Global Gathering: Operation Airlift!

By Carl Stagner

Going once, going twice, SOLD!” The auctioneer’s chants rang out through the gymnasium at Huber Heights Church of God as Operation Airlift was finally underway. The excitement and anticipation had mounted to this climactic moment when the tantalizing spread of cakes, pies, and pastries would be sold to the highest bidder. Operation Airlift was not a fundraiser for a daring rescue attempt or an emergency trip to the ER, but rather it was a project designed to raise support for an international delegate to secure a flight to the Global Gathering.

The Church of God in Huber Heights, Ohio, jumped on board as a sponsor of an international delegate earlier this year. Following the General Assembly meeting last June, associate pastor Howard Briggs simply could not get the opportunity to sponsor a delegate off his mind. “I just said, ‘We’ve got to do this.’” Briggs, whose pastoral responsibilities at Huber Heights include working with the seniors group, determined that his seniors could handle the task. These seniors would come up with a way to raise the funds to sponsor a delegate to the Global Gathering.

Just after the New Year, Briggs worked with the seniors group to plan a fundraiser. Operation Airlift—as the seniors dubbed it—would consist of a major dessert auction for the church. As Briggs described, the seniors needed very little encouragement and direction. They took off with the idea and ran with it!

“When they started bringing the food in, I couldn’t believe it! I didn’t have to do much of the prep or any of the cooking. It was wonderful. We had a big globe set up and decorated with a focus on the country where our delegate is coming from. And we had a lot more than just seniors there. We had young adults and the youth helping us.” As the people gathered that day, the enthusiasm in the church gymnasium was contagious.

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Exciting Kid’s Place Planned for Global Gathering

Hey Kids! This is Fred Fogel, your Kid’s Place tour guide. I am here to tell you a little of what’s going on at Kid’s Place 2013.

This year, your parents will be attending a very exciting convention, called the Global Gathering, and you will be able to attend a very special Kid’s Place too!

The Global Gathering will be a celebration where our friends from all over the world will make a long journey to come visit us. They will tell us how they share the love of Jesus in their countries. In a year like never before, these international friends will be our teachers at Kid’s Place!

This summer we will meet and get to know people who follow Jesus from all six regions of the world: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Caribbean-Atlantic, Europe-Middle East, Latin America, and North America. We will learn about their cultures, and they will teach us new games from their countries, and even show us the different ways they worship God. So pack your bags, and get ready for our trip around the globe! I am so excited to see you this summer!

**Things to Do Before You Arrive:**

- **Register for Kid’s Place.** Your parents or grandparents can help you do that on the Internet.
- **Look** at a map or a globe and find some of the countries your teachers will be coming from. How far away do they have to travel to get here? How long do you think it will take them to get to Indiana?
- **Pray** for the children that will be attending with you. Pray for the leaders that will be traveling a long distance. Pray for the people living around the world so they can know God’s love.

Parents: Kid’s Place is scheduled for June 23–25, 1:15 – 3:15 pm, at the Park Place Community Center gymnasium and classrooms. Registration is available online at www.chog.org/kids-place-registration. For more information, please contact your Kid’s Place director, Michelle Parker, at duparker@juno.com, or contact Katherine Schnaufer at KSchnaufer@chog.org or 800-848-2464, ext. 2185.
Extreme Love Explosion in Florence, South Carolina

By Carl Stagner

Juvenile crime—down 39 percent in one year. Arrests—down 54 percent in one year. Since 2004, overall juvenile crime has plummeted by more than 70 percent. Some crimes are now virtually nonexistent. The past thirteen years have ushered in a new era of learning to work together to transform culture. As a result of strategic partnership between churches, schools, and government, there has been an explosion of extreme love in Florence, South Carolina. Pastor Clyde Odom of King of Kings Church of God has brought this incredible story of transformation to light.

In a culture so devoid of faith, hope, and love, there simply isn’t sufficient time for the church to wait for government to do something. The church has been called to go and make disciples. But in Florence, South Carolina, the faith community found a way to partner with the government and the schools without spending a dime of taxpayer money. They have built a relationship founded on mutual trust and cooperation. By laying aside differences and focusing on their common vision for a better community, they have offered more than a ray of hope to a community reeling from years of decline culminating in a devastating outbreak of juvenile violence in 2004.

As an expansion of the Mayor’s Coalition to Prevent Juvenile Crime, which brought the faith community, the education system, and the government to one table, the Community Coalition has initiated programs and ministries that directly meet the needs of the residents. These include a jobs program, an after-school teen center, mentoring, Good News Christian clubs for elementary students, Christian Learning Centers for middle school students (operating with parental permission), homeless initiatives such as community breakfasts and the rehabilitation of abandoned houses for the homeless, drive-by prayer teams, and prayer walking. And in this community where kids go to school so that they can eat, a summer feeding program is offered, as well as summer camps and clothing giveaways.

Pastor Clyde Odom arrived in Florence in 1999, just as the community was reaching the pinnacle of need. King of Kings Church of God had dwindled down to just three people. Time and the elements had weathered the old building; cracks and peeling paint reflected the tale of a greater community in ruins. Drug dealers had even set up operations in the church’s crawlspace. But Odom took it all in stride, inviting them to lunch instead of dialing 9-1-1. The faithful few began to hold prayer services every Monday night for the drug dealers, as well as for the needs of the entire city. Soon their friends in low places vacated the premises, and it wasn’t long before the Community Coalition began to take shape.

“Our church members come from prostitutes, drug dealers, and the like. We’re not a big church, but we don’t go by numbers. Jesus didn’t tell us to go by numbers. He just said, ‘Go into Jerusalem,’ your local city. Now people come in drunk to our church, sometimes falling right in the door. All kinds of sinners come through our door. We don’t cut them up into pieces, but we don’t rewrite the Word either. We just hit them with love. The key to all that’s happening here in South Carolina is love. The homeless know we love them. I don’t care who they are; they know we love them.”

Before the Coalition, Florence was a divided city. Some may conclude that it would be nearly impossible to replicate this kind of vehicle for transformation in their community. But no step along the journey was easy. From the beginning, Odom had to be especially persistent in encouraging the faith community to work together before this unity actually became reality.

“Faith is risk,” Odom explains. “Go in faith. Take some risks. You never go wrong being in line with God’s Word. We in Florence don’t know it all. We’re evolving every day. But in every city people are just waiting for someone to love them, waiting and ready for hope to come to them. Our church people are preached to death and programmed to death, but our church people are waiting to do something beyond ourselves.”

In Florence, it benefitted the Coalition that every key leader who had come to the table at the beginning was saved. But Odom says, “Don’t worry about the government. Go in as a servant. Don’t go carrying Bibles in. Everyone’s looking for someone to read to the kids. Eat lunch with them. The key is love.”

About six years ago, Odom went to Brazil on a mission trip. While there he met a local videographer, Weslei Vianna. They became friends and maintained contact through Skype. Odom shared the story of the citywide transformation taking place and, by faith, brought

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Christian Women Connection Director to Speak at Global Gathering

By Mary Baker-Boudissa

What is the best part about the Global Gathering? It’s our time to come together and fellowship with our global family of believers! This June 22–25, 2013, will mark an event like no other in the life of the Church of God. Guests from eighty-nine countries will experience dynamic worship led by some of our movement’s most passionate voices.

Among those who will represent the United States on the distinguished slate of speakers is Arnetta McNeese Bailey. She will share a message on the power of the Holy Spirit as the catalyst for change in a difficult world.

Bailey is a national leader in ministry who has paved the way and advocated for other women who seek to serve the Lord in ministry. Under her leadership as executive director of Christian Women Connection (formerly Women of the Church of God), the agency has become “a place for every woman, where every woman takes her place.”

With her heart for ministry, her passion for reaching the lost, and her commitment to supporting missions at home and around the world, Bailey was a natural choice for the Global Gathering. She has inspired thousands over her years in ministry—at conventions, at conferences, and in her travels around the globe. Her compassion for men and women in transition, facing difficult life circumstances, led her to found Priscilla’s Lost and Found and In the Company of Good Men.

In addition to Bailey, Global Gathering attendees will also hear from Timothy Clarke (United States), Amos Moore (India), Donny Franz (Paraguay), David Ravell (Australia), Edward Nkan-sah (Ghana), Andrei Kolegov (Russia), Mailesi Phiri Ndao (Zambia), Norberto Obermann (Brazil), Lenworth Anglin (Jamaica), and other leaders from the Church of God worldwide.

With the Global Gathering in 2013, Arnetta McNeese Bailey hopes to help bring our connectedness as a Church of God family into greater focus. “This is at the heart of how show Christ to a hurting world,” says Bailey. “Through our connection, our love for one another, we demonstrate Christ’s love. We are all one body, and a beautiful reflection of what it means to be Christlike.”

Won’t you join us for this historic event? Register online at www.chog.org/globalgathering or call 800-848-2464, ext. 2130.

Good News Clubs, an offshoot of the Community Coalition, reach out to children.

Extreme Love

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Odom wants the Church of God to know that he’s available to share insights and information about the transformation taking place in South Carolina so that other churches and communities can realize similar transformation. “We want to see this thing spread.” Contact Pastor Clyde Odom by e-mail at cmpodom@att.net.

For more encouragement and inspiration to exercise extreme love in your life and church, visit www.chog.org/Focus40 and www.chog.org/extreme-love.
Churches Merge for Kingdom’s Sake

By Carl Stagner

No, it’s not fuzzy math. 1 + 1 = ONE. When two churches come together for the cause of the kingdom, two churches are no longer separate fellowships. They become one body, and 200 + 100 > 300.

Just outside Houston is the city of Pasadena, Texas. When one of its churches faced a difficult decision about their future, instead of folding or relocating, they chose to merge with another.

“There’s an independent church in town with roots in the Church of Christ,” Jim Feirtag, pastor of Parkgate Church of God, explains, “but their pastor and I are very good friends. Our churches had done a lot together over the years, including different service projects in the community and men’s and women’s retreats.” The two pastors, as well as several other pastors in town, meet together for fellowship each week.

“As much as their church tried to reach the neighborhood, it became very difficult. Almost overnight, their church became a drive-in congregation.” For the independent church, the question was whether or not to sell their building, purchase a new building, or rent a school. “As the pastor and I talked,” Feirtag continues, “we began to think about what it would be like if we pooled our resources.”

The two churches had no theological incompatibility, so the conversations expanded to include the church leaders and laypeople. In November, the churches announced their plans. They began pulpit and worship leadership exchanges, held joint fellowship activities, and combined youth events. “They basically came to us with a no-strings-attached offer. They just wanted to be a part of our ministry. It was not that there was one congregation that was drowning and the other had to come to the rescue; rather, both congregations decided that we could do a whole lot more together for the gospel than apart.” In January, Parkgate voted almost unanimously to complete the merger.

On the first Sunday of March, the two churches held their first service as one community of faith. Parkgate’s attendance hovered at two hundred before the merger. On Sunday, over three hundred showed up. Past members of each church who had left at one time or another returned to the fellowship that day. Several visitors also came to see what the hubbub was about. The service was especially celebratory and resulted in setting various goals for the new church to make an impact on the city of Pasadena. To help reach these new goals, the church made a big push for volunteers. Many signed up who have never been involved in the work of the church. Some of these volunteers were recruited to help with parking.

“We have to have a parking lot crew now, because we don’t have enough parking spaces,” Feirtag says. He chuckles and admits that this is a good problem to have. “I grew up in the Church of God,” he continues. “We heard, ‘We reach our hands in fellowship to every blood-washed one’ so many times. What we’re doing now is putting our rhetoric into action. Are we really willing to surrender our personal preferences so that we can partner together for the gospel?”

The newly merged congregation anticipates an upcoming opportunity when the other building sells. “We’ll have plenty of resources to expand our ministry debt-free. And we won’t have to maintain two buildings. Usually churches wait until they’re down to a few people before considering opportunities like ours. If more took advantage of this kind of thing while there is vitality remaining, there could be real kingdom impact.”

So what about the nuts and bolts of this merger? Feirtag is the senior pastor, and the pastor of the independent church became the associate of outreach and discipleship. Parkgate’s youth pastor remains responsible for youth ministry, and the youth pastor of the former church (who is gifted in children’s leadership) has become the children’s pastor. The worship leadership at the former church was made up of several volunteers, so the worship leader at Parkgate now has a bigger team of talent.

“Our whole focus for the rest of the year,” Feirtag explains, “centers on two things: becoming one spiritual family and carrying out the Great Commission. We will eradicate the former ties to the old congregations to the point that members do not feel they need to identify themselves as having come from one group or the other. Each month, we will function as one church as we do service projects to reach the community with the love of Christ.”

The newly merged congregation worships together!
Next Step Discipleship Resources Now Available in Spanish

Congratulations! You have made the most important decision in your life—you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Now what? What is your next step?”

These words welcome visitors to the Next Step Discipleship website, a product of the Transformation Team and Church of God Ministries. The site, created by Jonathan Absher, seeks to answer the question, What’s next for new Christians? It’s a question that new believers, pastors, and friends of new believers seek to answer. Church of God Ministries and the Transformation Team are pleased to offer Next Step Discipleship as an answer to the What’s next? question. Now these practical discipleship materials are available in Spanish.

Offering a range of practical study topics, including what it means to be saved, how to use the Bible, what baptism is all about, and how to get connected with a church, Next Step Discipleship is on the cutting edge of spiritual-growth products. Each lesson, adapted from Charles Shumate's book Stretching and Growing: A Guide for the New Christian, gives direction to new believers to encourage them to move beyond conversion to an ever-maturing walk with the Lord.

In addition to these resources, Next Step Discipleship offers downloadable business cards that contain QR codes so new Christians can use their smart phones to directly access the online materials. These business cards can come in handy for anyone who has just led someone to Christ. Charles Shumate’s book Telling Others: A Witnessing Lifestyle is also available on the website as a free download in both English and Spanish.

Text NEXT to 96362 to receive daily encouragement on your phone. For the Spanish lessons, visit www.nextstepdiscipleship.org and click Resources/Lessons. May the Church of God be encouraged by these products, and prepared to guide new believers on their journey of faith.

¡El corazón de la fe cristiana es las buenas noticia de la vida eterna en Jesucristo!

Warner Releases New Book on Intercessory Prayer


“Christians are troubled by the spiritual indifference and moral degeneracy of our day,” says Joe Allison, coordinator of publishing and creative services at Church of God Ministries. “Some resort to a kind of religious escapism, interacting only with likeminded believers and dreaming of a spectacular deliverance in the apocalypse. Yet God calls us to respond—not by escaping from the world, but by interceding for its deliverance. In fact, Scripture says that intercession is the life purpose of every servant of God.”

Dr. Kinlaw affirms that God still hears and answers the prayers of his people. Leading us through several amazing Scripture accounts of intercessory prayer, he challenges us to examine the depth of our own relationship with God.

A leading Methodist evangelist and former contributor to Christianity Today magazine, Dr. Kinlaw served as president of Asbury College for eighteen years. His first book, Preaching in the Spirit, has remained in print for nearly three decades and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. His other inspirational books include The Mind of Christ and We Live as Christ. All three are published under the Francis Asbury Press imprint and are available through Warner Press.

CHOG Fast Fact

11 World Conferences of the Church of God have convened since 1955. Global Gathering 2013 will be #12!

Register at www.chog.org/globalgathering!
Reflections of Christ in the Amazon

By Abby Smith

This year has gotten off to a difficult start for many people I know. Some missionary friends had a kid from the ministry break into their home and steal valuable electronic items. My brother-in-law’s office was also burglarized and suffered significant losses. The same week, friends of his lost their two-year-old son in a tragic home accident. The director of the feeding program where I work was hospitalized with hemorrhagic dengue, though she fortunately has recovered. Others have faced surgery, unplanned pregnancy, difficult transitions, and general discouragement. At the same time, 2013 has begun on a joyful note for many. Two of my friends were married, my parents began anew in pastoral ministry, and I have seen the Lord work in wonderful ways in my life.

When times are good for me and I see others struggling, I find myself wondering how I got so lucky. At other times, though, I demand an explanation when life does not go my way. Apparently, what I want is an easy answer. Too many churches, especially here, have subscribed to this easy-answer faith. If we follow God, life will go well, but if we have troubles, we need to repent of our sin or our lack of faith. Though I vehemently reject such simplistic theology, I do sometimes get caught up in the paranoia that one little mistake can lead me forever down a path of no return. I believe strongly in seeking God’s will, but often when I fail to hear a booming voice from the sky, I live in perpetual fear that I may have accidentally stepped outside of it.

When problems arise, we wonder where we went wrong and fear that God can never bring us back. We must realize, however, that while God does let us experience the consequences of our sin, not all difficulties are punishment for rebellion. Sometimes they are the result of others’ sin, and sometimes we have no explanation. What we have to trust, though, is that God holds all things in his hand. Rain falls on the just and the unjust, but God is bigger than all of it. If we are willing to let go and trust him to guide us at each step, we can have peace knowing that come joy or come sorrow, he is there and he will never let us go.

In January I had the opportunity to spend a few days in the Amazon, traveling with a mission team from the seminary where I taught and a Korean church from the United States. We went to build on a work begun by Pastor Julio, a traveling evangelist who has worked to plant and encourage churches in many isolated jungle areas in Colombia, Brazil, and Peru. I worked with children who enthusiastically learned the stories of four Bible characters. We talked about how Jesus changed their lives and how he wants to change our lives too. One member of our group also built a good relationship with the owners of a small store that we frequented, and they asked him to come share the Word with their family. He took Pastor Julio and a couple others along, and the family agreed to start hosting a small group in their home. At night we had church services, and I had the opportunity to preach on the second evening. Afterward, a woman asked me to pray with her so that she could follow Jesus. The town was too far away for her to get to any currently established churches, but fortunately I was able to point her to the family that had just hours before agreed to host the small group.

We were all very pleased to see doors open there. The Lord definitely had his hand on us. Despite the confusion that sometimes comes from four spoken languages—Spanish, English, Korean, and Ticuna—we were united in one Spirit and one Lord. Through the good and the bad experiences of life, the Lord continues his marvelous work. Please pray that his work in the Amazon will continue to grow even stronger in years to come.

Abby Smith is your missionary for Global Missions serving in Colombia.

Abby Smith (right) with a friend in the Amazon.
Revival at Warner University: 71 Students, 1 Faculty Baptized

By Chloé Boehm

Anyone who has ever attended a past Warner University chapel would agree that Tuesday’s was uniquely different from any other. Seventy-two people were baptized by Bob Beckler, the senior pastor of South Lake Wales Church of God.

Dr. Cathy Brim was chosen in early January to speak on February 26. “I am an introvert,” said Brim. Brim knew God wanted her to speak after what had been happening on campus over the last two weeks with speakers Dr. Joseph Jennings and Chad Varga.

Brim addressed the chapel and offered an opportunity to be submerged and baptized in front of peers, administrators, faculty, and staff. A few students were quick to stand up and go forward, but it was what happened over the following forty-five minutes that left many amazed, including Rodney Dallas, the director of resident life. “Warner has never had a chapel where something like that has happened since I’ve been a student or staff here,” said Dallas.

Pastor Bob Beckler baptized all seventy-two during Tuesday’s chapel service and was intentional about speaking to each individual about what was happening. “I saw tears streaming down face after face,” said Beckler. “It was something I had never experienced before.”

Freshman Jordan Jenkins entered chapel as if it were going to be a regular service. Jenkins recalls being baptized when he was twelve years old, but after he saw several others go forward, he felt moved to go as well.

Seven beach towels were brought to chapel Tuesday morning to dry off the expected few students to go forward to be baptized. After the stage filled with teary-eyed students, church staff climbed into the attic and searched the church for towels. The service came to an end and seventy-one students and one faculty member stood along the sides of the sanctuary, wet but renewed.

You can watch the baptism ceremony on YouTube at http://youtu.be/YpxFNTIXhmA.

The Global Gathering is June 22–25 in Anderson, Indiana. To learn more, and to register, visit www.chog.org/globalgathering, or call 800-848-2464, ext. 2130.
Attaining Beauty

By Sam Collins

I am not a particularly attractive human being. Sadder still, I was not even a cute baby. In fact, I have a sneaking suspicion that Dad called his insurance agent to make sure that all of the household mirrors were covered before he allowed Mom to bring me home from the hospital.

I don’t usually begrudge the pretty people their magazine-cover looks—although perhaps I should. Some studies suggest that good looks are just as likely to bolster career success as hard work and talent. That even extends beyond vocations that obviously depend on a breathtaking exterior (such as being a movie star or gesturing toward merchandise on TV quiz shows).

Though biblical archeologists have failed to turn up any eight-by-ten glossies, the Good Book indicates that a number of its prominent characters were fair of face and form. Among those renowned for their pleasing bone structures and glowing skin tones were David, Daniel, Esther, Saul, Rachel, Absalom, and Bathsheba.

Note that being included in this scriptural catalog of the comely did not necessarily mean that the individual possessed anything more than an ultrathin veneer of physical beauty. Absalom, as one example, was a bona fide Hebrew hunk, in addition to being the son of King David. Since patricide seemed to be his preferred method of career advancement, however, he was not the kind of boy to swell a parent’s heart with pride.

Although the Scriptures at times refer to those who possessed physical glamour, it is obvious that God prefers loveliness of spirit to straight teeth, shimmering hair, and dimpled cheeks. Though it conflicts with the values of our popular culture, it is better to have a radiant soul than a ravishing surface.

The book of Matthew contains the account of a woman who bathed the feet of Jesus with an expensive perfume. Significantly, the passage does not offer an evaluation of her figure or facial features. We are told, however, that Jesus made this comment about her: “She has done a beautiful thing to me” (Matt 26:10 niv).

In our society, a lot of people waste untold time, money, and effort trying to improve the features that heredity, time, and wind erosion have foisted on them. Despite their exertions, many still end up with faces that could curdle distilled water.

Perhaps we would be better advised to pursue a spiritual makeover in order to improve the texture and contours of our souls. We cannot all look like male or female runway models, but, as the behavior of the woman in the Matthew account suggests, we can all do beautiful things.

The views expressed in this column are not necessarily those of Church of God Ministries or, at points, even the writer, but are written with tongue firmly planted in cheek to hopefully provoke a leavening bit of laughter and a smidgen of thought.