Global Gathering to Premiere Global Worship Song

By Mick Gilliam

As I reflected on the nature and potential of the upcoming Global Gathering last year, I saw an opportunity to project a picture of a world united by common mission in Christian faith. In Brent Peterson’s recent book *Created to Worship: Becoming Fully Human*, there’s an agenda of painting the abundant life as human beings becoming “fully human”—all that we were created to be—high functioning and in conformity with the person of Christ. As a pursuant of the abundant life, this notion really caught my attention.

When the planning committees commissioned David Coplin (worship pastor at South Meridian Church of God in Anderson, Indiana) and me to compose a theme song for the Global Gathering, the concept of being fully human came to be at the crux of the lyrics. David featured the lyrics “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10) as a hypnotic ostinato weaved throughout the song. The idea is that we as many nations can live a life in conformity with Christ’s character, even on this side of heaven. The apocalyptic implication of that lyric is present as well, but my hope is to encourage Christians to live on earth like we will live in heaven.

“We Will Stand as One” echoes the theme statement of the Global Gathering, “Standing Together by Being the Body of Christ in a Changing World.” The content borrows not only images from the Lord’s Prayer but also those wonderful pictures of saints, elders, and angels worshiping God before his throne as described in from Revelations 4, 5, and 7. The first chorus of the song states:

*We will stand as one, stand before the Son, reflecting his glory! Nations all bow down, casting forth their crowns, proclaiming his story! Every tribe, every tongue, every nation as one join and sing... on earth as it is in heaven.*

David is a longtime dear friend and colleague who speaks in to my life as an accountability partner and songwriting collaborator. We have written together, but we also critique each other’s material on a regular basis. We both find that the journey of songwriting is a hard one. The journey of collaborative songwriting is even more difficult. The collaborators have to be willing to leave their egos at the door and give and receive honest critique. I say this as an exhortation to worship songwriters in the church to seek out collaborators and honest evaluation. It seems that currently we see some really great mate—

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Every now and then I like to look closer at a popular worship song, and today I'm checking out “Mighty to Save,” performed by Hillsong, written by Reuben Morgan and Ben Fielding. You might know this song as “Everyone needs compassion” if, like me, you tend to call songs by their first line.

The lyrics of the first verse are so powerful, proclaiming that everyone needs compassion, and that Christ is only the hope for the nations. This is evident in Scripture, and in Acts 2 in particular when the disciples were heard speaking in foreign languages. Scripture says about the people listening: “When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken…Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues” (Acts 2:6, 11b niv).

In the presence of turmoil, men and women in the Arab world are facing discouragement and disappointment on a daily basis. Their future is uncertain and their well-being is threatened constantly. Under such circumstances, hope is a farfetched dream. Survival becomes the normal mode of living.

However, God reveals his hope for everyone in many ways; one way is through listening to the gospel. CBH has been broadcasting hope for decades, and today we rejoice that we have the opportunity to share the gospel with over 250 million people in the Arab world.

Therefore, a partnership has been revived between CBH and Salem Church of God, and according to Pastor Bob Moss: “Three of the national radio speakers of the Church of God were former pastors of this congregation. W. Dale Oldham, the founder of the broadcast; Dr. R. Eugene Sterner; and Dr. David Grubbs.” The Salem Church is being asked to revive its relationship with CBH in a new enterprise aimed at reaching those in the Arabic world. Nabil and Myrna Safi are a part of the Salem congregation and have been asked to produce an Arabic broadcast, *Kello Tamam* (All Is Well).

This program is directed to anyone who is wants to be optimistic and is looking forward to a better future that is full of positive experiences and true happiness. Our plan is to broadcast a weekly fifteen-minute program starting in June 2013.

The end of Acts 2 gives more meaning to the original title of the above mentioned song, as God adds to the church those who were saved. Our job is to “let the world know,” and he is “mighty to save.”

For more information, or to listen to the very first broadcast, go to www.kelotamam.org!
The church, originally established in 1966, is blessed with an exceptional heritage of Christ-centered ministry and faithful proclamation of the gospel. As the reality of cultural and generational shifts shapes the landscape of the quaint community of Rainelle, West Virginia, the church has taken steps to ensure that this remarkable legacy continues. While the size and resources of the congregation were in decline, the hearts of the people were primed for something new. Like the early disciples who would stop at nothing to reach the lost, Highland First Church of God has determined to relinquish comfort for transformation.

“We’re not going to be about those who are presently at the church. Our passion will be for those who are not yet here.” This sentiment, echoed by Pastor Bob Daniels, sums up the lens through which all new ministry activities are now filtered at Highland First Church. “We must be a church geared to reach the lost in the community; so as God directs and moves, we need flexibility to make necessary changes.”

Not everyone greets change with a handshake and a smile. But the believers at Highland First Church fully embraced their state ministries’ offer of financial support in exchange for temporary oversight. A turnaround team meets with Pastor Daniels on a regular basis as outreach strategies are developed and implemented. While the congregation had to set aside their bylaws, this concession is all but eclipsed by their newfound passion for ministry. “Their love for the Lord has reached a new level,” Daniels explains. “Their level of love and pride for their church body has reached new heights.”

The excitement for what’s going on in Rainelle is only rivaled by that of the leadership at West Virginia Ministries. It’s been twenty years since a project of this magnitude has been launched, and for state health coach Thom Pratt, it’s a welcome opportunity. “We wanted a church that was really serious about turning around, not just interested in saving themselves from dying. I believe we’ve got the right folks with the right attitude and spirit. We’re already starting to see some numeric and heart growth in these people who are uniting around a vision to reach their community for Christ. We’re really thrilled about what’s going on there.”

After just a few months at Highland First Church, Daniels is diving head-first into the deep end of the outreach pool. He’s already met with the mayor, preached at an ecumenical unity service, and planned a carnival for the town’s children. The church is also actively practicing 360 Revolution evangelism, which Daniels helped plan while serving on the Youth Network Team of the Church of God. In all of these outreach activities, the Church of God in West Virginia has provided generous support. Liberty Street Church of God in nearby Parkersburg supported the turnaround in Rainelle by sending volunteers and games to assist with the carnival. The Liberty Street volunteers proudly donned T-shirts with Highland’s name in support of the turnaround.

For the centennial celebration for the community of Rainelle, Daniels landed the role of town cofounder in a reenactment of how the town came to be. During the opening ceremonies, Daniels rode a mule onto the set, theatrically bustin’ up the festivities while offering the crowd a humorous glimpse into the past.

Believers and nonbelievers are taking notice of the church’s keen interest in the welfare of the town, and Highland First Church of God is rallying behind a turnaround that has only just begun.

For more information about the 360 Revolution, visit www.chogy.org/node/8.

Bob Daniels baptized six persons on the last Sunday of April.
Holiness Defined for the 21st Century

By Ronald V. Duncan

One of the most quoted Scriptures on the necessity of holiness in the life of the believer is 1 Peter 1:16: “You must be holy for I am holy.” Holiness is clearly a requirement. It is a scriptural mandate. The difficulty arises in the definition of what holiness means when discussed in cultural context. The Bible is replete with examples and characteristics of a holy life. When the concept or belief of holiness has to take on real world attributes, the believer is drawn to a deeper level of understanding about holiness.

Each one of us can think back into our history and share examples of the holy life being defined by a list of things you don’t do. In some Christian circles this is still the primary way a definition of holiness is developed—by making a list of don’ts. Obviously, when there is a list of don’ts, somewhere there has to be a list of dos. For some in the Christian faith, the definition of holiness is guided more by the don’ts than the dos. It seems reasonable to assume that you really need both in any true definition. The key question about holiness is, What serves as the dominant driver in the believer’s life, the dos or the don’ts? The believer in Christ who is guided by the don’ts may never get to the dos, exhausting energy seeking to enforce those don’ts.

The love of Christ is presumed by most to be the motivating factor in each believer’s life. When this love of Christ and for Christ is at the forefront in the believer’s heart and mind, then the desire to live a life worthy of the high calling becomes the dominant force. The desire of the heart is to love, not out of compulsion or pressure, but out of genuine love. Genuine love seems to align more closely to the dos than to the don’ts. So as a definition is sought within culture, each believer should review all biblical sources and make application to daily existence. Hebrews 12:14b states, “Without holiness no one will see the Lord.” A short essay necessarily limits the discussion of all the nuances of holiness; therefore, a deeper study is required for a balanced definition.

Global Worship Song

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The Valley View School District had their work cut out for them: 2,412 boxes to move, 432 large desks to relocate, 420 student desks to transport from one place to another. And a mountain of files, white boards, sports equipment, and an array of other educational tools that had accumulated over the forty years of teaching at this location. Two weeks had been scheduled for this big move, but after First Church of God in Germantown, Ohio, got wind of the need, this two-week project was completed in just a few hours.

Debbie Bruner, the communications director for the district, reports that the outpouring of love began with a generous offer from the church to provide a meal to those who would handle the move. The offer was graciously accepted, but the Spirit nudged First Church’s associate pastor to do more. Ricky King coordinated a massive volunteer effort, and the church came back to the school with a second, much larger, offer. Bruner describes the sequence of events as follows: “Pastor Ricky was now offering to sign up volunteers to physically help with the move, volunteers to help teachers pack up classrooms, and volunteers to work on moving day June 15. ‘Is he crazy?’ asked the superintendent when told of this newest revelation. ‘I think so,’ I whispered, ‘but let’s answer yes before he has time to think about it!’”

Germantown First Church had originally heard about the school’s move from the local paper and word around the community. On the day of the move, the church fed the workers both breakfast and lunch, in addition to providing trucks and trailers to haul the school’s belongings. Some volunteers took time off work to lend a hand. “We wanted to help because we wanted to share the love of Christ and bless them, and let them know we were there for them,” Becky Wetzel, church secretary, explains. “Getting involved in the community is what it’s all about. We have a community food pantry that helps numerous families every month throughout the year. We have a free community dinner every month for anyone to come and eat and fellowship together. We do things in the local nursing home, offer free dinner-and-a-movie nights for the community, and help provide supplies for the community back to school program—just to name a few.”

All of these community activities are propelled by the love of God. First Church cannot help but love others with the love that God has lavished on them. “We simply want to bless people and let them know that God loves them,” Wetzel explains. “The objective is not to get people to come to our church or to bring glory to ourselves, but to share the love of Christ and bring glory to him. After all, that’s why we’re here, and that’s what it’s all about!”

At the end of the day, more than a hundred volunteers had moved the school to its new home. The school’s plans to rent moving trucks, secure hauling equipment, and hire additional help were rendered unnecessary. Today the school benefits from its new location and new technologies, in part, because one church chose to go the extra mile and cut an enormous task down to size.
Saddle Up and Spread the Good News!

By Carl Stagner

Scott Hilgendorff is called to reach cowboys. Images of the Lone Ranger and the Rifleman may come to mind, but Hilgendorff isn’t shooting for best supporting actor in the latest Western. He’s been called to share the gospel with real cowboys.

Cowboys are perhaps one of the more iconic symbols of pioneering freedom and heroism in our culture today. But the real cowboy culture, characterized by bull riders and rodeo talent, presents an opportunity that not many have taken to share the love of Christ. As these folk travel the country through the year, competing for trophies and cash prizes, their work and schedule often cloud their view of the prize after which the apostle Paul so desperately sought.

To this distinct Southern demographic, the journalist-turned-Church of God minister from Canada was called.

Having grown up in church, and introduced to the Church of God by a colleague in the newspaper industry, Scott was familiar with ministry. But it wasn’t until a vacation to the mountains of Tennessee that God started him down a most unusual path. Among the magnificence of God’s handiwork, Scott’s faith was revitalized and subsequently challenged when called upon to reach cowboys for Christ.

Scott was simply bringing in a little extra cash while taking photos of the rodeo circuit—why should there have been more to it? The answer was clarified after a series of events that led him to accept the call to ministry also found him reconnecting with a young bull rider who had become a pastor. Since then, Scott has proudly taken the reins of Cowboys of the Cross.

“Many cowboys give up a lot to make it work,” Scott explains. “They give up troubled relationships because of life on the road and often forfeit their jobs because they need to leave early on Fridays to get to events. They risk and face serious injuries, some are killed, for a chance at making it to the professional level where they can potentially make enough money to retire comfortably. Only a few make it, but thousands compete across North America.”

“These cowboys live a hard and dangerous life that takes them away from any possibility of being a regular part of a church. At the same time, cowboys and bull riders identify with Christianity as the principal faith within the industry, stemming from the days of circuit riders in America’s frontier. Bringing services to them fills a need, and most, particularly in the United States, will attend cowboy church services which are typically held before the start of the event.” From drug abuse, to questions about the Bible, to struggling relationships—Scott’s ministry addresses it all.

“Many bull riders and cowboys struggle with their rodeo/bull riding careers,” he explains. “They invest much in it with little return and can get extremely discouraged. We point them to a hope in Christ for their future.”

Scott is thankful for the work of the Church of God, as well as the support of peers in the ministry in Ontario and Tennessee. “Tennessee’s state minister, Dwayne Pierce, was instrumental in finding me a church to partner with. LifeSong Family Church in Lewisburg has been wonderful. Pastor Rocky Cunningham has been nothing but a source of encouragement.”

Scott did not grow up in the cowboy culture. But they have accepted him like family. Along this journey, the Lord has taught him invaluable life lessons. “You have to meet people where they are. One of the reasons these guys have accepted me so well is because they know I don’t judge them and that I do, in fact, care for them. You have to make time for people.” And when it comes to meeting all of your needs, Scott insists, “You have to trust God.”
Not Just a Fifth Sunday Thing

By Carl Stagner

They only come around about four times each year, but when they do come, you can be sure there’s a church somewhere planning something special. In the southwest corner of Missouri, you’ll find four Church of God congregations that use these extra Sundays as an excuse to get together—not that they need such an excuse! First Church of God (Granby), Scotland (Carthage), Grand Avenue (Carthage), and Southside Community (Joplin) place great value in the fellowship of the saints. For these churches, getting together on a regular basis reminds them that they are not alone in ministry, inspires them to keep pressing on, allows them to worship together in unity, and offers them the opportunity to celebrate what God is accomplishing among them.

Ashley Edgemon, pastor of First Church of God in Granby, is grateful for the unity services held each fifth Sunday. “This custom has helped to remind our people that they are not alone in this Christian journey, and that there are other brothers and sisters in the Church of God movement that are nearby in southwest Missouri. It is up to the hosting congregation to decide how each unity service will flow, but there is usually a sermonette or devotional thought, corporate singing, and special music selection from each church, followed by a time of fellowship and food.” When planning these unity services, Edgemon reviews the upcoming calendar year and e-mails a proposed schedule to the neighboring churches. The fifth Sunday designation makes it easy for everyone to remember.

“By gathering with the pastors and people of our sister congregations we are reminded of the ‘big picture’ regarding God’s kingdom,” Edgemon explains, “and that we belong to a fellowship of Christians all over the world that are sharing in the mission of living out God’s Word and spreading his message and love to all who will listen. The people of our congregations have become more acquainted with each other. I have heard of times when members of our sister churches have run into each other in public, recognized each other, and offered encouragement and brief fellowship. That is always a good thing!”

Though these fifth Sunday events have become a tradition, uniting together for worship and fellowship is anything but rote, and it is never forced. Rather, their tradition has led to deeper relationships with one another and a desire to fellowship beyond the fifth Sunday. The men of the churches join together for regular breakfasts, at which they encourage each other, pray for each other, and network. The pastors of the four churches also aim to connect for lunch each month, and the churches recently came together for a joint Christian education workshop. In the summer, they share together in times of refreshment and spiritual rejuvenation at the regional camp meeting. A newly formed SHAPE group has only furthered the opportunity for their pastors to connect for support and pastoral health.

“We have discussed everything from how things are going in our respective churches, to how our kids are doing in school,” Edgemon adds. “We’ve talked about what has worked and what hasn’t worked so well in our experiences of pastoral leadership. As the proverbial wisdom says that ‘iron sharpens iron,’ we have each been able to benefit from each other’s varied strengths.”

In southwest Missouri, the fifth Sunday thing isn’t just a tradition fueled by “the way we’ve always done it.” These unity services and gatherings are purposeful, empowering, always refreshing, and altogether wrapped in unity and holiness.
MACU Launches Online Master of Ministry Degree

Mid-America Christian University (MACU.edu) is pleased to announce its new online master of ministry (MMin) degree.

According to Mid-America President John Fozard, who contributed to the development of the program, “Preparing pastors and church leadership is at the heart of the MACU mission and has been since our founding nearly sixty years ago. In fact, MACU is a leader in equipping senior pastors graduating from Church of God colleges and universities. This new graduate program is responding in a dynamic way to the needs among Church of God leadership—and leaders of other churches.”

Subjects offered include biblical leadership, coaching, and ethics, evangelism in a postmodern era, and leading strategic change, as well as spiritual formation from a Wesleyan perspective, among others.

Dr. Kimberly Thomas, senior director of academics for spiritual formation in the MACU College of Adult and Graduate Studies, highlights the practical and strategic nature of the new program. “There is a hunger among church and lay leaders for a program that will speak to them right where they are and equip them to address the challenges of the church and its people. The master of ministry answers that felt need.

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The Master of Ministry Program will enhance and enrich the ministry skills and abilities of today’s pastors and ministry leaders and help them reach a whole new level of effectiveness,” Dr. Thomas said.

Further evidence of the program’s practical approach, the master of ministry culminates in several practicums that provide the student with hands-on experience within a local church setting rather than culminating in a traditional thesis as many graduate programs in ministry do.

Those interested in pursuing the Mid-America master of ministry online may be happy to learn that Student Success Coaches are appointed to every adult student to help them navigate online learning and to assist with enrollment and financial aid deadlines and other routine matters.

To learn more about the Master of Ministry Program, visit MasterofMinistry.MACU.edu online or speak with an enrollment manager by calling 888.888.2341.

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Watch it live on the Internet. Learn more at www.chog.org/gcs.
Warner University student Amanda Moyer was one of only twenty delegates selected to attend the NASA Kennedy Space Center (KSC) Pre-Service Teacher Institute (PSTI). LiAnne Sprunger was chosen as an alternate. It is a ten-day residential opportunity designed to increase preservice educators’ skills in teaching science using NASA-themed educational activities. The institute will be held at KSC May 28–June 7, 2013, and will focus on inquiry-based learning and the incorporation of technology into curriculum.

This will be an intensive and exciting experience providing a long-lasting impact on the participants’ professional career in education. Participants are expected to fully participate in all activities throughout the ten-day experience, including evening activities. Laura A. Baker, the NASA Educator Resource Center program manager, commented, “Dozens and dozens of pre-service students applied to the program this year; more applicants than we have seen in a while. We were very excited to get such an overwhelming response. The selection process was difficult. There were so many worthy applicants. Miss Moyer appeared very enthusiastic in her application and talked of how she was influenced by her mother as an educator and was excited to have a chance at this new opportunity to continue to grow as an educator.”

Education specialists from the Kennedy Space Center Educator Resource Center will provide participants with training to inspire student learning of science content through the use of education resources based on NASA missions of research and discovery. The two Warner University students will work in small groups to develop lesson plans using NASA educational resources and are expected to present these activities to local elementary level students upon their return home.

Ms. Moyer and Ms. Sprunger had to submit unofficial transcripts indicating their coursework and grades, references from two college professors, and write an essay addressing why they were interested in teaching and their career objectives, why they were interested in participating in the NASA PSTI, and how they will share their knowledge from the PSTI with fellow educators. Ms. Moyer and Ms. Sprunger will receive a financial support package, including an $800 stipend for meal reimbursement and lodging during the PSTI.

Ms. Moyer is from Sebring, Florida, and will graduate from Warner University in December 2013 with a bachelor of arts in elementary education. Ms. Sprunger is an elementary education major who plans to become certified in middle grades science. She was the assistant for the Lake Alfred Addair Shark Week dissection event and worked with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Specialist from Mote Aquarium.

Both Ms. Moyer and Ms. Sprunger are members of Kappa Delta Pi, an International Honor Society in Education that elects those to membership who exhibit the ideals of scholarship, high personal standards, and promise in teaching and allied professions. Ms. Moyer and Ms. Sprunger are exemplary Warner University students who will make excellent teachers in the future.
The Flattery Trap

By Sam Collins

Recently I received a spate of e-mails from sources who supposedly were eager to publish my writing. According to one message, mine is a talent too deep and capacious to continue to languish in obscurity.

I have been writing for publication for over thirty-five years and have been doing editorial work for almost as long. I know when something along these lines smells fishy. And these inquiries had about them the odor of a giant tuna left in the summer sun for three weeks with a Ferris-wheel-size mass of limburger cheese lashed to it.

My suspicions were confirmed after wading through three or four hip-deep, fertilizer-fit paragraphs whereupon the communiqué informed me that—in their zeal for sharing my genius with a wider audience—the publishers were willing to accept any manuscript I might send them, so long as it was accompanied by my personal check to help defray marketing expenses. Since my work was comparable to that of the very best of Shakespeare, Dickens, Austen, Tolstoy, and Twain, they were sure that subsequent royalty checks I would receive would dwarf my initial, modest "author's investment."

After a millisecond of prayer and fasting, I decided this was a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" I could happily pass up on multiple occasions. Nonetheless, whoever sent this stuff has some sense of the weaknesses of human nature. Few things can leave us more vulnerable to ruinous decisions than artful appeals to our vanity, especially when linked to areas in which we harbor insecurities.

As the book of Proverbs points out, "Flattery is nothing less than setting a trap" (29:5 cve). Many of the steel-jawed traps that threaten to chomp down, wound, and undo us are baited with enticements that touch on our unfulfilled hopes and personal anxieties.

That’s why people are lured by the lottery and other express-lane-to-riches pipe dreams (the longing to escape financial worries) or extramarital affairs (the desire to dull doubts about attractiveness). We can become so thirsty for angst reduction and affirmation that we will put our heads through the opening of a guillotine in order to sip an ephemeral drop of ego elixir shimmering on the other side.

One of the easiest ways to lead us astray is to offer us a buttery flattery tart that hints at sating our longing to be recognized and appreciated. That’s why it’s wise to beware when we sense ourselves feeling excessively gratified and pumped up, especially on the heels of feeling deflated. Danger lies therein. Let us test the spirits and make sure we aren’t stepping into a trap apt to sever both of our limbs at the hips.

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.