Bible studies at the center and connect with others in the same situation. Ineke also provides basic medical care.

"It's so rewarding to know that we've done what we can to love the widows and love the orphans, showing them the body of Christ in action," Claire says.

Learn more about Lydia's Mission at <https://lydiasmission.org>. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Laura McKillip Wood, former missionary to Ukraine, now serves as bereavement coordinator and palliative care chaplain at Children's Hospital and Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska. She and her husband, Andrew, have three teenagers.

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MARRIAGE HAPPENS EVERY DAY!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HAPPENINGS LEADING TO HAPPINESS

By Rudy and Osharye Hagood

One evening, Rudy and I found ourselves standing before a gathering of married couples at one of our Marriage Practitioners seminars. In an audacious move, we dared to ask these couples to jot down five things their spouse could do today to make them happy.

I know, right? It was scandalous. I mean, as believers, don't we know that joy is greater than happiness? As Christians, do we not embrace sacrifice, for our Savior is the One who sacrificed it all?

Hear us out. Our purpose was to help couples realize that the daily routines of life often hinder our daily happiness. We know that many maturing couples experience joy in their marriages while settling ever so gently into the secure and comfortable “contentment” phase or season of matrimony. As Scripture reveals, “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). However, *contentment* does not exclude us from practicing little acts of kindness that bring about moments of happiness.

At our Marriage Practitioners seminars, we occasionally make requests of our audiences . . . and we will ask the same of you and your spouse today. Here it is: We want both of you to practice the discipline of happiness. *We know, how scandalous! We want you to practice happiness.* You probably just chuckled a bit. Yet, we are dead serious. Sadly, we believe that happiness is a practice and discipline of effective Christian marriages that is going the “way of the earth,” as the Old Testament writers said. Let us share where we believe the devaluation of happiness began.

Picture yourself in this worship service. You feel the excitement in the air as you anticipate another inspiring and clarifying word from the preacher. It goes something like this:

Preacher: “Joy!”

Church: “Joy!”

Preacher: “Oh sweet joy!”

Church: “Yes!”

Preacher: “It’s everlasting!”

Church: “Yes!”

Preacher: “But happiness . . . Happiness is only temporary!”

Church: “OK.”

Preacher: “Joy is a gift from God!”

Church: “Yes.”

Preacher: “But happiness is merely based on happenings!”

Church: “Uhm, OK.”

And just like that, it’s over. From that point on, “happiness” becomes the second-class citizen of Christian emotions.



OUR PURPOSE WAS TO HELP COUPLES REALIZE THAT THE DAILY ROUTINES OF LIFE OFTEN HINDER OUR DAILY HAPPINESS.

To be clear, we agree with these clarifying words on *joy* and *happiness*. Just because joy is supreme doesn’t mean happiness isn’t significant. If happiness is based on happenings, and my marriage is happening every day, then the Hagoods are going to need a chunk of those happy happenings every day! Can we get an amen? The Hagoods, and most married folks, want to lead marriages filled with happiness and built on the secure foundation of eternal joy!

For clarity’s sake, consider the distinction between these two biblical ideas. *Chara* (χαρά), the Greek word for “joy,” is a state of something. *Makarios* (μακάριος), the Greek word for “happiness,” is the result of something.

Chara is a response to a state of being. It is consistent and solid. *Makarios* is a response to activities or happenings. It can be fleeting and as flimsy as the fragility of life. Yet, both have their place and both need our attention. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than in our marriages, where we must navigate the happenings of two people simultaneously. But somewhere along the line, in valuing *chara*, we have devalued *makarios*, and it is affecting our marriages, placing unwarranted weight on our *chara*, which is our strength.

So, we assert today: Happiness matters more than we often realize. It may not be the same as joy, but, as mentioned earlier, just because joy is supreme, that does not diminish the significance of happiness. Now, let’s consider the psychological and social benefits of these two biblical ideas. We have summarized various studies in psychology and social science to illustrate seven distinct benefits of happiness and/or engaging in activities that promote happiness:

1. *Mental health*: Happiness is associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Positive emotions can act as a buffer against stress and can enhance overall mental well-being.
2. *Physical health*: Happy people tend to have better physical health. They often have lower blood pressure, stronger immune systems, and a reduced risk of chronic diseases.
3. *Longevity*: Several studies report that happier people live longer. The reasons for this are varied but could be related to healthier lifestyle choices and reduced stress.

“ IF HAPPINESS IS BASED ON HAPPENINGS, AND MY MARRIAGE IS HAPPENING EVERY DAY, THEN THE HAGOODS ARE GOING TO NEED A CHUNK OF THOSE HAPPY HAPPENINGS EVERY DAY!

4. *Relationships*: Happiness is linked to more satisfying and stable relationships. Happy people often have healthier friendships and social support networks.
5. *Creativity and productivity*: Happy people tend to be more productive at work, and they are more innovative and creative.

6. *Resilience*: Happiness enhances endurance in the face of difficulty. Happy people are better at managing life's challenges.

7. *Generosity*: Happy people tend to be more charitable and helpful to others, which can create a positive reciprocity of happiness.

So, in effect, practicing happiness as a marital discipline may not only enhance your marriage but also enhance the quality of your life, impacting your mental, physical, and social health. So yes, we are serious; practice happiness in your marriage as a discipline. When it comes to joy and happiness, we are not promoters of either/or but rather both/and.

As already stated, here is our request, which is a simple exercise for you and your spouse: Create some happenings that lead to happiness on purpose. Specifically, ask your spouse, “What can I do today to make you happy?” It needs to be an action that can happen today or tomorrow, before the sun goes down.

For example, “Rudy, it would make me happy today if you bought me flowers from Trader Joe’s.” The goal is to cultivate an environment of happiness, generally in a short, sweet, and simple way. No heavy lifting here.

Another example, “Osharye, it would make me happy if you sat with me and watched the Rams game.” This exercise grants your partner access to understanding what makes you happy. It’s an opportunity to make a love deposit in the banks of each other’s hearts. Remember, marriage happens every day!


Finally, the beauty of joy (*chara*), is that you have it whether you’re happy or sad. Joy is eternal and sustaining. It provides us with the strength of the Lord in our prayers and in life’s difficult situations. For the joy of the Lord is our strength. Furthermore, as a result, our happiness becomes profound when it is founded and built on never-ceasing joy. Praise the Lord!


“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). ■

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Rudy and Osharye Hagood have seven children and nine grandchildren so far. Osharye is a women’s minister who is also certified as both a life coach and a health coach. Rudy is a college professor with a background in social work. They love being married and love to bless both married and engaged couples.

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PREACHING CHANGED MY LIFE

By Chris Philbeck



I HAVE ALWAYS HAD THE CONVICTION OF HEART THAT PREACHING STILL MATTERS.

Early last year I told my elders that after 44 years of full-time vocational ministry, over 22 of which have been spent at my current church, I plan to retire from full-time ministry at the end of June 2024. This decision has led to a lot of reflection.

MY HISTORY

I started with a church plant in Sugar Land, Texas, in 1982. That was in the “old days” when a church planter was pretty much on their own. There were no assessments, no “sending” church or church-planting organizations that provided help; instead, there were just a handful of people willing to trust a 22-year-old kid who wanted to preach.

After almost 11 years in Sugar Land, I moved to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, to lead what I would call a “turn-around” church. The church had a history of growth, but after a couple of church splits, they had lost momentum. I served almost 10 years there, and by then the church’s attendance was at an all-time high; the church was filled with new people along with a healthy number of “old” people who had returned.

Then, in 2001, I moved to Greenwood, Indiana, to be senior pastor at Mount Pleasant Christian Church, where my full-time ministry will come to an end very soon. Mount Pleasant was already a megachurch when I arrived, and 22 years later it continues to grow and live out the mission of changing the world for Christ: one life, one family, one opportunity at a time.

MY INFLUENCERS

As I look back on my years of service in the local church, I can say that one of the strongest reasons I have spent the past 44 years of my life as a preacher is because *preaching changed my life*. The life change happened first in the church where I grew up. But the sermon with the greatest impact on me didn’t occur on a Sunday morning or a Sunday night, but during a funeral sermon delivered by my preacher, Delmar Debault.

The sermon text was John 10:10 where Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly” (*New American Standard Bible*). The way my preacher talked about the meaning of that word *abundantly* in relation to my grandmother’s life is what captured my heart.

He talked about how, after a dramatic conversion, my grandmother’s life completely changed and she went

on to live a life that was—I’ll never forget his words—a “cut above” anything she had ever experienced. He talked in very practical ways about how her new life in Christ was far better than anything she could have created or imagined on her own.

That was the first time I heard someone talk about the meaning of words in the original language, and it remains the most powerful funeral message I’ve ever heard.

I also remember being home from college in the summer of 1977 and attending a large evangelistic rally. My family lived in Houston, Texas, at the time. The evangelist that night was a man named Richard Hogue. I didn’t know anything about him and, to be honest, I still don’t. But when he got up to preach to an audience of several thousand people, he captured my heart with a message about the urgency of following Jesus. I had never heard anyone preach with such passion. It consumed me.

When the service was over, I remember going down front to get as close a look at him as possible. I know that sounds silly, but I was a 19-year-old kid and I wanted to see him up close.

Later, as a student at Ozark Christian College, I was privileged to hear some incredible preachers. I have mentioned four of those preachers in previous columns: Ron Carter, Tom Moll, Dave Bycroft, and Ken Idleman. They all made an impact on my life because they preached in a way that made me want to preach.

As a young preacher, I took my family to the North American Christian Convention every year so I could hear preachers like Wayne Smith, Ben Merold, and Bob Russell. I remember attending one North American Christian Convention, I’m not sure the year, and hearing John Caldwell preach about the need for an “evangelistic church.” I bought the cassette tape and listened to it multiple times on my drive home to Texas.

I could go on, but I’ll stop there. I can honestly say that a big part of why I’ve spent 44 years as a preacher is because *preaching changed my life*.

MY CONVICTION

There certainly have been times of discouragement in my preaching ministry. And there have been many times when I felt inadequate for the task. But I have always had the conviction of heart that preaching still matters. The content matters because we preach the life-changing truth of God’s Word. And the communication matters because we share those truths as

winsomely and persuasively as possible while trusting the Holy Spirit to convict the hearts of the listener.

I doubt my home church preacher, Delmar Debault, had me in mind when he preached my grandmother’s funeral service using John 10:10 as the theme verse. And Richard Hogue didn’t know any more about me than I knew about him when he preached about following Jesus on that summer night in Houston. And while John Caldwell has since become a dear friend to me, he didn’t know who I was when he preached about the need for an evangelistic church at the NACC. But I remember each of those sermons because *preaching changed my life*.

So, to all my preacher friends, wherever you may be on your journey, be encouraged because your preaching matters. And when you face moments of doubt, remember these words from the late pastor and author Adrian Rogers: “You never know the ripple that will touch the shore of eternity when you drop that stone of grace into somebody’s heart.” Preaching has the power to change lives! ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chris Philbeck serves as senior pastor of Mount Pleasant Christian Church in Greenwood, Indiana. He has been in ministry since 1980 and has had the privilege of planting a new church, leading a turnaround church, and now leading a megachurch.

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THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

By Kent E. Fillinger

I received a special gift in the mail a few years ago from my friend Dr. Will Walls, a former missionary and a longtime campus minister. He sent me his copy of the centennial issue of *Christian Standard* from April 9, 1966, because of my history of writing for the magazine. I was a junior at Cincinnati Bible College when my first article was published in the December 20, 1992, issue. Since then, I've had scores of articles published.

I placed the centennial issue Will sent me—which he had saved for over 50 years—on my bookshelf beside my other copies of *Christian Standard*, but I never read through it until very recently. This issue's theme of “looking back” at our Restoration Movement churches prompted me to explore that centennial issue from 58 years ago.

THERE'S NOTHING NEW . . .

Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (1:9).

In 1849, French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote, “plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,” translated as, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

In 2010, rock band Bon Jovi released a greatest hits album which included a new song titled, “The More Things Change.” The song includes lyrics of the reality that “yesterday keeps coming 'round” and “it's the same song with a different melody.”

In a similar fashion, we often keep singing the same “songs” in the church regardless of the date on our calendars.

CHANGE IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

As I read through that centennial issue from five years before I was born, I was reminded that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Many of the same concerns and challenges we're discussing and wrestling with today have been around for decades. The word *change* was used repeatedly in that centennial issue, and it continues to be a constant to describe life and ministry.

In his editorial titled “The Rock Remains,” Edwin V. Hayden wrote, “Change is a human experience. Men can change. Men do change—sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. Men must change, adjusting themselves to the unchanging Christ, if they would be acceptable to God.”

The 75th anniversary issue of *Christian Standard* from April 5, 1941, was built around the theme of the New Testament plea for Christian unity. That issue included “a series of statements from college students and leaders of youth who evaluated the Restoration plea”; in the centennial issue from 1966, those same writers were asked to comment again on the same subject. Here are some of their reflections that are still apt today.

CONCERNS FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR MOVEMENT

Delno W. Brown, then professor at Atlanta Christian College (now called Point University) was one of those repeat writers. In his article, “Deepened Convictions,” he wrote, “The Restoration movement is dead! So, some current seminary professors have been quoted as saying.”

He concluded, “Times have changed, and some of our brethren insist that we must be restructured. The restructure we need is the development of more effective means of restoring the Christianity which captivated our forefathers, and which is disclosed to all of us in the New Testament.”

It seems that hastening or predicting the demise of our movement is a familiar song that’s been sung by some for years. Yet, the Restoration plea continues to hum along!

CONCERNS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

“Fears for youth today are the same as in other times. Situations have changed in identity but not in basic issues,” wrote Ralph Clark, then minister with Mount Olive Christian Church, East Point, Georgia. “There is the fear that youth will not step in the footprints of older leaders, that they will not learn the lessons of responsible leadership, that they will go far afield in their teaching of God’s Word or will reject it altogether. This is a baseless fear.”

I wrote about “The Preacher Pipeline Problem” in my Metrics article for January/February 2022, but reading the centennial issue reminded me that “there’s nothing new under the sun.” Clark reminded readers, “The challenge to win reluctant fields for Christ has the same demanding claim on the life and talents of today’s youth as it had in other days.”

“Students are the product of their teachers,” Clark wrote. “They follow those who are set out as leaders of the faith.”

Let’s continue to teach the next generation well and entrust them to God’s ongoing call on their lives to lead the church into the future.

CONCERNS ABOUT CULTURE, COMMITMENT, AND CONVICTION

W. R. Boebinger, vice president of The Standard Printing Company in 1966, addressed concerns about the culture of his day and the lack of commitment and conviction among Christians and church leaders.

“On every hand are evidences of decay,” Boebinger wrote . . .

Civilization itself is tottering before the ruthless greed of men. Scientific minds are being used not to build a better world, but to destroy the world. So-called financial wizards are not concerned with decreasing the burdens of debt upon the people, but with increasing them. Educators are too prone to be no longer concerned with the search for truth, but are striving to inflict their own pet theories upon the human mind. On every hand, political leadership has become corrupt, and is seeking after power and attempting to subjugate its constituents. Few religious leaders in these days hold aloft the high ideals of the Christ, but rather they are compromising with the world in every conceivable way.

That’s quite a lament, but it’s a familiar refrain regarding the demise of our culture that’s still being preached, written about, and posted about regularly today.

Boebinger continued,

Most of the church buildings are filled on Sunday morning because church going is “the thing to do,” but one sees little evidence of real religious conviction. In most instances, ministers who were once community leaders in advocating and accomplishing moral reform have become mere men “yes men” who follow the public opinion of the times. All too often they are followers rather than leaders.

“ LET’S CONTINUE TO TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION WELL AND ENTRUST THEM TO GOD’S ONGOING CALL ON THEIR LIVES TO LEAD THE CHURCH INTO THE FUTURE. ”

The apparent lack of commitment and conviction among Christians and church leaders continues to be a concern for many.

LOOKING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK

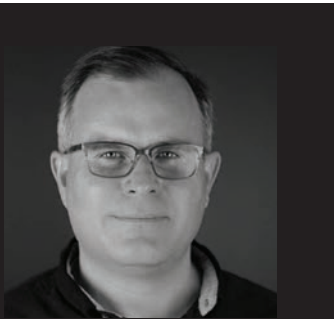
The “News in Brief” section at the end of the centennial issue included announcements for upcoming evangelistic meetings, training seminars, state conventions, missionary conferences, creation of a new Christian camp, and more.

It listed ministers who had changed positions, ministers’ anniversaries, the ordinations of new ministers, workers ready for service, and churches looking for new ministers.


The news section also shared attendance information for the 10 new churches planted during the first three months of 1966, and it celebrated the recent 337 baptisms and 284 transfers of church membership from our churches across the country.

We continue these same practices today in various ways. We measure present realities by considering past situations. And the best predictor of future action is always past action. Let’s ponder these historical reflections and consider how our efforts today as Christian leaders can shape new realities in the future. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kent E. Fillinger serves as president of 3:STRANDS Consulting, Indianapolis, Indiana, and regional vice president (Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan) with Christian Financial Resources.

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18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
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and recovery of sight for the blind,
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THE STORY OF MOUNTAIN CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BY BEN CACHIARAS

Churches don't last forever. The churches Paul worked with in Corinth or Ephesus are both gone. There is a typical life cycle for churches, and those who study such things say that after 30 or 40 years most congregations show signs of stagnancy and start down the backside of the bell curve in decline. This is partly why the vast majority of churches in this country are plateaued or are shrinking in vibrancy and impact. About 5,000 churches will close their doors this year. Most of them are, well, old.

So, when a *really old* church is *bursting* with new life, vibrancy, growth, and impact, it's remarkable and worth celebrating! And when that church is burgeoning in the "rocky soil" of the Northeastern United States, amid 60 million souls with the highest percentage of unchurched people in the country, it's very special, indeed.

This is our situation at Mountain Christian Church! In 2024 we're celebrating our 200th birthday. And there is so much to celebrate!

In 2023 we experienced nearly 40 percent growth year over year, with record numbers in kids, students, young adults, groups, and worship. And 536 baptisms! 2024 has continued the boom with scores of first-time guests and a new surge of attendance. More importantly, as so many churches are experiencing in our post-COVID world, there is a new hunger for God, truth, depth, and community.

A CONGREGATION WITH HISTORY

1824 was 200 years ago—that's quite a long time! John Quincy Adams was president, and there were no cars, computers, or bicycles. If you had an infection, the doctor might prescribe bloodletting and let some leeches suck on you for a while. Before there were matches or movies or light bulbs . . . or bathrooms or indoor plumbing . . . there was a church in Maryland, northeast of Baltimore. And it has continued in an unbroken line through two centuries to this day when God continues to "do something new" (Isaiah 43:18-19, *New Living Translation*).

But the most interesting and important part of a church is not its age or size. It's the defining moments. The stories. The places where God's undeniable presence and power show up.

A defining moment for me personally was my ordination service back in Minnesota. Karla and I felt called to uproot from all we knew and head to Tennessee. My father, John H. Cachiaras, spoke at the service and told how, back in the 1950s, he and Mom had done the same thing, leaving Minnesota to move across the country to enter Butler seminary in Indianapolis. He described those difficult years with a heavy school load, a difficult church situation, a baby, and no money. There were days they didn't know if they would make it.

Dad quoted the old hymn, "God Made a Way." Then he looked right at me and said, "As you go with God and he with you, whatever happens, God will make a way for *you* when there seems to be no way."

I've never forgotten that. And it's true! Countless times God has made a way where there was no way! And *that* is exactly the story of Mountain, as well!

Today Mountain is a thriving multisite, multiethnic church with four campuses (we're pregnant with our fifth!), two community centers, a strong online ministry, and more than 7,000 people who worship together each week. God has made a way! The church in Acts faced all manner of conflict, threats, and persecution. But it prevailed through it all and pressed on unhindered (as the final verse of Acts indicates). And God has also made a way again and again for Mountain for 200 years!



RESTORATION MOVEMENT LEGACY

Samuel Rogers was baptized by Barton Stone; both were great pioneer leaders of the early Restoration Movement. Rogers traveled by horseback from Kentucky to preach in Maryland. On two different trips, in 1821 and 1823, he gathered believers and interested friends in a log cabin called Union Chapel. Then in 1824 Restoration Movement preacher James McVey, also from Kentucky, met with those 14 families representing 11 different churches. He helped them catch a vision for a new expression of church without denominational labels that would identify simply as “Christian”; it would be a place where truly *everyone* was welcome. God made a way, and what would soon be called Mountain Christian Church was born!

We first met in a log cabin-type structure, but growth soon required construction of a white clapboard church building. The Civil War brought heavy losses to the church, but God made a way and Mountain ministered faithfully through it. We planted our first church in 1877, and we would go on to plant over a dozen more. Instrumental music was introduced in 1878, and in 1882 our preacher, Albert Norton, left to begin the first mission of the Christian Churches in India.

God kept sending people and we kept welcoming them! In 1891 a second, larger house of worship was built; it was remodeled and enlarged in 1941. Under the visionary leadership of senior minister William P. Walker and his wife, Doll, in 1956 we relocated 500 feet to what is now known as Walker Chapel, a beautiful neo-Gothic stone structure with a stately steeple. Old-timers remember “walk over Sunday” when, like the children of Israel, we marched together to occupy our new “Promised Land!” God kept sending people and we kept welcoming them! An educational wing was added, then a K-8th school. In the 1960s Mountain experimented with a drive-in church service! Just pull into the parking lot and tune in on your car radio! I imagine the deacons went car-to-car collecting the offering! Members of the church were obedient to calls to the mission fields of Rhodesia (now called Zimbabwe), Kenya, Mexico, Japan, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, England, Tanzania, and many other places around the world—and each one of them has harrowing stories with the same punchline: God made a way!

RENEWED HOPE IN A DARK SEASON

The year 1983 brought dark days for our church. There was a disagreement about a pastor and whether he should be dismissed. It got very contentious, and it split the church. About half of our 600 members left with two pastors to begin another church. It was a horribly difficult time. We had lasted through America’s Civil War, but now we had our own civil war within the church. Families hurt and friendships were damaged. On the heels of that horrible event came our annual Faith Promise Rally for missions, when we would pledge “over and above” giving in faith that God would provide. The first round of commitments had been collected before our congregation was reduced in size. That had produced a stretch-of-faith number. Now what would we do? Should we adjust the number downward to better reflect our decimated membership? We decided to leave the goal where it was and trust God.

The day came when everyone made their gifts and pledges. Some took the cards to a back room to count them up while the rest of us sang and worshipped. Soon a leader came back in with the results. Everyone was on pins and needles. He cleared his throat, wiped his eyes, and read the total pledges . . . which **exceeded the original goal!** People erupted into applause and cheered; they stood on pews, hugged, and laughed. In that moment we knew God had made a way where there seemed to be no way!

Still, we worried: *Who would come out East to serve as minister with a depleted, discouraged little church that just lost half its members?* But God made a way, and in 1984 God sent Dr. Charles and Barbara Cook who led us into a beautiful new era of unity and getting back to welcoming whomever God would send.

Karla and I arrived in 1997, and I remember thinking on my first Sunday, with 700 people present, “I’m in way over my head here. There is *no way!*” I preached a message from Acts 2, doing my best to describe the beauty of Jesus’ church and being simply Christian. After the sermon, a man (who I later learned was an atheist) marched down the aisle straight toward me with a strange look on his face. I didn’t know any better, so I asked him what he wanted and gave him a microphone! He said, “I finally get it! I want to do this Jesus thing!” Moments later, he came up out of the baptism waters and pumped his fists in the air, jumped up and down, and in a crazy laugh shouted, “Woo hoo!” God has been making a way like that for these last 26 years, again and again.



GOD MADE A WAY

I could tell you so many stories. Like the time we were trying to build our New Life Center but couldn't proceed because of multiple failed perc tests (a septic requirement). We didn't know what to do. The whole project was about to screech to a halt. An elder suggested we pray one more time and test again. I rolled my eyes, but we prayed. The next day he went out and dug yet another hole—and it *perced!* The project moved forward, and God made a way!

Or like the time we felt called to plant a new church just down the road, and sent off four full-time staff members and nearly 300 members so God could launch Community Christian Church one exit away. It was scary, but God filled those spots in no time and made a way!

Or the time Tom Moen, our global missions pastor, and I were sent to Africa to find a new mission partner, and at the last minute we connected with Mary and Wallace Kamau with Missions of Hope International. They had grown their holistic, Christ-centered ministry that provides education, health care, food, and Jesus to reach children and families amid the most abject poverty we'd ever witnessed in the slums. When we saw hundreds of children's names on a waiting list, we promised to help get every one of them into school. We came home and shared the need with the Mountain people and many other churches, and by God's grace, that partnership today serves over 30,000 children in 36 centers!

I could tell you about campuses that met in Catholic schools and health clubs (no way!—yes way!), or opening the EPICENTER, a beautiful community center that seemed impossible at first. But last year, EPICENTER served 11,000 people, including 712 ex-criminal offenders, and gave away 250,000 pounds of food, and it now has two locations. Or launching our Aberdeen Campus in the middle of COVID. *No way!*

STANDING FIRM

What's the secret sauce to Mountain's enduring health and longevity? I'm hesitant to say it's anything we're doing at all. But we do try to “stand firm, and let nothing move [us]” (1 Corinthians 15:58) from the following key commitments:

- **Stick to the Mission.** We are mission-driven. It's easy for churches to drift, and make it about “us,” and forget why we're here! We're not here to play games; we're trying to make it hard to go to Hell in Maryland! “Mission first” is our mantra, and our mission is to “make *more* and *better* disciples.” If a decision ever comes down to choosing between making ourselves more comfortable or reaching out to one more lost person, we are going to do whatever it takes to reach out. Every single time. And once a person says yes

to Jesus, we have clear pathways and make it natural to follow and obey him for a lifetime.

- **Stand firm on essentials.** Holding fast to the same Restoration ideals that formed us 200 years ago—like scriptural authority and striving for unity—and the core matters of our faith (and allowing liberty in nonessentials) are more important now than ever. Preach it, live it, stand firm.
- **Strong leadership matters.** The church can rise no higher than its leaders. Leaders are too often the “lid” instead of the “lift.” Capable elders, carefully selected, within a healthy, biblical governance model, partnered with competent staff form a powerful team. Choosing wisely and building trust lets us move at the speed of the Holy Spirit.
- **Stay humble, stay hungry.** If anything good has happened at Mountain in 200 years, it's not *because* of us, it's in *spite* of us! Stay humble! At the same time, we refuse to become complacent and to think we've arrived. Yesterday's medals can become shackles in tomorrow's race. We keep a future focus with fresh vision. *We believe nothing in our past compares with the future God has in store for us.* We look back with gratitude at the people of faith who have gone before us; but we stand on their shoulders and peer forward with expectancy, believing to our core that God is about to do a new thing!

Mountain has come through the Civil War, two World Wars, cold wars, and cyber wars. We've been here through the Great Depression and multiple economic disasters. We've survived dark days of social upheaval, political turmoil, and not one, but *two* pandemics. Through it all, when there seemed to be *no way* . . . God *made* a way!

Mountain's “life verse” is Psalm 118:23: “The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.” It's easy to get that backwards: “Look at all this cool stuff we've done for you, God! Isn't it marvelous in your eyes?” In reality, the Lord has done this, and we marvel.

For 200 years that's been the story of Mountain. And it's the story of the church where you serve, too. Because for 2,000 years God has been doing what he promised: building *his* church. And whatever congregations may come and go in the meantime, until the kingdom has come in its fullness, the gates of hell will not prevail against Jesus' church. ■

Ben Cachiaras serves as lead pastor of Mountain Christian Church located in and around Joppa, Maryland.



TRADERS POINT
CHRISTIAN CHURCH



190 Years of
Kingdom-
Centered
Service

By Aaron Brockett

Many people unfamiliar with the history of Traders Point Christian Church assume that TPCC is younger than it really is. It's not uncommon for me to be asked, "When did you start the church?" The inquirer's surprised look is almost predictable when I say, "Actually, our 'launch Sunday' was back in 1834!" This fact continues to amaze me every time I'm reminded of the history, legacy, and faithfulness of hundreds of men and women who came before us in central Indiana to make Traders Point what it is today.

When I stop to think about all we've been through as a church in our nearly 200 years of history, it's astounding. For example, we've been through multiple world wars, several recessions and depressions, as well as massive shifts in society and culture. I like to joke that most churches have endured only *one* global pandemic, but we've navigated at least two or three!

The average "life cycle" of many churches is said to be roughly 40 to 50 years. That means if a church doesn't make a concerted effort to contextualize the mission and ministry for a new, yet-to-be-reached generation, then it is at significant risk to plateau, decline, and eventually die. We see hundreds of churches reach the end of this "life cycle" every year and close their doors for the last time. Jesus warned us of this sobering possibility in his letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

Traders Point has been a relatively small church for most of our existence. The past four decades of our 189 years of meeting together have brought about tremendous growth, change, and impact. When I'm asked why this is, I immediately think about the faith, boldness, and courage of so many men and women through the generations. The decisions they made and the sacrifices they willingly offered to restart the church's "life cycle" has ensured the mission didn't end with them. I'm so grateful for them and the DNA they've infused into our church.

NECESSARY, NOT EASY

For example, right after I was hired, one of the long-standing elders at the time took me to lunch. He'd been with the church for decades and had been in leadership through much of the initial growth. I asked him what he thought was the "turning point."

Early in his leadership, TPCC had a good man as their minister, he said. People liked him, but in this elder's words, "He couldn't preach his way out of a brown paper bag!" He said leadership made the painful decision to transition the minister to a role better suited to his giftedness. People were upset and the elders took a lot of flak for that decision. He looked at me and said, "That's when things began to change, and we started to reach people." Then he added, "We've always been willing to find the courage to do what's necessary, not always what's easy."

In many ways, the story of Traders Point is that of unsung and underrated leaders who God has used in incredible ways, who found the courage to do what's necessary, not always what's easy.

For the better part of a century, Traders Point was a rural church on the outskirts of Indianapolis. The name came from an area of town where people stopped to trade goods before heading to Chicago or out West. Most of the pastors in those early days came and went, few of them serving for more than a couple of years. It wasn't until the 1950s that the church had the size and resources to pay a full-time minister. During this time, Indianapolis was growing, inching its way closer to our church building northwest of the city.

A NEEDED TURNING POINT

In the late 1960s, Dave Roberts was hired as minister. Dave bucked the trend of the typical two to three years of ministry by staying and serving 14 years. In the early 1980s, Dave left to teach full time at Milligan College. He had been working on a paper for an academic degree he had just completed. In his last elders meeting, he handed them the completed paper. The thesis was on governance models for the church. (I don't think this was a common subject in the 1980s!) It's my understanding his last words to the elders were something along the lines of, "The city is growing toward us. If we want to reach the people coming this way, then we need to be ready for them. Part of being ready is reexamining our governance, our structure, and how we will go about accomplishing the mission in a changing environment."

Wow!

The gift Dave gave to our church has never been publicly acknowledged, and it can easily be

overlooked. So let me proclaim it now! *Dave Robert's 14-year tenure, as well as his foresight to challenge the elders to reexamine the structure and systems of ministry, were a turning point in the life of our church.* It set us up for decades of fruitfulness when we could have been sucked into the vortex of apathy and tradition. He deserves more credit than he's received.

Dave may have teed things up, but God next brought the person who propelled our church toward the future we are experiencing today.

A LEGACY OF TRUST

Howard Brammer began his ministry at Traders Point in the early 1980s. At the time, we were a midsize (for that day) neighborhood church. "Class act" is the best way to describe Howard. His steady, pastoral, and unanxious presence impacted thousands of lives. Many of our current elders and long-tenured "members" met Jesus and/or grew exponentially in their relationship with Jesus under Howard's ministry and direct influence. Of course, I can't leave out his wife, Martha! If Howard was the steady bass drum, Martha was the snare drum and the cymbals! She was artistic, flamboyant, and warm. They were a dynamic ministry duo and the heartbeat of Traders Point for decades.

The church grew at a steady and sustainable pace for the majority of his 24-plus years of ministry here. Howard gave our church consistency, faithfulness, and trust. In fact, that's what Howard and I talked about in our very first conversation back in 2007.

"Aaron," he said, "never forget that trust takes years to earn and only a few moments to lose."

I believe the biggest reason there is such a high level of trust in leadership in our congregation is because of Howard. It's in our DNA because of

him. I've told him countless times, "Thank you for letting me stand on your shoulders. They trust me largely because they trusted you." It's a responsibility and privilege I don't take lightly.

During the last few years of Howard's ministry, he led in casting a huge vision that fundamentally changed the scope of our ministry and the number of people we potentially could reach with the hope and help of the gospel. A relocation effort started that took nearly a decade to play out. After numerous closed doors, God opened the right one that featured 90-plus acres of land on the northwest side of Indianapolis. On it, the church built a 2,600-seat auditorium (the average weekend attendance at the time was around 1,600) and relocated there in April 2007. Two months later, in June, Howard announced his retirement.

The elders contacted me that summer, and I joined the staff in November. I was 31 years old and immediately felt the weight and responsibility. What I lacked in experience, I tried to make up for in authenticity and passion. We set our focus on trying to speak to and serve those who were disconnected from or disillusioned with the church. John Stott's classic book on preaching, *Between Two Worlds*, was one of the foundational works in shaping my view and understanding of the role of biblical preaching. Build a bridge from the secular to the sacred and walk people back and forth from the "text" of Scripture to the "context" of their everyday lives. By God's grace, and in ways I don't fully understand, we began to grow rapidly.

Within a few years, our leadership noticed a couple of things:

1. ***Our new location expanded our reach regionally.*** For years, we had largely been a neighborhood church, but our new facility sat right off I-65, a major interstate connecting Indianapolis to Chicago. As a result, we saw hundreds of people driving 30, 40, even 50 minutes to attend.



Our
*'launch
Sunday'*
was back
in 1834.



EPHESIANS 5:14

"Wake up, sleeper, rise
from the dead, and
Christ will shine on you."



Healthy
things
reproduce.



"We've always been willing to find
the courage to do what's necessary,
not always what's easy."

2. ***We began to max out our new facility when it was only a few years old.*** For several reasons, we didn't think the answer was to build an even bigger facility. We also wanted the people who were driving more than 20 or 30 minutes to join a group, serve, and invite their friends. That was unlikely for people driving such significant distances. *Multisite* was relatively new and somewhat untested as a strategy, at least for us. At the time, there weren't many (if any) churches in central Indiana with more than one campus. We ultimately decided to decentralize by launching campus locations around the city where we already had a high concentration of people engaged in the life and mission of our church.

In 2016, we chose to be "one church in multiple locations" and started our first campus. Today, we have six locations around the city with plans to start numbers seven and eight. Here are a few things I love about multisite:

- We have expressions of our church in various parts of our city because we love every part of our city!
- Every time we start a new location, we "deepen the bench." People who were previously unengaged become engaged in the mission by serving and leading.
- The reach of our church continues to expand.
- Healthy things reproduce. The best way to breathe new life into aging movements is to start new things.

When the dark, looming clouds of COVID-19 started to lift a couple of years ago, we began to ask the same question as many others, "What's next?" Personally, my entire tenure at Traders

Point up until 2020 was a rocket ship of growth and faith. I'd lie awake at night and wonder, *Are our best days behind us?* It was a question mainly born out of insecurity. I should have known the pandemic caught everyone but God off guard. Through that season, our leadership leaned on Ephesians 5:14: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." This passage was literally a wake-up call for us to realize God wanted to do something new.

A TIME OF AWAKENING

In April 2022, we started working on the next two- to four-year vision for our church. We call it "Awaken." We started gathering with small groups of people in early 2023 to share the vision and solicit feedback. Late last year we wrapped up a six-week series of messages on it, followed by the entire church making financial commitments toward what God wants to do. The response has been incredible! The stories pouring in from people who are confessing they've been spiritually asleep and need to be reawakened to the voice of God so that he can do something *in them* and *through them* has been inspiring.

It feels like we're witnessing another pivotal moment in the history of our church. It quite possibly could be a moment we'll look back on and say that God breathed new life into our old church once again so that his work of redeeming and restoring what has been lost to sin and brokenness will continue for generations to come. The next chapter in our long history is just beginning, and I can't wait to see where God takes us. ■

Aaron Brockett serves as lead pastor with Traders Point Christian Church, with locations in and around Indianapolis.

OLDEST INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND CHURCHES OF CHRIST

BY JIM NIEMAN

YEAR STARTED	CHURCH NAME	LOCATION	
1740	Calvary Christian Church	Glen Allen	VA
1790	East Union Christian Church	Carlisle	KY
1798	Stony Point Christian Church	Charlestown	IN
1800	Parksville Christian Church	Parksville	KY
1800	Cool Spring Christian Church	Keysville	VA
1803	Indian Creek Christian Church	Cynthiana	KY
1811	Dutch Fork Christian Church	Claysville	PA
1812	Post Oak Springs Christian Church	Rockwood	TN
1814	Countryside Church of Christ	Seaman	OH
1815	Driftwood Christian Church	Vallonia	IN
1818	Mulkeytown Christian Church	Mulkeytown	IL
1819	Keensburg Christian Church	Keensburg	IL
1820	New Glasgow Christian Church	New Glasgow	CAN.
1821	Bentonville Ebenezer Christian Church	Lewisville	IN
1821	Bethel Christian Church	Fountain City	IN
1821	First Christian Church	Minerva	OH
1823	New Hope Christian Church	Columbus	IN
1823	Clermont Christian Church	Clermont	IN
1823	Little Prairie Christian Church	Albion	IL
1824	Mountain Christian Church	Joppa	MD
1824	Berlin Christian Church	Berlin	IL
1825	Boones Creek Christian Church	Johnson City	TN
1825	North Central Church of Christ	Bloomington	IN
1826	Leesburg Christian Church	Cynthiana	KY
1826	Mackville Christian Church	Mackville	KY
1827	Bluff Creek Christian Church	Greenwood	IN
1828	Corner House Christian Church	Hubbard	OH
1828	Lick Prairie Christian Church	near Lancaster	IL
1828	Bethany Christian Church	Bumpass	VA
1828	Old Ford Church of Christ	Washington	NC
1829	Plainfield Christian Church	Plainfield	IN
1830	White Oak Christian Church	Cincinnati	OH
1830	Bethany Christian Church	Washington	IN
1830	Hanoverton Christian Church	Hanoverton	OH
1830	Greenford Christian Church	Greenford	OH
1830	Union City Christian Church	Richmond	KY
1830	Manville Christian Church	Madison	IN
1831	First Christian Church	Monticello	KY
1831	Clarksburg Christian Church	Clarksburg	IN
1832	Greenford Christian Church	Greenford	OH
1832	Germantown Christian Church	Brooksville	KY
1832	Ash Grove Christian Church	Windsor	IL
1832	Corinth Christian Church	Manquin	VA
1833	First Christian Church	Decatur	IL
1833	Tranter's Creek Church of Christ	Washington	NC
1834	Traders Point Christian Church	Whitestown	IN
1834	Hopwood Christian Church	Milligan College	TN
1834	Pleasant Ridge Christian Church	near Lawrenceville	IL
1834	Clarence Church of Christ	Clarence	NY
1835	The Church at Mt. Gilead	Mooreville	IN
1835	First Christian Church	Charlottesville	VA
1836	Pleasant Hill Christian Church	Washington County	IA
1837	Middletown Christian Church	Middletown	MO
1837	Connection Pointe Christian Church	Brownsburg	IN
1838	Eastside Christian Church	Milford	OH
1839	Campbellsville Christian Church	Campbellsville	KY
1839	First Christian Church	Sturgis	KY
1839	Portland Mills Christian Church	Rockville	IN
1840	Mount Tabor Christian Church	Salem	IN
1840	Northpointe Community Church	DeWitt	MI
1840	CrossView Christian Church	Waynesville	OH

YEAR STARTED	CHURCH NAME	LOCATION	
1840	First Christian Church	Grayville	IL
1840	Bethlehem Church of Christ	Winchester	OH
1840	New Somerset Christian Church	Toronto	OH
1840	Christian Church of New Cumberland	New Cumberland	WV
1841	Cambridge City Christian Church	Cambridge City	IN
1841	Hutsonville Christian Church	Hutsonville	IL
1841	Ruddles Mill Christian Church	Paris	KY
1842	First Christian Church	Barnesville	OH
1842	Poplar Ridge Christian Church	Piney Flats	TN
1842	Lancaster Church of Christ	Lancaster	IL
1843	White House Christian Church	Bridgeport	IL
1844	South Fork Christian Church	Verona	KY
1844	Abingdon Church of Christ	Abingdon	IA
1845	Warsaw Christian Church	Warsaw	MO
1845	Marion Christian Church	near West Salem	IL
1845	Bachelor Creek Church of Christ	Wabash	IN
1845	Pattonsburg Christian Church	Toluca	IL
1845	County Line Christian Church	Axton	VA
1846	Amity Christian Church	Amity	OR
1847	Delta Church of Christ	Delta	OH
1847	Ladoga Christian Church	Ladoga	IN
1848	Athens Christian Church	Lexington	KY
1850	Indian Run Christian Church	East Canton	OH
1850	Croton Church of Christ	Croton	OH
1850	Texas Christian Church	Clinton	IL
1850	Westport Christian Church	Westport	IN
1850	Lane Christian Church	Lane	IL
1850	White Mills Christian Church	White Mills	KY
1850	Hardinville Christian Church	Hardinville	IL
1850	Athens Chapel Church of Christ	Bath	NC
1851	First Christian Church	Warsaw	IN
1851	First Christian Church	Carmi	IL
1852	Millersburg Christian Church	Millersburg	OH
1852	Colfax Christian Church	Colfax	IN
1852	First Christian Church	Clinton	IL
1853	Central Christian Church	Mt. Vernon	IL
1853	Lincoln Christian Church	Lincoln	IL
1853	Castle Rock Christian Church	Castle Rock	WA
1853	Orleans Church of Christ	near Moulton	IA
1853	Georgetown Christian Church	Georgetown	IN
1854	Rising Sun Church of Christ	Pleasant Hill	IA
1854	Buchanan Christian Church	Buchanan	MI
1854	Maple Grove Christian Church	Jamesville	NC
1855	First Christian Church	Canton	OH
1855	First Christian Church	Columbus	IN
1855	Shelby Christian Church	Versailles	IN
1855	Atlanta Christian Church	Atlanta	IL
1856	Milford Church of Christ	Centerburg	OH
1856	Greenville First Christian Church	Greenville	IL
1856	Willisburg Christian Church	Willisburg	KY
1856	First Christian Church	Lyons-Muir	MI
1857	Christian Chapel Church of Christ	Williamston	NC
1858	Pleasant Grove Church of Christ	Mt. Gilead	OH
1858	Pricetown Church of Christ	Hillsboro	OH
1858	Putnam Christian Church	Putnam	IL
1858	West Village Christian Church	near Albion	IL
1858	First Christian Church	West Salem	IL
1859	Hope Christian Church	Indianapolis	IN
1859	Crossroads Christian Church	Washington Court House	OH
1859	Millwood Church of Christ	Howard	OH
1859	Athens Chapel Church of Christ	Bath	NC

We thank visitors to *Christian Standard's* website for helping us to compile this list of the oldest Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ that are still meeting for worship each week. If you know the names and start dates of additional churches that should be listed, send us an email at cs@christianstandard-media.com or leave a comment beneath the online version of this article at ChristianStandard.com.

the restoration movement



A History of Separation

By Richard J. CheroK

Among the guiding principles that set the Restoration Movement in motion was a concern for Christian unity. In *The Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington*, Thomas Campbell's seminal work that gave direction and guidance to the fledgling movement, Campbell declared division among Christians "a horrid evil, fraught with many evils." He further stated that Christian division "is antichristian . . . antiscipitural . . . antinatural . . . [and] productive of confusion and of every evil work." Yet, the fellowship of believers that emerged with these initial ideas has experienced two major separations and a number of smaller ones as well. This essay will explore the pivotal issues that gave rise to the divisions that have left the Restoration Movement with three distinct communities of faith.

Perhaps the crowning event of the Restoration Movement's early history arose out of two meetings in the Lexington, Kentucky, area surrounding the Christmas and New Year's holidays of 1831–1832. In these meetings, the Christian reform movements of Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell were introduced to one another and their similarities were accentuated. At the second of the two meetings, Stone and "Raccoon" John Smith, an evangelist who represented the Campbell reform efforts, shook hands to symbolize the unification of these two Christian fellowships. While there were no actual governing bodies to be merged or to declare this union accomplished, the participants in these assemblies exerted a great deal of energy proclaiming that the two communions had become one.

As the unity announcement made its way among the churches, the Disciples of Christ*, as Alexander Campbell's community of churches were known, both accepted and celebrated the merger. The "New Light" Christians associated with Barton Stone, however, were somewhat less enthusiastic about the union, and a significant number of their congregations refused to participate in the newly established fellowship. Nevertheless, the Christian body that emerged from the accord resulted in the fastest-growing Christian fellowship in 19th-century America. Yet, the seeds of disunion were quickly planted.

FIRST DIVISION

The first major division within the Restoration Movement has often been described as a separation over the use of instrumental music in worship. And, while the use of musical instruments was certainly the most visible representation of this fissure, the roots of this division ran much deeper than the mere use of musical instruments in worship.

Soon after ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1788, differing philosophies of interpretation emerged that would impact both the nation and the church. The Jeffersonians of the South favored a "strict constructionist" view of the document, insisting that only those powers explicitly enumerated within the Constitution are permissible for the new government to act upon. The Hamiltonians of the North, however, promoted a "loose constructionist" view that argued for adherence to the constitutional mandates while permitting freedom to act (or not act) upon issues that are not prohibited or addressed within the Constitution.

As these interpretive philosophies became more prominent within their respective sections of the nation, they were also adopted as regional standards for explaining Scripture. So, while the loose constructionists of the North saw freedom in practices that are neither prohibited nor addressed in Scripture (e.g., instruments in worship or missionary societies), the strict constructionists of the South contended that the silence of Scripture (specifically of the New Testament in matters related to the church) is a prohibition of such actions. Thus, the churches of the South eschewed the use of instrumental music in worship, missionary societies, and other "innovations" that are not expressly identified as New Testament commands or precedents.

The tensions of the Civil War both widened the gap between the Northern and Southern churches and reinforced each region's resolve to hold more firmly to their distinctive practices and characteristics.



This strict constructionist approach to Scripture was confirmed in the thought of many Southern members of the Restoration Movement after Jesse B. Ferguson, a prominent minister with the Nashville (Tennessee) Church of Christ, nearly destroyed the congregation when he accepted some of the religious trends of his day (including Spiritualism). The ramifications of the Ferguson calamity in the 1850s had a lasting impact upon two of the South's most respected voices. Nashville-based evangelist Tolbert Fanning and his protégé, David Lipscomb, who later edited the South's most influential magazine, *The Gospel Advocate*, became staunch objectors to any "innovations" added to the direct commands and precedents established in Scripture.

The tensions of the Civil War both widened the gap between the Northern and Southern churches and reinforced each region's resolve to hold more firmly to their distinctive practices and characteristics. As a result, the 40 years that followed the Civil War were marked with heated controversies over the propriety of "innovations" within the movement. What had once been dismissed as personal opinions became points of conflict and contention, and perhaps no issue was more inflammatory during these years than the musical instrument question.

When Lewis L. Pinkerton introduced a melodeon into his church in Midway, Kentucky, in 1849, few people noticed or cared about his use of a musical instrument in worship. In the years after the Civil War, however, as Northern churches welcomed the accompaniment of musical instruments into their congregations, the churches of the war-ravaged South grew increasingly resistant to the acceptance of this "innovation" into the movement.

As the years of conflict and controversy mounted, the U.S. Census Bureau served as the conduit by which the noninstrumental churches of the South separated themselves from the Disciples of Christ. In 1906, as the bureau prepared for a special Census of Religious Bodies, agent S.N.D. North contacted David Lipscomb to inquire about the relationship of the noninstrumental churches to the Disciples of Christ. Lipscomb responded by insisting that the Churches of Christ in the South are a distinct fellowship and requested that they be listed separately from the Disciples of Christ in the 1906 census, thus formalizing the first major division of the Restoration Movement.

SECOND DIVISION

Around the start of the 19th century, a "new theology" known as Modernism or theological liberalism originated in German universities. Using the newly formed techniques of biblical higher criticism to study the Bible, liberal scholars questioned the traditional authorship of the biblical books, the plausibility of miracles, the veracity of Scripture, and even the very notion of Scripture as God's revelation to humanity. By the latter half of the 19th century, liberalism had found its way into the leading American universities and was filtering down into many American churches.

Theological liberalism grew quickly within the Disciples of Christ, largely because it was endorsed by many prominent Disciple leaders and gained acceptance in many colleges within the movement. Along with the growth of liberalism came a questioning of the long-established Disciple belief in the necessity of baptism for salvation. The resultant practice of "open membership" began to appear in both the churches and on the mission field, and it rapidly became a volatile issue among Disciples. By the early years of the 20th century, it was readily apparent that the Disciples were polarizing into conservative and liberal factions, and fault lines were beginning to emerge.

An additional disturbance that widened the gap between conservative and liberal Disciples was a proposal to unite the movement's three missionary societies into a single organization. While liberals argued that merging the missionary societies into the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS) would provide financial and organizational efficiency, the conservative Disciples feared

By the early years of the 20th century, it was readily apparent that the Disciples were polarizing into conservative and liberal factions, and fault lines were beginning to emerge.

the society would be too powerful and have no accountability to the churches. Amid a contentious struggle, the missionary societies (and six other benevolent agencies) were combined to form the UCMS in 1920.

Within a few years of the UCMS's beginning, conservatives were angered to learn that the society accepted open membership in the mission field and entered comity agreements that divided missionary fields into denominational regions. When Leslie Wolfe, a veteran missionary in the Philippines, refused to relocate his successful ministry from Manila because a comity agreement excluded Disciples from working in that region, the UCMS discontinued his funding in April 1926. Conservative Disciples affiliated with the *Christian Standard* and the Christian Restoration Association, however, raised the financial support necessary to sustain Wolfe's ministry in Manila. The ensuing effort to subsidize Wolfe's ministry without the benefit of a missionary society led to a conservative network of direct-support missionaries.

In November 1926, conservatives brought Wolfe to the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, with the hope that his story might expose the liberal activities of the UCMS. The convention's liberal leadership, however, permitted Wolfe to speak only for a few brief minutes and his claims were quickly disregarded. As a response to the liberal's slight to their concerns, the conservatives, led by P.H. Welshimer, minister of the First Christian Church in Canton, Ohio, developed a rival convention that would focus on preaching, teaching, and fellowship. This new convention, the North American Christian Convention, held their initial gathering in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1927.

Although numerous differences were apparent well before the Memphis convention, the events at Memphis created a chasm between the conservatives and liberals that grew increasingly wider and deeper in the years that followed. By the 1960s, when the liberals authorized the Commission on Restructure to explore the possibility of reorganizing the Disciples of Christ along denominational lines, a *de facto* separation between the conservatives and liberals had already occurred. So, when the Disciples voted to approve the plan of Brotherhood Restructure at the 1968 International Convention, creating the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination, many conservative churches requested that

their congregations no longer be listed in the Yearbook of the Disciples of Christ.

At roughly the same time, it became apparent that candidates for military chaplaincy within the movement required approval from the liberal leadership of the Disciples. This prompted the conservatives to appeal to the Armed Forces Chaplains Board for the creation of a Chaplaincy Endorsement Commission of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ to sanction chaplaincy candidates from conservative churches. After the Chaplaincy Endorsement Commission was approved in 1969, an additional request was made for a separate listing of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in the Yearbook of American Churches. The acceptance of the separate listing in 1971 formalized the division between the Disciples of Christ and the more conservative Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.

OBSERVATIONS

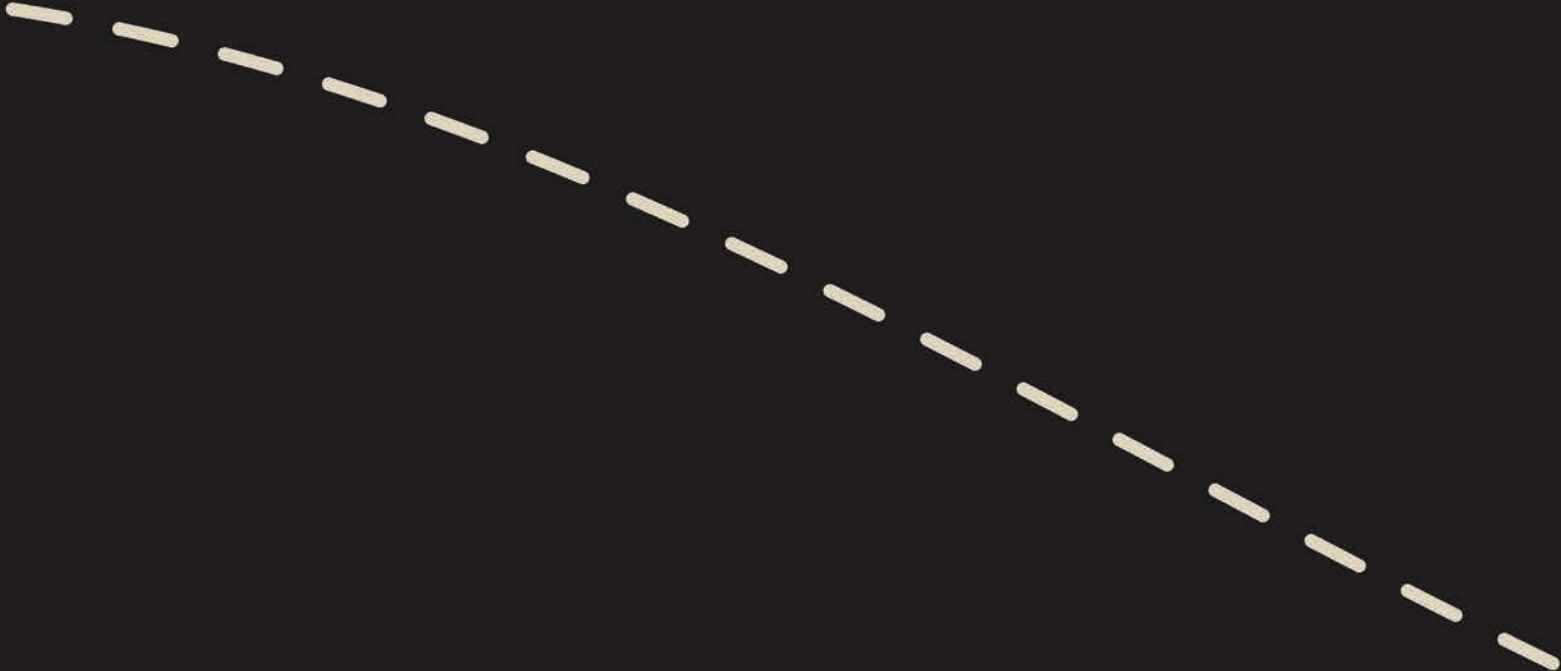
One might easily criticize the Restoration Movement for emphasizing the importance of Christian unity while experiencing two major divisions within its own heritage. As a fellowship of autonomous churches with no overarching headquarters or controlling leadership outside of the individual congregation, however, the Restoration Movement has proven rather resilient to divisions. A thousand different autonomous churches may espouse a thousand differing opinions within the Restoration Movement, yet the movement has managed to prevent fellowship fractures from arising with every divergent concern. And while our desire should be to fulfill Jesus' prayer (John 17) for unity based upon the truth of God's Word for the purpose of winning the world to him, it may be too easy to overlook the vast number of divisions that have occurred within most denominations as one points out the rifts of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

*The descriptive titles "Disciples of Christ," "Church of Christ," and "Christian Church" were used interchangeably after the merger of the Stone and Campbell Movements. After the divisions of the 20th century, they became more exclusive identifiers of the various groups within the movement. ■

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UNDERSTANDING THE DISCIPLES' DECLINE

BY JAMES HANSEE



The men and women who aligned with the Restoration Movement in its early years chose to be identified as Christians only, without ties to any sect or denomination. The movement as a whole held that commitment for the next 150 years or so. Then in 1968, one stream of the movement, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), began functioning structurally as a denomination. Since that time, the Disciples have experienced significant decline. In addition to moving to a full denominational structure, several other factors have contributed to that decline, specifically the priority of unity and theological flexibility.

Membership among the Disciples peaked in 1958 at just under 2 million. The *Christian*

Post reported membership dropped below 1 million in 1993 and has been in steady decline since then. By 2017, membership dipped below 500,000, the *Post's* Michael Gryboski reported, and by 2022 total membership was down to 278,000.

Robert Cornwall, an ordained Disciples minister and board chair for the denomination's Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministries, acknowledged in an article/blog post following the 2023 General Assembly of the Disciples that structural issues of the denomination may be contributing to the decline.

"Many of our structures were developed back in the 1960s when our membership stood

above a million members,” Cornwall wrote in August 2023 at the Word & Way website (wordandway.org). “It’s interesting that while we are flexible in our theology and spiritual practices, we discovered that our structures were less flexible.”

Some structural changes were made at the recent General Assembly, but he admitted, “Implementation . . . will be challenging.” Cornwall quoted a friend who said, “Change is hard, stagnation is fatal.” Cornwall added, “As we navigate as a denomination in these very challenging times, we cannot afford stagnation.”

UNITY FOCUS

Ironically, another factor contributing to the decline of the Disciples is their priority on unity.

“As a denomination that claims Christian unity as our Polar Star, we will need to ponder what that means for us in this age,” Cornwall wrote. “What kinds of new configurations will emerge? Will we see more merger of congregations? Will denominations become less parochial and embrace anew Jesus’ call for unity (John 17)?”

The Disciples have indeed sought to keep unity as their “polar star,” a line coined by early reformer Barton W. Stone, but at what cost? Since the founding of the Disciples denomination, they have sought to enter into full communion partnership agreements with other denominations and organizations seeking unity. In 1989, the Disciples entered into an “ecumenical partnership” with the United Church of Christ, a denomination formed from a union of other denominations in 1957. Additionally, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have partnerships with the World Council of Churches and the United Church of Canada, among others.

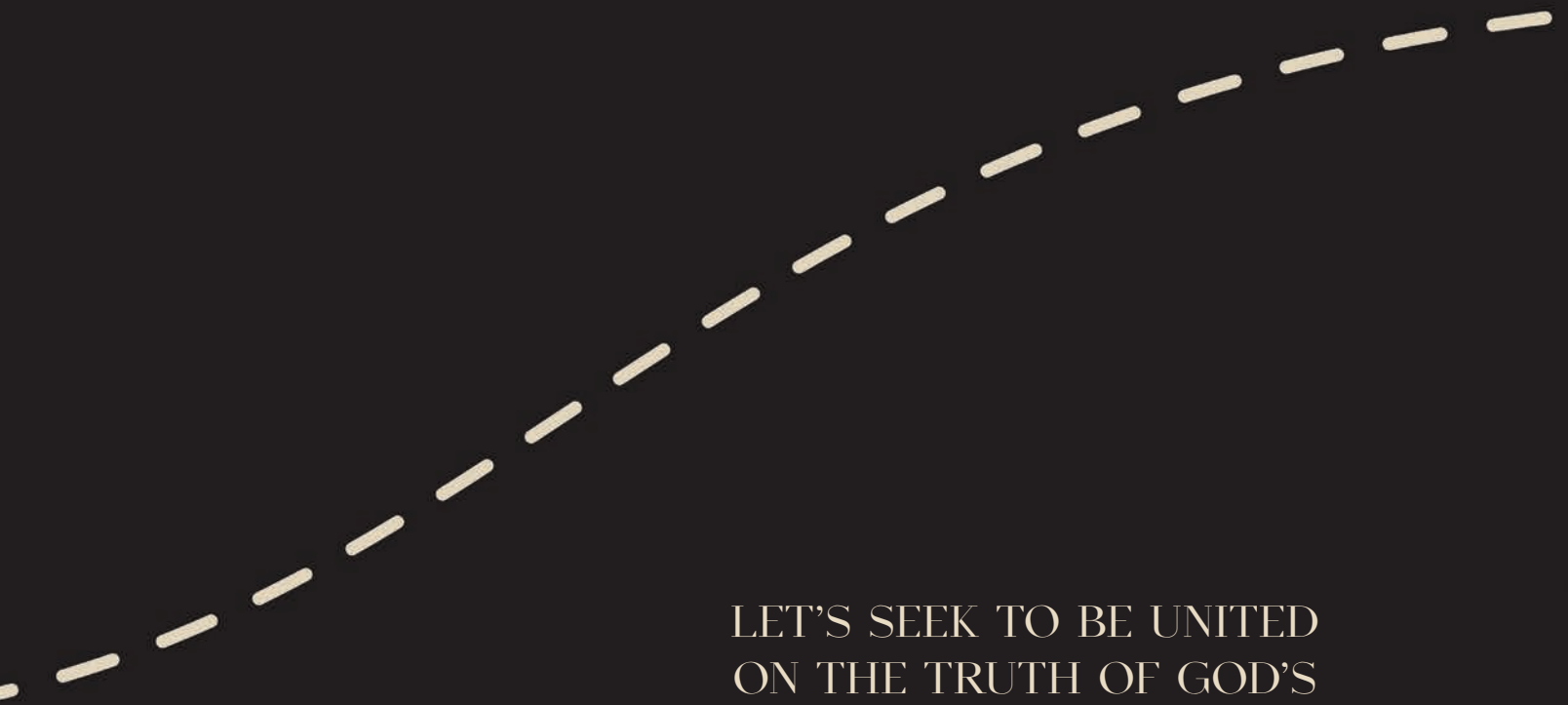
The unity focus of the Restoration Movement’s founders was rooted in a common

commitment to the guidance and authority of Scripture. Yet, the Disciples partnered with denominations that expound liberal interpretations of Scripture influenced by the Modernist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These theological positions were departures from the orthodox scriptural interpretations, based on the authoritative nature of the Word, held by their Restoration Movement brothers, the noninstrumental Churches and Christ and the Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

Commenting on this, Jeffrey Walton wrote at Juicy Ecumenism (juicyecumenism.com) that the Disciples “share many of the demographic problems faced by mainline Protestants: overwhelmingly white congregations, declining birth rates, and an exodus of members that adhere to theologically orthodox teaching.” He notes, aside from demographic challenges, that some members of the Disciples have left the denomination to return to churches and/or denominations that hold to traditional orthodoxy.

The Disciples have worked to be diverse at the denominational level, even if that goal is elusive at the congregational level. At the national level, the Disciples have “three racial/ethnic general ministries that provide resources to congregations” and have intentionally sought diversity among their denominational leadership, according to disciples.org. In 2005 the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) elected the Rev. Sharon Watkins as the first woman to lead a mainline denomination, and in 2017 they elected the Rev. Terri Hord Owens as the first African American woman to lead a mainline denomination.

The quest for diversity while maintaining unity is a reflection of God’s heart for his church as we see pictured in Revelation 7:9-10. We would all acknowledge that diversity and unity are vital components of life in the kingdom. What may have been lacking in this process, however, is a focus on diversity and unity that runs deeper than the organizational structure and is rooted in other biblical principles as well.



LET'S SEEK TO BE UNITED
ON THE TRUTH OF GOD'S
WORD FOR THE ADVANCE
OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS
CHRIST IN THE WORLD.

THEOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

In his blog post, Cornwall used the phrase “flexible in our theology,” which has been a characteristic of the Disciples since the formation of the denomination and a key influencing factor in their membership decline. Several recent examples demonstrate the theological flexibility of Disciples.

Jeffrey Walton, communications manager and Anglican program director for the Institute on Religion & Democracy, noted at Juicy Ecumenism, “Disciples have firmly moved in a theologically revisionist direction on matters of human sexuality, gender expression, and radical individual moral autonomy. The 2023 General Assembly meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, emphasized the ‘kingdom of God’ rather than the Kingdom of God.” That theme served to highlight their unity emphasis while diminishing the Kingdom of God focus that was so often a focal point in Jesus’ teaching. One could also surmise that the focal point was identity based on individual autonomy rather than identity based on the characteristics of the Kingdom of God.

At the 2023 General Assembly, anti-transgender legislation was one of the key issues discussed. The Assembly passed a resolution titled, “Oppose anti-trans legislation and affirm the dignity of Transgender and Gender-diverse people,” Cornwall reported at Word & Way. While affirming the worth of each individual is vitally important, the passage of this resolution within the Disciples denomination was seen as illustrative of their embrace of a divergent position away from historic orthodox theology.

A final example from a 2019 interview with Jeffrey Walton in *The Christian Post* highlighted another theological issue of concern among the Disciples, “A universalist theology appears to be sapping the evangelistic vigor of clergy [among the Disciples].” He noted anecdotally, “I’m hearing from Disciples members who are tired of political lectures in general from their clergy during Sunday worship services. . . . They’d like to hear the gospel preached, but their clergy are more focused upon social witness.” Flexing theologically toward universalism would indeed diminish the evangelistic fervor of leaders and churches.

The Restoration Movement Plea is for the unity of Christians based on the truth of God’s Word for the evangelization of the world. When the dual focal points of *unity* and *truth* are not held in a healthy tension—when one is emphasized over and against the other—the result typically is not growth. The Disciples’ emphasis on unity, influenced by their theological flexibility along with their commitment to a denominational structure, has contributed to a decline in membership over the last 55 years. This is a loss not just for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), but for the Kingdom of God. Let’s pray for one another, especially those within the heritage of the Restoration and Stone-Campbell Movement, and let’s seek to be united on the truth of God’s Word for the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. ■

James Hansee is a minister in Cincinnati, Ohio, and former adjunct professor of history at Cincinnati Christian University.



*Disciple
Heritage
Fellowship*

By Rick Grace

IT was a disturbing trend. Even more disturbing was that only a few people seemed aware of it or concerned by it.


It was 1985. The turn toward progressive theology was becoming even more pronounced in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In response, the board of the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Decatur, Illinois, offered a simple resolution—Resolution 8516—asking the Disciples of Christ biennial General Assembly to “affirm that the belief in the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture continues to be a viable option” for today’s Disciples. That such a resolution was needed was disturbing. Even more disturbing was the resolution being overwhelmingly defeated.

A HEART FOR RENEWAL

Disciple Renewal (DR) was born that year, with Richard Bowman, Dr. Doug Harvey, and Kevin and Linda Ray being the primary founders. The goal was to foster spiritual renewal in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) based on the conviction of the Bible being the authoritative and infallible Word of God. DR would continue to raise concerns and issues within the denomination using the main platform available—the resolution process of the General Assembly.

In 1987, 22 churches cosponsored a resolution (Resolution 8728) asking the General Assembly to “reaffirm the historic faith of the entire Christian Church in general and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in particular, that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, and that apart from him there is no salvation.” Again, that such a resolution was needed was disturbing. Even more disturbing was the resolution being referred to the Commission on Theology for two years of study.

At the 1989 General Assembly, the Commission presented their report without consulting any of the 22 sponsoring churches. Those who raised the original question were quite disturbed to be excluded from the process and from having any input into the final report. Among other questionable portions, the sponsors of the resolution certainly would have rejected this line from the report: “Christians have reason to trust that, by God’s mercy, no human being is ultimately rejected and nullified by God.” In response to objections, both on the Assembly floor and in print, the resolution’s sponsors were repeatedly told this was not a statement of universal salvation, but how could it be seen otherwise?

The page features several thin, black, curved lines that sweep across the background, creating a sense of movement and framing the central text. One large arc starts from the top left and curves towards the top right. Another arc starts from the bottom left and curves towards the bottom right. A third arc starts from the top left and curves downwards towards the center.

*“It is the mission of
Disciple Heritage Fellowship
to encourage, strengthen, and lead
churches to fulfill Christ’s mission.”*

A TIME OF DEPARTURE

As Disciple Renewal, we continued working in and through whatever venues were open to us within the Disciples and among other like-minded evangelical churches. But the doors within the Disciples were rapidly closing. In 1997, the procedures of the General Assembly were changed. Until then, a church or churches or recognized units within the Disciples could author a resolution that would be presented to the General Assembly. Starting that year, resolutions had to be approved by the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) before they could go to the Assembly floor. It became apparent no resolution giving voice to evangelical biblical concerns would ever see the light of day. It was time for a new chapter.

The Disciple Renewal board, meeting on the campus of St. Louis Christian College in 1997, established a new trajectory. Disciple Renewal would be no more, for the goal of renewing the Disciples was abandoned. The Disciple Heritage Fellowship (DHF) was born. The name was carefully chosen.

Disciple with no “s” indicated we no longer had a direct connection to the Disciples, yet recognized the reality most of us and the churches we represented were at one time Disciples churches. Even today, roughly 20 percent of the churches in the DHF network have stayed within the Disciples. Many are open about their connection to DHF; many fly under the radar, fearing repercussions from denominational and/or regional structures. For our part, DHF is committed to partner with any church turning to us, regardless of their denominational connection.

Heritage pointed to our continuing embrace of the ideals of the Stone-Campbell Movement. We are firmly rooted in the ideals of the American Restoration Movement. Our commitment to this rich heritage continues.

Fellowship declared we were not becoming another denomination but rather a voluntary connectional fellowship of churches, pastors, and congregational members. We are committed to sharing ministry, mission, and resources within this fellowship. We foster networking between leaders and churches to further the cause of Christ. This is captured in our mission statement: “It is the mission of Disciple Heritage Fellowship to encourage, strengthen, and lead Churches to fulfill Christ’s mission.”

ISSUES RELATED TO UNITY


DHF leadership has been asked over the years why our churches don’t simply become “independent” Christian churches. Forty years ago, it wasn’t that simple. There was some lingering misunderstanding, if not animosity, leftover from the church fights of a previous generation. More importantly, two significant issues stood in the way.

One was baptism. Many DHF churches practiced, and still practice, open membership. While baptism by immersion is taught as the biblical mode, many of our churches allow membership to be extended to those Alexander Campbell called “the pious unimmersed.” Church membership can be extended to those who had been “baptized” by a mode other than immersion. Baptism, viewed as the first step of obedience following the embrace of salvation in Christ, was not seen as a part of the salvific process. This position led to some lively discussions with many on the Christian Church and Church of Christ side of the street!

The other issue was the role of women in leadership in the church. Many DHF churches had embraced a more egalitarian view and had women serving as elders and even pastors. Most Christian Churches and Churches of Christ had a much more complementarian view which would not allow women to hold those leadership positions. Many DHF churches still hold a complementarian position, and it seems an increasing number of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are adopting a more egalitarian stance. As a connectional fellowship, we do not dictate theological positions or polity matter to any of our churches. We guard freedom in Christ beyond the core essentials we identify (enumerated at www.discipleheritage.org/beliefs).

By 2018, the DHF ministry was languishing; it was significantly underfunded. Some on the board were asking if God was done with DHF . . . if God had brought us into existence “for such a time as this,” but that time was over. The board entered a season of prayer and fasting, seeking God’s heart and direction for this ministry. We judge God spoke clearly to us at that point, that he was not done with DHF, and that another season of growth would happen.

To stabilize the ministry and to breathe new life into it, the decision was made to move DHF under the



*“We have been very intentional
about strengthening our relationship
with the Christian Churches and
Churches of Christ.”*

umbrella of the First Christian Church of Decatur, Illinois. Decatur First was, and still is, the flagship of the DHF network of churches. Dr. Wayne Kent, lead pastor of the church, became executive director of DHF. We knew that was unsustainable in the long run, but it was very much needed in the short run. An unexpected gift from the estate of longtime supporters of DHF provided funds for the ministry to hire a full-time staff person. Dr. Rick Grace, as “church liaison” (his official title), serves as the go-between of Decatur First and the DHF network of churches and pastors. With a full-time staff position secured for two years, the ministry started to move forward once again.

The “season of growth” anticipated from the board’s time of prayer and fasting started right before the COVID mitigations shut everything down. Clearly God was not bound by the pandemic; churches, especially churches still within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), began reaching out to DHF. Among the requests, many were for help in navigating the murky waters of ever-increasing theological progressivism, and many were for help in learning how to leave the denomination in a way that would protect the church.

Requests for these kinds of assistance have increased over the last two years, and especially since the 2023 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Lexington, Kentucky, in late July. The Disciples Alliance Q decision to host a drag queen at the Assembly (performing under the name of Miss Penny Cost) was the last straw for many more conservative Disciples. It was further confirmation of the Disciples’ complete embrace and support of the LGBTQIA+ agenda. Though the Disciples voted at the 2013 General Assembly to ordain candidates for ministry regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identification, this drag performance was viewed by more conservative Disciples as an “in your face” event.

A second line in the sand for many conservative Disciples at the 2023 General Assembly was passage of an “emergency resolution” called “An Invitation to Oppose Anti-trans Legislation and

Affirm the Dignity of Transgender and Gender-diverse People.” The resolution cites “an unprecedented amount of anti-transgender legislation . . . and anti-healthcare (especially prohibiting trans children from receiving medically-indicated treatment) . . . bills.” It encourages churches to “stand in solidarity with transgender and gender diverse individuals against harm being done against them often with the misuse of religious texts and symbols.” Conservative Disciples pastors and churches have rejected this invitation. And again, many of them have turned to DHF for help.

SERVING CHURCHES, EXTENDING THE KINGDOM

DHF is committed to partner with churches from any strand of the Restoration tradition. We have been very intentional about strengthening our relationship with the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. At the DHF ’22 National Conference, Dave Stone, former lead pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, was our keynote speaker. At DHF ’23, Rick Rusaw, executive director of the Spire Network, was our keynoter. That we have initiated steps to deepen this partnership is evidenced by our recent keynoters and the DHF presence at the most recent Spire Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

DHF is now in a stronger position to serve the church and enhance the kingdom of God. We will continue to respond to requests from churches to help them along their journey as well as to strengthen our strategic partnerships with other Restoration churches. From the common ground of the essential truths of the historic Christian faith, DHF actively seeks to be used of God to fulfill the prayer of Jesus, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21, *English Standard Version*). ■

Rick Grace serves as church liaison with Disciple Heritage Fellowship in Decatur, Illinois.



A BRIGHT FUTURE

Across the pond

RESTORATION
CHURCHES IN
THE U.K.

By Martin Robinson
and Mont Mitchell

Some have claimed that Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are the first group of churches to grow up in America—as if they’re an entirely American creation. Well, there’s more to the story.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Churches with a broadly “Restorationist” ideal had arisen in various parts of Britain in the late 18th century. Though they varied in ideas and went by different names—Scotch Baptists, Haldane churches, Sandemanian churches—they shared a commitment to congregational autonomy, governance by elders and deacons, weekly Communion, and believers’ baptism. Some congregations could trace their origins to somewhere around the *middle* of the 18th century, meaning these churches significantly shaped the thinking of Alexander Campbell as he traveled from Northern Ireland and Scotland to join his father, Thomas, in the United States.

These British pioneers of Restorationist thinking soon shaped the emergence of churches that called themselves Churches of Christ. The story of their emergence is complex but centered on three key factors:

- Individuals in these congregations were in personal contact with others who shared their views and aspirations. Such correspondence sometimes took place through face-to-face meetings, but more commonly through written letters.
- The writings of Alexander Campbell began circulating in Great Britain.
- One individual, James Wallis of Nottingham, began to publish a journal called *Christian Messenger and Reformer* in 1837. Much of the early content from it, and derivative publications, came from Alexander Campbell’s writings.

While these were not the only influences, they were the most important ones.

COMING TOGETHER

The various connections made through constant correspondence led to a suggestion that representatives from the various churches meet to discuss how they could work together. In part, they were influenced by news of a meeting in 1834 of representatives—or “messengers,” as they were called—from 13 congregations in Wellsburg, Virginia (now West Virginia).

It was agreed to meet in Edinburgh’s South Bridge Hall on August 18, 1842. Messengers from 40 churches attended. Three additional churches sent updates (including statistics), and an additional 8 churches known to be sympathetic to the cause did not attend.

At the close of the meeting, the goal was to raise funds to finance evangelists to spread word about the movement, and—by implication—plant new congregations. Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland date their formal origins as a distinct movement from this very meeting.

Within a few years, Alexander Campbell was invited to visit the United Kingdom to help consolidate and extend the new movement. Campbell arrived in Liverpool on May 29, 1847, to begin a speaking tour. One meeting in Nottingham drew 2,000 people, and other meetings were similarly successful. Campbell remained in Britain until October 1847. During his final month there, Campbell spoke at a second meeting of the churches in Chester at which he emphasized the point of the churches’ cooperative effort was to form a community of communities for the purpose of spreading the gospel.

Working Together

with a

shared vision.

GROWING IDENTITY

In these early attempts to begin a movement, it took some time to be clear about the exact beliefs of a disparate group of churches. The boundaries of the movement were not precise. But as the early generation of leaders passed the baton to the next, a clearer sense of identity emerged—along with a stronger growth strategy, featuring intentional church planting. Growth was rapid. By 1920, the churches numbered close to 200, with around 16,000 members.

This growth led to confidence among the churches, and also a growing desire to know how they related to the rest of the Christian world. After World War I, the wider Christian community grew in its desire for all churches to work together for the sake of mission, which was music to the ears of the Churches of Christ who had long advocated unity for the sake of mission.

MISSION DRIFT AND DECLINE

Sadly, over time, the emphasis on “unity for the sake of mission” became only a concern for “unity,” and the “mission” theme was significantly downplayed. That development was also mirrored by an increasingly “liberal” approach to theology, such that evangelism and mission were no longer the priorities. It seemed as if a social gospel had replaced a gospel of salvation. The result was a catastrophic decline in membership, accompanied by the closure of many churches. This mirrored what was happening in many mainstream denominations in the U.K. Membership across mainline Protestant churches was falling, and in many places, church buildings were being closed and sold to become warehouses, community centers, housing projects, restaurants, nightclubs, and even mosques and temples.

By the late 1970s, Churches of Christ had shrunk from 200 churches with 16,000 members in 1920 to 75 churches with 3,500 members—and many of those 75 churches were on the brink of closure.

National leadership of the Churches of Christ faced a crisis. They had been exploring union with the United Reformed Church (URC) for many years, and while the results of those negotiations were not very positive, leadership felt they had no choice but to put the proposal for union to the entire body. Most churches were in favor, but not a sufficient majority to allow the union to go ahead. The consequence was division over unity.

The majority of churches (42) joined the United Reformed Church under the terms previously negotiated, while 9 churches remained independent, joined other denominations, or simply closed immediately. The remaining 24 congregations voted to continue as Churches of Christ. The combined membership of these churches was around 650, so the average size of the churches was 25 to 30, many of whom were older people. And almost all of them were without a minister to lead them. The prospects for growth did not look promising.

A NEW BEGINNING

As had happened in the origins of Churches of Christ, a meeting was called in September 1979 to consider how the continuing congregations might work together. By December 1979, a charity called the Fellowship of Churches of Christ (FCC) was registered. Contact was made with key leaders from the Christian Churches in the U.S., and a group of senior ministers from larger churches in America came together to form the British American Fellowship Committee (BAFC). The BAFC recruited fully supported missionaries to move overseas to strengthen the British churches. They also raised funds and recruited staff to begin Springdale College, a school for educating and training church leaders. The new college began its work in 1980.

The key question at this time was this: *Is it possible to bring renewal to a group of churches that has been in decline for almost half a century?* The problems were immense. There were no assets available for the FCC from the previous organization. The majority of membership of most of the churches was either of retirement age or close to it. There were very few younger leaders, and there were no models available that might point to a successful strategy for renewal.

In light of these problems, it was determined the future must center on both renewing existing congregations and planting new ones. This became the focus of Springdale College, and active recruitment of workers from overseas (primarily the U.S.) to support existing congregations began.

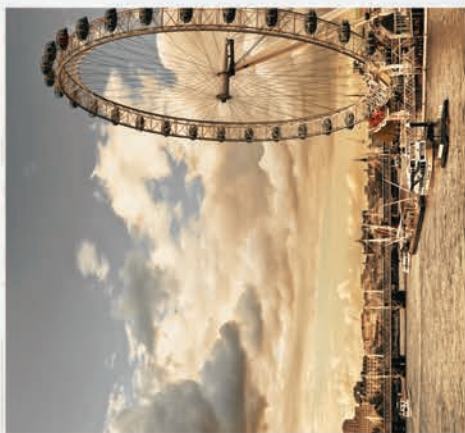
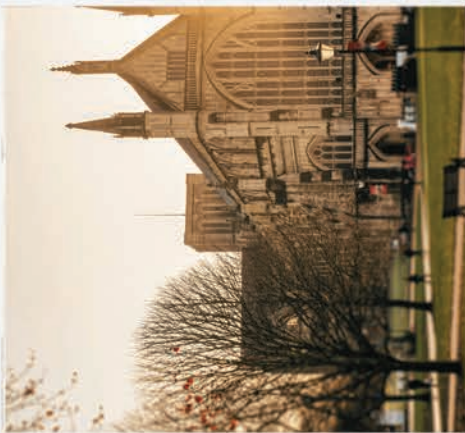
In the early 1980s, British leaders across the denominations realized that Christianity in the United Kingdom was in severe decline and that no one had immediate answers to the problem. They could see that Christendom (i.e., the presence and impact of Christians and the church) in the U.K. was broken but still held out hope that it could somehow be fixed.

LESSONS LEARNED

It was not until the 1990s that leaders began to realize Christendom could not be fixed—that indeed it had ended. The West was no longer the base for mission but was itself a mission field. Missionaries were now arriving in Europe from many other parts of the world. This changing perspective began to influence the strategy of FCC, and by the beginning of the 20th century, several lessons were becoming clear:

- FCC did not understand church planting. Efforts had focused mostly on replicating models that had already failed.
- The training systems in use at the college were not effective and needed to be reimagined.
- The nature of missional work in Europe had become far more difficult than first realized.
- Strategies to renew existing churches were unrealistic and had often failed. For some churches, renewal simply was not possible. These churches often had leaders who kept them alive but also prevented them from growing.

By 2006, FCC had adopted a new church-planting strategy that took account of these lessons. For a time, FCC ceased to invest resources in older churches that could not be changed, and Springdale College completely changed its educational and training operations. A dispersed campus model was embraced, with a different curriculum and different teachers that flowed out of a partnership with Together in Mission, a church-planting mission organization. The new face of Springdale—eventually renamed ForMission College—produced hundreds of students from many denominations. Around half of the students were from other parts of the world but were living in the U.K. permanently, committed to regional work. New kinds of churches were emerging.



BETTER RESULTS

These changes led to a dramatic change in the shape of FCC. Although, in theory, FCC had always been committed to becoming an intercultural group of churches, the reality on the ground was rather limited. After 2010, the shift toward an intercultural expression of FCC was noticeable. Today there are between 65 and 70 congregations which are either already part of FCC or are in the process of joining. Given that there were 24 churches in 1980, there has nearly been a tripling of FCC over the last 40 years. But the actual story is more significant than that. During that time, 14 congregations from the original 24 have closed; meaning that if nothing had been done, there would be just 10 congregations left in the U.K. In reality, more than 50 congregations have been added, which represents a *quadrupling* of the overall number.

NEXT STEPS FOR KINGDOM GROWTH

The impact of all this remains to be seen, but a new leadership team and focus brings forth a promising and hopeful future. As American churches begin to partner anew with FCC in this new ministry season, there is hope for continued, invigorating mission impact. Without a doubt, new innovative approaches to church ministry and church planting will be implemented to promote cross-cultural and multiethnic expressions of the Restoration Movement in the United Kingdom. Working together with a shared vision as the churches have done in the past, there is reason to believe God is with the movement in the U.K. and nothing will ultimately hinder his church from impacting society. ■

Martin Robinson has been a national leader in the Fellowship of Churches of Christ since 1980 and has led FCC as their national moderator since 2002. He plans to retire this March.

Mont Mitchell serves as lead pastor of Westbrook Christian Church (a multiethnic, multicongregational church) in Bolingbrook, Illinois. Mont is partnering with FCC as the new international director of Churches of Christ U.K. as well as being the directional leader of the congregations in the United States.



THE RESURRECTION: A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

By Renee Mitchell

In the accounts of Jesus' resurrection, nobody had more fascinating experiences (in my opinion) than Mary Magdalene. Not only was she the first person to see the risen Lord, but we can model our walk with the Lord today on her personal journey with Jesus.

JESUS AS HEALER

Mary Magdalene is first mentioned in the Gospel of Luke as one of the women accompanying Jesus on his travels throughout various cities and villages. We see an example of Jesus' healing power in Luke 8:2 which says he cast seven demons out of Mary; his first relationship with her was that of **healer**. As a person under the power of demons, Mary would have experienced physical and mental tortures daily. She also most likely was socially ostracized and isolated. In removing the demons, Jesus not only cured her physical and mental ailments, he also enabled her to connect with other individuals and begin leading what most people would call a "normal" life. As Christians, however, we know that such an encounter with Jesus leads to anything but a "normal" life.

JESUS AS TEACHER

Once healed, Mary Magdalene became a dedicated follower and disciple of Jesus. In reading through the Gospels, we can deduce that Mary was a woman of financial means, able to help support Jesus' human needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.). She, along with other women, relieved Jesus of the burden of securing these necessities so he could focus on his earthly ministry. As she followed him, she became a student of his teaching, which illustrates the second relationship Jesus had with Mary—that of **teacher**. In those days, rabbis refused to teach women, and females were restricted to the outer courts of synagogues. Contrast that with how Jesus freely welcomed women and accepted their service to him. He taught both women and men, welcoming everyone into the fold. Imagine how it must

have felt not only to be healed but also accepted as an equal in the eyes of Jesus! I imagine that Mary—along with his other female followers—clung to every word he spoke and followed him everywhere he went.

JESUS AS SAVIOR

This journey eventually led Jesus to the cross. Scripture tells how Mary Magdalene witnessed Jesus' crucifixion.

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there (Mark 15:40-41).

The Greek word used for "watching" in this passage carries the idea of detached observation, meaning it was not the type of watching that leads to conviction. In other words, these women knew Jesus was God in the flesh as he hung from the cross. This is the reason I believe they remained there until the bitter end. All of the male disciples had left, and at least one even denied knowing Jesus, but the women remained with him. Oh, what a valuable lesson that even in the worst of times, we need to remain with him, for he is always with us (Hebrews 13:5-6)!

We know the rest of the story—Jesus was buried in a tomb and a stone was rolled in front of it to prevent anyone from stealing his body. On the third day, John 20 says Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb early and found the stone removed from the entrance. She quickly went and told Peter, who ran to the tomb along with another disciple. The men found the linen cloths lying in the tomb and confirmed Jesus' body was gone. After they left, Mary remained at the empty tomb and

Mary Magdalene was so fortunate to have such a close relationship with Jesus, but all of us can have that same connection.



wept. Her Lord had died, and now his body had disappeared. As Christians, we understand that the spirit is the animating force of a person, but still, we interact via the physical body. Not being near Jesus, I imagine, caused in Mary a feeling of emptiness and further loss. I believe that was why she continued to weep.

When the angels appeared to Mary and asked why she was crying, she told them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:13, *New King James Version*). When Jesus (whom she did not recognize) asked that same question and also, “Whom are you seeking?” Mary thought he was the gardener. She said to him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away” (John 20:15, NKJV). Many have surmised that Mary, a woman of financial means, wanted to take Jesus’ body and properly bury him herself. She needed closure and could only have that by knowing his body had been laid to rest in the proper manner.

Then came the heartwarming and powerful moment of recognition: “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’” (John 20:16).

Earlier in his Gospel, John wrote, “The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name . . . and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:3-4, NKJV). When Jesus said Mary’s name, she immediately knew who he was and clung to him. At this point, though she may not have realized it, Jesus became her **Savior**—he had conquered death and risen from the grave. Wow! To have been there that day and seen the risen Lord—the man thought to be dead and buried, now standing outside the tomb, alive as he could be!

Mary was the first to see the risen Savior; unfortunately, the disciples did not believe her when

she told them. It’s not all that surprising the men did not believe her, since the testimony of women carried no weight in that time. I find it so interesting that Jesus chose Mary, a woman, as the first witness to his resurrection. I believe it shows that humans may hold others in lower regard, but in Jesus’ eyes, men and women are equal. The disciples would learn later that the Gentiles were also equal in the gift of eternal life through Christ.

Mary Magdalene was so fortunate to have such a close relationship with Jesus, but all of us can have that same connection. As Christians we have accepted Jesus as Lord and **Savior**, and through him we have the promise of eternal life. As we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), he becomes the **teacher** of “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3, NKJV). As we read and study the Bible, we never stop learning. Mary heard Jesus teach in person, but we have the written Word to guide us daily.

Finally, I believe Jesus can be a **healer** today, for as we move further away from sin, we lead healthier spiritual lives. I have seen how a healthy spiritual life can spill over into the emotional and physical aspects of our being. Sin brings with it so many problems; by working to put sin to death in our life, we can avoid the harmful physical and emotional effects that come with it.

I hope and pray we all develop the sort of relationship with Jesus that Mary Magdalene had. Let us embrace him as healer, teacher, and Savior daily and cherish that connection with our Lord. ■

Renee Mitchell is Product Manager for Publishing Systems at S&P Global Ratings. Prior to that, she served 20 years in the United States Air Force as a Cyber Operations Officer, retiring in 2015 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. An active member of Toastmasters and popular women’s conference speaker, Renee lives with her husband, John, and daughter, Madison, in Mason, Ohio.



LIVING HOPE & UNQUENCHABLE JOY

***CELEBRATING THE
RESURRECTION OF JESUS***

By Tom Claibourne

What difference does it make if some guy died on a cross and rose again many years ago? Does it really matter? Does it make any difference . . .

- when life is unfair?
- when many political leaders seem godless and corrupt?
- when evil is considered good, and good is considered evil?
- when the persecution of Christians escalates?
- when life is considered expendable?
- when Satan's attacks are relentless?
- when death is inevitable?

No doubt many believers in recent years have asked these questions during moments of despair. No doubt some believers asked similar questions as early as three decades after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter likely had these believers in mind when he wrote his first Epistle and assured them in its opening chapter that no matter what happens in this life, we as followers of Jesus can have a living hope through the risen, living Christ and a salvation to be revealed in its fullness someday in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Peter wrote about the power of hope and how hope makes possible an unquenchable joy even in the face of pain, uncertainty, and shattered dreams. The basis for that hope is the glorious victory over death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus fought and defeated the king of death.

HOPE AND JOY LEAD TO CELEBRATION

We celebrate a new birth. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

We were born again (John 3:3) of imperishable seed through the living and enduring Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Through God's great mercy and grace we are no longer “dead in our transgressions” (Ephesians 2:5). We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Scripture says repentant believers who were baptized into Christ “were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his,

we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:4-5).

When we arose from the new birth by God's resurrection power, we began a never-ending life and no longer need to fear death nor even the crises that come in this life. When the Christian scientist Sir Michael Faraday was nearing death, a journalist questioned him as to his “speculations” about life after death. He responded, “Speculations? I know nothing of speculations. I am resting on certainties. I know that my redeemer lives, and because he lives, I shall live also!”

No wonder Peter speaks of a living hope found in a living Savior. No wonder the living Word of God describes *hope* as a confident expectation of something good, in contrast to a worldly hope that reflects wishful thinking.

There is joy that comes with the new birth . . . and also the promise of a future inheritance.

We celebrate a permanent inheritance. “. . . [A]nd into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-5)

The word *inheritance* typically grabs our attention. Some even fantasize about a long-lost, wealthy (and childless) relative leaving them a massive estate. But should that unlikely scenario actually occur, all the things we inherited eventually would perish, spoil or fade, or we would leave them all behind for someone else when we died. Ecclesiastes 2:21 describes this futile cycle.

Down through the ages, people have sought a “fountain of youth” in a desperate attempt to thwart growing old and dying. I once read about police officers who arrested a con artist for selling bottles filled with a liquid he claimed slowed the aging process. One detective told his partner, “Check his record. My gut tells me that our guy has played this game before.” The partner reported back, “You're right; he's got priors. He was busted for the same thing in 1815, 1887, 1921, . . .”

There is no fountain of youth, but there is a fountain of life that comes from the blood of Jesus and is sealed by his victory over death, making possible a living hope for us. God offers us a permanent inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. God keeps it on layaway for us in heaven where sin's curse no longer has power (Revelation 22:3); this assures us that no court action can revoke it, no thief can steal it, and no fire or rust can destroy it (Matthew 6:20).



As long as our faith remains strong, we can maintain our secure place as God's heirs and joyfully anticipate our permanent inheritance.

We even celebrate suffering. "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials" (1 Peter 1:6).

Suffering and trials are part of living in a fallen world. The curse that resulted from human sin (Genesis 3) will not be undone until Jesus returns and brings full restoration (Romans 8:18ff). Thus, Christians are not now exempt from illness, job loss, abuse, grief, poverty, and physical death. We face "all kinds of trials." But praise God for the implications of that phrase "a little while" in verse 6. Our suffering here is short in comparison to eternity. Truly, our "momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

In a blog post from July 2020, pastor Lewis Holland shared an old story attributed to Charles M. Davis that was found in an old Bible.

Davis wrote about a man known as Uncle Jake who had done yard work for him years before. Uncle Jake was uneducated but had amazing knowledge of the Bible. Davis once asked him to name his favorite Bible verse.

Uncle Jake leaned on his spading fork, pushed back his hat, scratched his chin, and explained, "Well, sir, I've lots of favorites, but there's one that has helped me most. It's found all through the Good Book, but it's just five ordinary words."

"And what are those five little words?" Davis asked.

"Well, sir, those Bible words are 'And it came to pass.'"

Davis looked puzzled, so Uncle Jake continued.

"Don't you see? 'It came to pass.' It didn't come to stay. I've known a heap of troubles, but they came to pass. They didn't come to stay." (Posted at preacherlewis.com.)

Troubles typically stay for just a little while.

James M. Gray asked in a hymn, "Who can mind the journey when the road leads home?" The child of God can have joy on the bumpy journey of this life because of living hope.

OUR FAITH REFINED

Peter referred to our faith as "of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire" (1 Peter 1:7a).

As gold is refined by fire, less precious minerals are separated from it. Similarly, the faith of a Christian is made purer and stronger by the challenges we experience in the fires of life. In the Old Testament, God spoke of bringing some of his people through fire. "I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God'" (Zechariah 13:9).

Peter himself learned how suffering can refine us and make us better. During Peter's three years of training with Jesus, God used Peter's challenges, struggles, and failures to prepare him for greater things later.



Are the trials of life refining you or are they burning you? It's up to you. If we let God refine us, we can rejoice in our trials and celebrate the resurrection power of God working in our life.

OUR FAITH PROVEN

“These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith. . . may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7)

We don't demonstrate the reality of our faith on Easter Sunday in a full house of worship by lifting our voices in celebratory songs of praise. We don't demonstrate the reality of our faith on a balmy spring day when flowers are blooming and all is well. We don't demonstrate the reality of our faith when our health is great, our wealth is secure, and our family is at peace.

No! We prove the reality and depth of our faith when the rug has been pulled out from under us, or the fire burns us, or disease ravages our body, and yet we still look to God in unwavering, confident hope.

Peter seems to imply that when Jesus returns he will commend his faithful followers with praise, glory, and honor for passing our tests of suffering and persecution. That in turn will bring praise, glory, and honor to Jesus because people will see how we were empowered to be faithful through the resurrection power abiding in us through the Holy Spirit of God.

OUR FAITH REWARDED

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and

glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9)

Peter addressed his original readers and readers today by reminding us that we have not physically seen Jesus as he had. We did not walk the dusty roads of Judea and Samaria with Jesus. We did not marvel with Peter and the others when Jesus calmed the raging sea. We did not touch the scars on his hands after his resurrection.

Yet the Bible has painted a clear picture of him for us. He has saved us from our sins and continues to work in our lives. As a result, we sincerely believe in him and in the full and complete salvation he is preparing for us.

Verse 9 is interesting, for it uses the present tense to say we are *now* receiving the salvation of our souls. It is important to remember that God gives us our salvation through the risen Christ in stages. We have been saved from sin's penalty (in the past). We are being saved from sin's power (in the present). And we will be saved from sin's presence (in the future) since nothing impure will ever enter the heavenly city. (See Revelation 21:27.)

It is only a matter of time. Our goal is in sight. Our God reigns supreme. Jesus is alive and will return in glorious victory. The Bible is still true. Salvation is real. And soon we will be heading home.

Maranatha! ■

Tom Claibourne celebrates hope with his church family, the Bethlehem Church of Christ, near Winchester, Ohio.



The Fool of God

The Story of Alexander Campbell, Who Made Scripture
His Final Authority and Catalyzed a Movement

Louis Cochran

Foreword and Afterword by Bobby Harrington

 RENEW.org

 collegepress

By Bobby Harrington

I became a disciple of Jesus at the University of Calgary (Canada) and was baptized on my 20th birthday. I was discipled to closely read and obey Scripture. It was an exciting journey, and the process completely changed my life. Soon I was married to a godly, young lady and we pursued Jesus and followed the teachings of Scripture together.

Yet, by the time we were in our mid-twenties, we were confused.

We had spent time in a church that was legalistic and then, after trying to grapple with their approach, we left for another church. We liked the second church, but it had a progressive spirit. It was too concerned, we came to see, with molding the teachings of Jesus to fit what the culture around us was saying. We were confused about our future direction and what to look for in a church.

A HELPFUL RESOURCE

We then found a book that unexpectedly helped us in very convincing ways. We read *The Fool of God*, a historical novel based upon Alexander Campbell's life and the principles of the Restoration Movement.

The Fool of God was an easy and interesting read. Neither of us wanted to put the book down once we started reading it. The story of how Alexander Campbell engaged Scripture in such a raw, yet determined way captured our hearts and minds. The narrative and the specific details became more than history for us. We bought into the Restoration Movement's core value: *surrendering to Jesus' Lordship by following Scripture alone as our final authority*.

If Campbell could be called a "fool" (per the title of the book) for this raw commitment to make Scripture his true, final authority, then we wanted to be fools like him. We both gladly adopted his Restoration ideals about Scripture. These ideals gave us direction about the kind of church we needed because we wanted to be in community with a body of believers that had the same radical commitment.

Surrendering to Jesus' lordship through Scripture is a resilient value, ideal for any age, but especially our age when truth is secondary to prevailing narratives. God's truth in Scripture comes first; whatever narratives we use to make sense of our lives are subject to reinterpretation based upon a better understanding of Scripture.

At its best, this core value of surrendering to Jesus' kingship by following Scripture alone as our final authority is simply the pursuit of upholding "the apostolic tradition" or "the canon of scripture." We are seeking to think carefully and canonically for God's glory and honor.

Then about 10 years ago, I found myself facing a difficulty in the church we had planted with a group of family and friends just outside Nashville, Tennessee. We had many new people coming to our church, from various backgrounds, and they wanted to understand our denominational or historical roots. Many were part of a leadership class that we invited people to attend over a two- to three-year period to get certified for potential ministerial or eldership roles. Many of the people in these classes have gone on to become paid ministers and/or join in serving as elders of the church.

A THEOLOGICAL VISION FOR THE CHURCH

What I discovered was that the single most important tool in winning these future leaders over to the theological vision of our church was the book *The Fool of God*. Many of the everyday disciples in our church have read it and have been won over to the core value of making Scripture the final authority, which is at the heart of the Restoration Movement vision (as well as RENEW.org Network's vision).

The Fool of God is historically accurate in describing all the relevant factual events and details of Campbell's life, while the author (Louis Cochran) made up much of the dialogue to fill in the unrecorded conversations and engage our imaginations. With the republication of this book, you too have an opportunity to join with us in appreciating Campbell's vision. We hope it will capture your heart and mind the way it has captured so many others. The movement that Alexander Campbell catalyzed now has millions of devotees in North America and beyond.

My hope is that reading *The Fool of God* does more than help people like me appreciate our roots, but that it also helps us think through how to encourage a new generation toward a renewed vision of following Scripture as we head into the middle of the 21st century. We face significant cultural challenges as we seek to follow Scripture, hence it will be crucial to carefully consider our cultural moment. The following is a summary of that vision, as we contextualize that commitment to Scripture in these post-Christian times.

We focus on Jesus Christ, his gospel, and his kingdom. Our hope and focus is Jesus Christ. We uphold a key saying: “The Jesus we proclaim, the gospel we preach, and the faith we teach will determine the kind of disciples we make.”

Many have found that historically, Restoration Movement leaders assumed, but did not emphasize, doctrines like the centrality of Jesus and his gospel. They lived in a North American culture for the past 250 years where most people claimed to be Christians, attended church (even irregularly), and believed in Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. Because they could assume these teachings, they focused instead on secondary doctrines that needed to be restored regarding church organization and polity.

Yet we must always keep our focus on Jesus Christ, his gospel, and the kingdom, as Scripture teaches. If we ask ourselves, “What does God want for every person on planet earth?” we find a simple answer throughout Scripture. God wants everyone to come to know and place their faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel, to enter his kingdom, and then, by faith, to become more and more like Jesus Christ. This clarity is vitally important and needs to guide us into the future.

We make disciple-making the core mission of the church. Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, Walter Scott, and others in the Restoration Movement helped us prioritize evangelism and local church structures based upon God’s Word. Evangelism is vital. But the point of the local church is not just to get people saved and attend a church that has practices and a structure based upon the Word of God.

The point of the local church is to help everyone to place their faith in Jesus and then form their entire lives around him. This means that we focus on being disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus, and our disciple-making results in planting churches that make even more disciples of Jesus. It means we are empowered in this great mission because of our love for God and love for people. We follow Jesus’ example, as he loved his disciples and spent time in intentional relationship with them. *His priority was intentional relational disciple-making.*

We rely on the Holy Spirit through prayer and fasting. We seek to build prevailing churches in our cultural context as we move into the middle of

the 21st century. But if we hope to build more and more of the kind of churches we have been describing, we must emphasize something that has been a weakness in many Restoration Movement circles: praying and fasting for the Holy Spirit’s presence and power.

As we look at the world outside North America today, we see movements that are just like our Restoration Movement when it comes to prioritizing the teaching of Scripture alone as their final authority. Disciple-Making Movements (DMM), powerfully fueled by everyday disciples making disciples, have arisen worldwide in the last 30 years, yet they have not taken root in North America. These movements rely on similar values to ours in the Restoration Movement; they simply teach people to dive into Scripture with others, review what it teaches, obey what it teaches, and share what they’ve learned with others.

Here is the key difference between disciple-making movements and most Restoration Movement churches in North America (and almost all other churches in North America): Disciple-making movements are focused on praying and fasting for God’s power. If we want to truly restore the church of the New Testament, we must restore the way Jesus and the early church prayed and relied on the Holy Spirit.

A SUMMARY

Every time we read and connect with the Restoration Movement story, we are left feeling both grateful and hopeful. We are grateful for the Restoration Movement and those who chose the path of Scripture as their final authority over the easier path of just following the traditions they inherited. We are also hopeful because we believe God will use our commitment to Jesus, to the good news of the gospel, to the kingdom, and to all of Scripture to bring about faith-filled, Spirit-led, kingdom-advancing collaboration in our time. We anticipate a bright, hope-filled future into the middle of the 21st century and beyond. We want the disciples we are making to be able to look back on our time with gratitude and hopefulness because we prayerfully pursued resilience and courage.

We hope you will join us in moving toward this vision. ■

Bobby Harrington is the point leader of Discipleship.org, RE-NEW.org, and Harpeth Christian Church (in the Nashville area).

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PUBLISHING CO. RECENTLY TEAMED-UP
FOR THE RERELEASE OF *THE FOOL OF GOD*,
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BELL'S LIFE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THE
RESTORATION MOVEMENT, IS AVAILABLE
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AMAZON, AND OTHER BOOKSELLERS. (BOBBY
HARRINGTON WROTE THE FOREWORD AND
AFTERWORD FOR THE NEWEST VERSION.)



Impact

By Jerry Harris

It was the spring of 2007 when I received an invitation to a luncheon hosted by Provision Ministry Group at the North American Christian Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. The luncheon was for leaders of churches averaging more than 1,000 in regular attendance, and it was the first time I had been invited to such an event. The people I met at that gathering, and the relationships that grew out of it, marked a turning point in my life and ministry. It was there I met Doug Crozier, then president of Church Development Fund. I asked him for help with a financing problem with The Crossing's first multisite campus.

GREATER VISION FOR MINISTRY

We had planned to spend \$1 million to purchase and refurbish a grocery store in Macomb, Illinois, into a Crossing location, but we were falling short by about \$500,000. Our local bank wanted a guarantee for the additional funds; I found this off-putting, as we had been an exemplary customer for years. Doug came out to Quincy, Illinois, toured the project, and said he didn't want the \$500,000 loan. Instead, he wanted all of our indebtedness! He planted a vision in me for not just one multisite location, but an additional five locations!

Just three years later, Doug gave me the opportunity to be part of the start of a brand-new church

extension fund, The Solomon Foundation. I joined the first board of directors when TSF incorporated in December 2010, and the Crossing was the first loan on their books. Doug gave me opportunities to tell our church's story to investors and other church leaders across the country, and it wasn't long before I found myself in the company of some really incredible leaders in a network of growth and innovation.

Doug's vision for the Crossing having five locations turned out to be surprisingly shortsighted as we now have 11, but none of that boldness to take those aggressive growth steps would have occurred without TSF and Doug. During my eight years on the board, two of those years as chairman, I watched and participated as our story reproduced itself again and again in literally hundreds of churches, using the investments of believers to build the kingdom while they received a great return.

But I saw so much more than that! I saw a ministry that measured its bottom line in outreach, church attendance, and baptisms! As churches managed and overcame their obstacles through TSF's help, those churches increased their ministry impact exponentially, just as we had. To date, TSF has been instrumental in the growth of almost 600 churches, helping to increase their attendance by more than 180,000, and contributing

to more than 65,000 baptisms! And God has blessed TSF's bottom line with over \$1.13 billion in total assets, making TSF the fastest-growing extension fund in history and fourth largest in the country! If the total assets of all three Restoration Movement extension funds were added together, it would by far be the largest such fund in the country! That is not only kingdom growth, it's movement growth!

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPACT

In 2015, TSF had the opportunity to write their first loan to an African American Church of Christ. It wasn't long before Doug and the board wanted to build the loan portfolio of the AACC brothers and sisters to \$80 million. Today, TSF has partnered with over 90 African American Churches of Christ and provided loans of more than \$130 million. Additionally, TSF is committed to allocate 20 percent of its total assets available to African American Churches of Christ. This opened up the Restoration Movement to TSF on a much wider scale, as relationships formed and fellowship has been forged with Churches of Christ and International Churches of Christ, restoring relationships that had been severed long ago. TSF shares Restoration Movement ideals with fringe churches that have no tribe as they seek to fund their projects, connecting them to a network of like-minded leaders so they can learn and grow with a Restoration Movement perspective.

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

In 2017, TSF, primarily through the work of Renee Little, saved Christian Standard from being consigned to history by its former owner, the Wicks Group. After TSF purchased it, the operation was changed from a for-profit business to a not-for-profit ministry, seeking to leverage the power of our unity in obedience to Jesus' prayer in John 17. As a result, we've been able to tell so many stories that help define who we are as a movement and the role we play in the wider kingdom.

With TSF's help, Christian Standard Media has not only continued the printed magazine, but also has made it available online for free to any who wish to read it. CSM/the magazine reports up-to-date news of our movement, has our movement's most comprehensive digital database, has expanded our digital archive back to 1966, and provides an abundance of resources for networking, Bible study, and tools for growth. We are also custodians of much of our movement's history and many of its artifacts, saved from destruction in the Christian Standard Library.

Doug and TSF innovated and used gift lease-backs to help 33 churches to date, as well as three of our colleges. This tool helps these ministries to get fresh wind in their sails as they look to their futures. When COVID hit in 2020, TSF helped churches navigate PPP loans to keep them going, started weekly Zoom calls to provide encouragement for church leaders, and retained counseling help for pastors and staff that continues to this day. TSF placed over \$40 million in PPP loans for more than 80 churches through their lending relationships. TSF then raised another \$4 million to allow another 40 churches to receive a TSF grant after they could not get PPP monies. Many of these were small, rural AACC churches. TSF has also played a key role in sponsoring such Restoration Movement conferences as Spire, Renew, and ICOM.

All of this and so much more has been accomplished in just 13 years! There's no telling what the future will hold, but there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that God has had his hand of blessing on the work of The Solomon Foundation. Generations of believers will benefit from TSF's visionary thinking and hard work, whether they know it or not. I can truly say that the Crossing and I have both been blessed by having TSF as our ministry partner and would have never realized the kingdom impact we've experienced without her. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Doug, Renee, the board, and the staff of TSF!

RESOLUTION AND RECONCILIATION

On April 22, 2022, The Solomon Foundation filed a defamation suit against Christian Financial Resources, a fellow Church Extension Fund supporting the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. In September of 2023, TSF and CFR came to a full and final settlement of all issues relating to the matters presented in the lawsuit. As part of the resolution, CFR agreed to make the following public acknowledgement and apology:



FUNDING MINISTRY... CHANGING LIVES

We, Christian Financial Resources, Inc. (“CFR”), recognize and acknowledge that certain of our senior personnel have made inaccurate and disparaging statements about The Solomon Foundation’s business practices, financial stability, and personnel. For that we apologize. CFR believes that its personnel should always act in a Christlike manner, and carefully guard all speech and actions, in our dealings with competitors and partners alike. In the future, we will ensure our entire team is aware of our responsibility to adhere to a God-honoring code of conduct in all our endeavors.

TSF appreciates CFR’s willingness to face the issues that were presented in the lawsuit and to find resolution and reconciliation. As a movement, we need to have confidence in one another and support one another in service to the Kingdom of God.

TSF considers CFR to be a sister entity. Both entities share the common mission of providing the financial means for Restoration Movement churches and ministries to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and God’s plan of salvation throughout the world. Through discussions of reconciliation, CFR and TSF have committed one to another not only to put the dispute behind them, but also to find ways to better work together to serve the Restoration Movement.

Douglas Crozier, CEO
The Solomon Foundation

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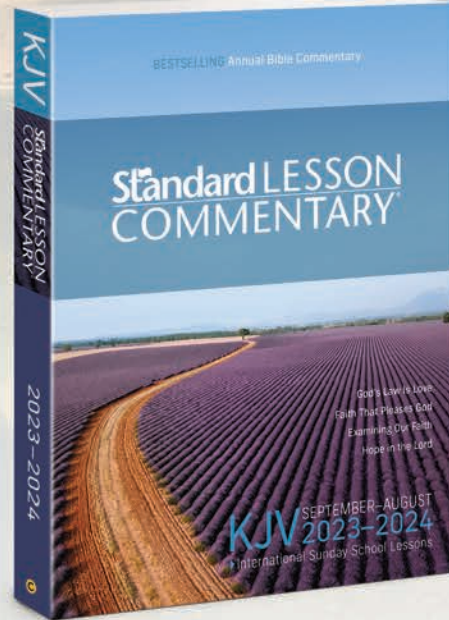
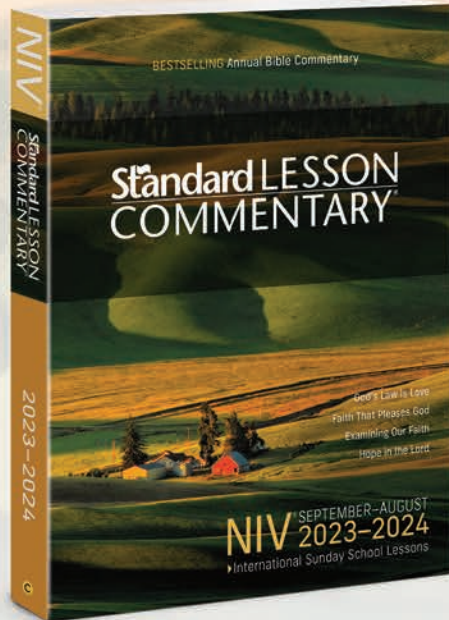


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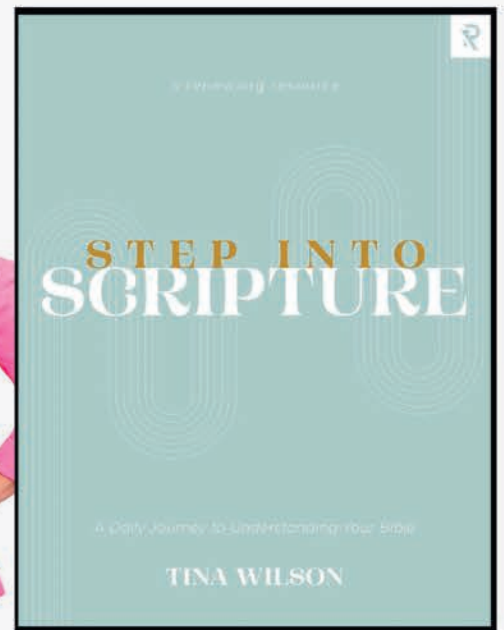
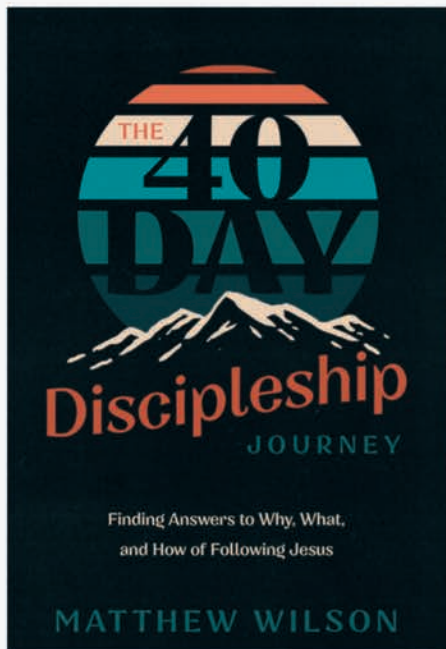
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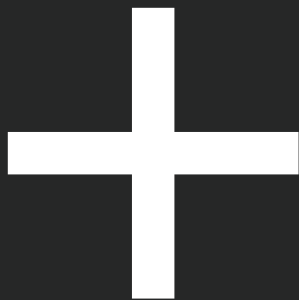
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MARCH 2024

1 CORINTHIANS (PART 1)

THE LIVING CHURCH

The church at Corinth had problems, as most churches do . . . even those that are vibrant and growing. Life was not easy in the pagan Roman culture. Life in the church was not much different. The Corinthian church had problems with unity, leaders, morality, marriage, freedoms, idolatry, spiritual gifts, love, the resurrection, and the collection for the saints. But the church of today can learn to be united from a divided church like Corinth. In this study, we highlight what constitutes unity, the nature of servant leadership, the constraints of freedom, the unifying significance of Communion, and the functioning of the body of Christ.

APRIL 2024

1 CORINTHIANS (PART 2)

THE POWERFUL CHURCH

If the living church had problems (which was last month's emphasis), then the powerful church had answers. Even churches with brokenness, like the Corinthian congregation, can provide knowledge and insight. Powerful churches learn to stress the right things (i.e., the big things of the book, the Bible). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the foolishness of this world. Powerful churches stress spiritual gifts that edify others over pandering to the pride of the user. Powerful churches stress love over self-centeredness. Powerful churches stress the resurrection over the hopelessness of the world.

INTERACT

'STAYING TRUE?'



Michael Hines A similar survey of how many schools teach a history of the Restoration Movement would be interesting ["Staying True? (A Christian Standard Report on Our Colleges)," by Chris Moon, November/December 2023, p. 54]. I did an informal survey several years ago and found few colleges taught the subject. A couple of them taught a "Principles of the Restoration Movement" course; several listed such a course in their catalog but it never appeared in their "line schedule"; and others no longer teach the course at all. I would be interested in a more formal survey to see where our colleges stand on the movement's history. Some are saying that doctrines long held to be essential no longer matter or [they] have been watered down sufficiently so as to not seem heretical to evangelicals. This is true regarding the church's stand on current issues far beyond the mode and purpose of baptism.



Jeff Allen Colleges who refuse to answer or who have "punted" the issues to the local church . . . fail to understand that they are uniquely responsible for the normalization of doctrinal truths specific to what we call the Restoration Movement. We in the local church rely on them to codify and teach the doctrines that make our movement unique. As a nondenominational body, we have very few other means to make sure the Restoration church is consistent in our beliefs and understanding of Scripture, as well as our history and background. Our colleges must continue to impart these things on our future pastors and church leaders for us to stay consistent and relevant in our biblical beliefs. We have lost much of our past normalizing functions [and institutions]: Standard Publishing is a shadow of what it once was; *The Lookout* and *Christian Standard* used to be ubiquitous in our churches every Sunday, as was their Sunday school curriculum—no more. Our summer camps have waned in influence in many places, the North American Christian Convention was gutted. Even crosstown get-togethers with other Restoration Movement churches seem nonexistent. We need the colleges to continue carrying our consistent doctrine and history forward to the next generation of church leaders if we are to have any future as a consistent and unified movement. Colleges, please don't overlook this responsibility—you need to express your voice on these matters!

TRAINING AND EDUCATING FUTURE LEADERS



Rather Not Say [Having] graduated from Lincoln Christian Seminary [with two degrees,] I'm not an enemy of higher Christian education. But I am marked as an enemy to the state, which ultimately is the gatekeeper of higher education ["Why Some College Presidents Were Hesitant to Respond," by Chris Moon, November/December 2023, p. 60]. The accreditation system at present is fully capable of silencing and controlling school curriculum, especially in Canada. Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are deemed hate speech here. The days of acceptance and tolerance of the faith are passing away. We need rigorous training and education for men who will learn the languages, hermeneutics, history, theology, and preaching who will lead the way. This training will likely need to operate under the accreditation radar. The open egalitarianism and even sexual sin being pushed in the Restoration Movement will end us as a movement. Perhaps we didn't study history enough when looking at the Disciples of Christ.

FIGHTING FOR RELATIONSHIPS: IT'S WORTH IT



Paul Boatman The bellicosity of too many will reject Ben's very fine essay before getting into the meat of it ["Fighting for Relationships: Striving for Unity in Politically Divisive Times," by Ben Cachiaras, November/December 2023, p. 64]. But some divided tribes and families may benefit by firmly grasping the gentle, loving spirit of the article and inviting children, parents, cousins, etc., on the "other side" to risk reflecting with them on the issues and pleas that Ben identifies.

INTERACT (CONT'D)

CHRISTIANS AND EVANGELISM



Joshua Vie This should be required reading for all pastors, elders, and small-group leaders across the Restoration Movement . . . all churches, actually. This is precisely the all-in mentality churches need right now [From the Editor, “Inaccurate Assumptions about Evangelism and Christians,” by Michael C. Mack, November/December 2023, p. 6].

PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT



Teresa Pietrangelo “These shifting views seek to reshape the church . . . but for what purpose? Is it feminism, a rejection of patriarchy, a desire for inclusion, or a desire to gain status, money, or power?” It is merely to be able to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit as given, without any human telling us it is ungodly to do so [“Is It Time for a New Restoration Movement (Part 2),” by Jim Putman, November/December 2023, p. 70]. Jesus did not tell women where they were to stay or what spiritual gifts were for males or females. Not once did he silence women or tell them what they could not do in his kingdom. He told all to *go* and make disciples. You make a point of tradition, but in Acts there were no traditions, just Holy Spirit-led worship and service by men and women in mutuality. Women are named as disciples throughout the New Testament, and the words “women’s roles” are never used. There were women prophets, householders, pray-ers, and fellow workers, even a female deacon named by Paul (in Romans 16) is identified using the same word [as that] used for male deacons. Taking a few verses written for specific people and purposes and trying to put them on all women for all time just doesn’t add up with all of the women God used to glorify his name. There must be a lot of talking in roundabouts to look away from all the women God used in Scripture to fulfill his purposes, and God never silenced them. So, to be called by God into ministry, leadership, and teaching by the Spirit is not to be put into a box of human making, but to be free to use what we’ve been given in all aspects of the church, even in the Restoration Movement, to glorify God and bring more [people] into his family. Women and men are both blessed by God in their callings as they seek to do God’s will within their ministries.

PREACHING ON ADVENT



Harold Harker This would make for a marvelous and timely sermon message presented from pulpits everywhere around the world . . . one that most of the world could relate to in our perilous times. If one closes their eyes, the opening descriptive paragraph makes one feel as if they are actually transported back to the streets of Bethlehem [“The Advent of Jesus into a Wicked World,” by Michael C. Mack, November/December 2023, p. 48]. Thanks for blessing us with your God-given talent.

PREACHING THE WORD



Ralph Phares This article proves that you don’t need to be the smoothest, most sophisticated preacher. You need only to preach God’s Word and rely on the Scriptures to convict and cajole each of us to be more than what we see in and around us. This is a most instructive article [Preach, “Preaching with Depth,” by Chris Philbeck, November/December 2023, p. 26].

For space, length, readability, relevance, and civility, comments sent to Interact may remain unpublished or be edited. We do read them all and prayerfully take them to heart. If we publish your comment, we will try to honestly reproduce your thoughts with those considerations in mind. Where we disagree, let’s continue to keep P.H. Welshimer’s words in mind to “disagree without being disagreeable.”

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MOTIVATE
BY DAVID FAUST



THE WAY WE WERE

Fifty years ago, *Billboard* magazine named the title song of the movie *The Way We Were* the No. 1 pop hit of 1974. The film, starring Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford, was a box office success although it received mixed reviews. The song, “The Way We Were,” won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for Best Original Song, and it has been hailed as “one of the most recognizable songs in the world.”

An honest look at Restoration Movement history also elicits mixed reviews. Our past includes the good, the bad, and the ugly—and it generates provocative questions about where we are headed. What can we learn by reviewing the way we were?

We were people of the Book.

Our forebears in the Restoration Movement were devoted to the apostles’ doctrine. They said, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” Preachers encouraged their listeners to imitate the Bereans who “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures

every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). They understood that if we are not in the Book, we will be in the dark.

Today, do we preach the whole counsel of God with courage, clarity, and conviction? Are we equipping biblically literate disciples who have a solid grasp of biblical truth and know how to share their faith winsomely with others?

Our movement captured the imagination of young adults.

Our leaders didn’t all have gray hair. Barton W. Stone was in his late 20s when the Cane Ridge Revival began, and at age 31 he helped to forge *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. Alexander Campbell was 28 when he preached his famous “Sermon on the Law.” Raccoon John Smith was baptized at age 20 and ordained to the ministry at 24. Walter Scott was 25 when he first met Alexander Campbell (who was 33 at the time). Campbell later wrote, “Our age and our feelings . . . rendered us susceptible of a mutual attachment,” for both men shared an ardent desire to reform churches

that “appeared in a state of the most miserable destitution.” Dissatisfied with the religious status quo, energetic young speakers and writers spread Restoration ideals across the American frontier.

Today, do we make enough space for young believers to use their ministry muscles? Is the vision for vibrant New Testament Christianity capturing the hearts and minds of the next-generation leaders who will guide us in the future?

We were unity minded—but often contentious.

An African proverb says, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” In its early days, our movement was motivated by Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17, New Testament warnings about division, and the positive example of the first-century believers who “were one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). When we were at our best, we spoke the truth in love, holding our convictions firmly but explaining them with gentleness and respect. Yet, our tribe often has been scrappy and argumentative. Our internal divisions contradict our lofty vision for Christian unity.

Do we treat other Christians with respect and “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)? Have we become so accustomed to division that we hardly notice or challenge it anymore?

We kept things simple. We were flexible and innovative—relational more than institutional.

Ours was a grassroots movement. Unencumbered by stifling creeds and theological jargon that muddled the gospel message, churches grew organically through personal evangelism and informal discipleship. Lay preachers earned their living by farming, teaching, or other jobs. Believers dropped denominational labels and embraced the plea to be “Christians only.” Visionary disciple-makers planted new churches, and independent congregations collaborated to send out missionaries. We started colleges, benevolence ministries, and Christian service camps. We gathered in regional and national conventions, not to exercise authority or dictate policy, but because we longed for connection and encouragement. In 1866, a group of entrepreneurs

who believed in Restoration ideals created *Christian Standard*, and for many years it was the longest-running weekly magazine published in America.

As a general rule, our Restoration ancestors didn’t spend a lot of time and money on expensive buildings. Times were simpler then, but it also appears our churches focused on the mission more than its packaging. Compared to many of our religious neighbors, we gravitated toward church architecture that was functional but unelaborate. Rarely did a congregation carry burdensome financial debt or employ a large staff.

Things were far from perfect, and we shouldn’t try to reproduce an idealized version of the “good old days.” (Someone quipped, “Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be!”) But we must dare to ask . . .

Has our movement stopped moving? Have we over-complicated things? Has spiritual arthritis stiffened us with age and made us more institutional and less relational? Do we still engage in serious study and encourage creative thinking? Do we settle for imitating other churches instead of asking God to show us effective new ways to reach and serve our unique communities? Do we welcome innovative ideas (consistent with Scripture, of course) that will help us engage the culture and lead more people to Christ?

The ideals that shaped our movement remain as relevant and timely as ever. Are we still motivated to apply them? The lyrics of the song “The Way We Were” asked whether life really used to be “so simple”? Then came the big question:

If we had the chance to do it all again,
Tell me, would we? Could we? ■

Dave Faust serves as contributing editor of *Christian Standard*. He has written a weekly lesson application for our Bible study material for several years. Previously, he was editor of *The Lookout* magazine. Dave presently serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

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