Global Gathering 2013: NAC Experience Goes Global

By Carl Stagner

The Global Gathering is fast approaching, and many are wondering what it is, how it’s different than the North American Convention, and why they should plan to attend. Like NAC, the Global Gathering will be held June 22–25, 2013—typically the week of NAC—in Anderson, Indiana, on the campus of Anderson University. The opportunity to worship the Lord with thousands of believers in unity that has been a hallmark of NAC will be an integral part of the Global Gathering as well. But the Global Gathering will amplify our connection as the body of Christ by shining a light on God’s church around the world!

Did you know that the Church of God outside of North America is larger than the church within? Did you know that God is doing some incredible things through his church amid persecution, famine, war, and political unrest? Did you know that much of what the local church faces in North America is also faced by our brothers and sisters in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Europe and the Middle East, as well as Latin America? At the Global Gathering, you’ll hear story after story of how God made a way when there seemed to be none, how the light of truth is illuminating the darkest of places, and how pastors in one region of the world are overcoming the kind of obstacles also present in your hometown.

Though the Global Gathering does not officially kick off until 2:00 pm on Saturday, June 22, a Global Forum of international delegates will meet beginning on Friday morning, June 21. In addition to a discussing the topic of reconciliation, sixty-five delegates representing more than sixty countries and territories will gather on Saturday morning to conduct a seven-phase prayer summit for the church around the world. By the time you arrive at the Global Gathering, the entire event will be bathed in prayer.

Though there won’t be the normal array of conferences to choose from, you’ll appreciate the deliberate attention given to the planning of daily activities. Unlike the twice daily worship services of the traditional NAC format, you’ll have the opportunity to participate in three major worship experiences each day. Plan to join attendees from around the world in morning prayer meetings. On Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, don’t miss the plenary sessions in which informative presentations on evangelism, discipleship, clean water, and global hunger will take place. Then put your faith into practice at a variety of “connectors,” including packing meals to combat hunger, networking with international delegates, and engaging the younger generation around the world in the ministry of the gospel.

Expect enhanced worship experiences at the Global Gathering. Multiple languages will be incorporated into each service, and a special service hosted by the Hispanic Council will take place on Sunday. There will be global Communion, missionary commissioning, and anointing. Children will worship and grow in Christ at Kid’s Place. Between services, be sure to visit the Global Expo, continued on page 7
Going for the Gold!

By Carl Stagner

Noreta Bish came up with a big idea the year of the Athens Olympics. In 2004, she was working part-time with Florida Church of God Ministries, handling tasks that included providing children’s ministry resources to Florida congregations in advance of an annual summer event. Each year, children would come together from churches across the state for a competition. Following her ministry at the state offices, Bish formed a ministry called Bible Basics for Kids so her big idea wouldn’t die. Bish, whose husband Ken is the senior pastor of New Journey Church of God in Jacksonville, coordinates the annual ministry called Bible Olympics.

Next year, Bible Olympics will celebrate its tenth year. The ministry’s success seems to be rooted in its spiritual component combined with its promotion of healthy, fun competition. Each January, Bish sends information to churches about the program for the year. In February, she mails curriculum, instructions, sample quiz questions, and other helpful material so students can sharpen their knowledge of a specified Bible theme. The themes over the years have included “Heroes of the Bible,” “The Lord’s Prayer,” “The Life of Christ,” “Old Testament Kings,” and more. This year’s theme was “Wilderness Survival” and covered stories and topics from Genesis and Exodus.

The games begin in late July or early August. A variety of activities take place over the two-day event for children from second through eighth grade. Teams compete against other teams in their age bracket. “When students arrive on Friday, they have their picture taken, and then we have a round of Bible Basics Jeopardy for the elementary age students,” Bish explains. “We then break for dinner, and after dinner the middle school students participate in Bible Basics Feud—played like Family Feud, with a few alterations.” After a round of “sword drills”—racing to find Bible books and passages—and a snack, all participants come together for worship.

On Saturday, teams gather for an opening ceremony. Bish describes the experience: “All of the teams line up with their spirit flags, spirit sticks, and they all wear their shirts and they march into the auditorium with the Olympic theme song playing and everyone in the room cheering. It’s a pretty awesome experience to watch this. Churches bring parents and other church members with them, and these people cheer their kids on during all of the day’s events.” Then the games continue with more sword drills, relays, and a Bible trivia competition in which contestants use electronic buzzers to chime in with the correct answer. A closing medals ceremony honors all contestants, as everyone who places lower than second receives a bronze medal.

This year’s Bible Olympics featured a new emphasis: missions. Prior to the event, churches were asked to participate in service projects. Children’s ministries were also challenged to support Scott and Deanna Compton, Church of God missionaries to Tanzania. “Initially the groups raised enough funds for seven hundred blankets to keep Tanzanian children warm. At the conclusion of Bible Olympics, a couple of pastors came to me and said they wanted to try and get to nine hundred blankets, so they went back to their churches, and within three weeks we had raised enough money for 905 blankets!”

Bish continues to promote Bible Olympics to churches because she believes, “the more we can make learning the Bible fun for kids, the more they will seek God out and make him a priority in their lives.” For more information about Bible Olympics, visit www.biblebasicsforkids.com or call Noreta Bish at 904-497-7204.
The theme for this year’s faith promise is “The Church Has Left the Building.” Not that you have to sell your property, pitch tents, and adopt the methods of the flying messengers of the early Church of God. Leaving the building means going to the people who need Christ rather than waiting for them to come to you. When Maiden Lane Church of God in Springfield, Ohio, decided to cancel regular Sunday morning worship services, they certainly weren’t playing hooky. They were simply worshiping outside of their four walls—they had left the building to worship through service.

Mark Martin, senior pastor at Maiden Lane, remembers the sultry August morning when a 105-year history of holding Sunday services on the grounds was halted. Referring to the community that surrounds Maiden Lane, he explains, “Normally, they just drive by and see cars in the parking lot on Sundays. There were no cars in the lot that day. Instead, they saw Christians face to face. They saw and felt the love of Christ. We were his presence in the community.”

Volunteer Kristin Hopkins reflects on Salt and Light Sunday, as it was dubbed, with the following question: “How often does a whole church get the chance to serve the community?” Over the years, Maiden Lane has coordinated a variety of service projects, but never a day of service that would suspend normal Sunday morning routines. Martin recalls that “on a practical level, we wanted to get the number of volunteers needed to achieve our goal. Sunday morning is the only time this can happen. Any other time, it would be less than half of the number we had.”

Citing Romans 12:1, Joy Sherman, connection pastor at Maiden Lane, explains, “We wanted to help the church to understand that work could still be an act of worship to the Lord. Jesus’ commission was to go into the world...for me it was critical that we begin to deconstruct some of the myths that the church has created around itself for the community. It was incredibly important for us to be physically present on a day that [Christians] are normally in a church.”

At first, the idea of canceling normal Sunday morning activities wasn’t enthusiastically accepted by all. But the church quickly got on board with the vision. After Salt and Light Sunday, “there was a resounding response from the people, How long do we have to wait to do this again?” Sherman says. “That’s an indicator of transformation within the congregation.” Five weeks after the event, the buzz in the community and congregation is still alive. It’s no wonder people are still talking about something that connected with community at just the right time.

Two weeks prior to the day of service, fear descended upon the community following a fatal shooting. God sent his instruments of peace into the surrounding neighborhood to pray with residents and offer yard work. Teams were formed...
John and Jane Kincaid know firsthand the challenges people face when caring for a person with special needs.

The couple’s experiences with one of their grown children has been the inspiration for the start of a new support group at Teays Valley Church of God in Scott Depot, West Virginia.

Many resources, both public and private, are available for children and older adults with special needs. However, most caregivers for these precious children and adults find themselves alone to face the challenges involved in providing quality care. The challenges include not only the daily care for their child or adult but also the struggle to work with the various doctors, school programs, and maze of social agencies and government programs to get the aid and assistance they critically need.

There are big issues to face, but sometimes simply scheduling a quiet evening out with your spouse, or finding someone to tend to your child or adult while you attend a funeral, can be a major undertaking. The Special Needs Caregiver Support Group’s mission is to help the caregiver so that they may be in a better position to help their child or adult in need. This group provides a monthly opportunity to share ideas, lend emotional support, and highlight useful informal and formal information not only from professionals but also from caregivers who have “been there and done that.”

“John and Jane are people who are generously sharing what they have learned over the years,” commented the church’s pastor, Dr. Melissa Pratt. “They are offering what they wished they would have had themselves. Because John and Jane walked in the shoes of those who are attending, their encouragement is like a drink of cold water to many who have been thirsty for help for years.” The group has only been in existence a few months, but the attendance from persons in the community is quickly growing. “All it takes to reach people is a willingness to share where we have been and what we know,” said Dr. Pratt. “Because of John and Jane’s willingness to share their story, we now have relationships with several new families in our community with whom we can share Jesus.”

West Virginia Church Offers Special Needs Support   By Melissa Pratt

Chritians

continued from page 3

to tackle a variety of tasks. They sought to prepare an elementary school for the fast approaching school year, make major repairs to the local Christian Rescue Center, minister to the incarcerated, and beautify a hiking trail system. Seniors who were physically unable to do the heavy lifting opted for sending letters for ministry. All the while, a prayer team was interceding for every volunteer and every project. That day, salt and light permeated the darkness.

An excerpt from Navigator, the church’s newsletter, best describes the way the Holy Spirit was working among the teams on Salt and Light Sunday: “Just a few blocks away, the Children’s Rescue Center was in need of serious overhaul before kids piled in for the school year; seventy people worked to scrub walls and floors, paint, repair holes in the ceiling, rearrange workout equipment, sew curtains, hang cabinets and clean the common areas. That volunteerism created even more generosity: some people on the CRC team ran out to purchase new basketballs and kickballs, another group took up a donation to buy a new industrial sink, one donor gave extra painting supplies, and yet another purchased faucets and hardware.” Beneficiaries of the service projects were overwhelmed and continue to this day to express gratitude through smiles and tears.

After a day of demonstrating the love of Christ, the teams came together with neighbors at a community park to proclaim the love of Christ through song and word.

Support group leaders, John and Jane Kincaid.

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PASTOR APPRECIATION MONTH
October 2012

Celebrating those who Serve

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”

—1 Timothy 5:17


Learning to Live: Transforming the Culture’s Perspective on Finances

By Carl Stagner

It may be that the best way to live out the love of Christ in our culture today is to address real needs of real people with real solutions. The economic downturn has left individuals and families in great financial distress. Even before the economy took a turn for the worse, responsible money management was not prevalent in a society where credit cards and loans offer short-term satisfaction for materialistic hunger. Today, the weight of a struggling economy is pressing down on people who live right next door to churches that may be unaware of this real need. First Church of God in Ellettsville, Indiana, has decided to address this need head on—with those inside the church and those who live next door.

“When we understand the biblical concepts of how God intends us to look at money, it frees resources for ministry,” Pastor David Dittman explains. “When finances are under control, we can do amazing things with the resources God puts in our hands—whether it’s giving in the local church or meeting a need outside of that.” With this in mind, the church agreed that their neighbors could practically benefit from the biblical principles of Financial Peace University.

Since fall 2010, First Church has offered Financial Peace University about twice each year. Lately, the sessions are being held on Wednesdays. Several families come in from outside of the church to participate, some from other churches, and some who are unchurched from the surrounding community. Dittman reports that many have been challenged to get out of debt and practice biblical stewardship. Many of those who have come out of the program have testified that they are working hard to pay off debt and are becoming more and more able to do things that were otherwise financially impossible.

Though the church has not yet seen anyone join the church as a result of Financial Peace University, the ministry has clearly made a difference in the lives of those who were enrolled. “My wife works in a medical office with a woman who is coming to the class, and we believe there’s a great possibility that she will start bringing her family to church.”

Dittman explains God has used the program to produce some nearly immediate transformation: After just two weeks into current program, a young couple from the church turned in their first-ever tithe check! And when a woman in the congregation had a family member pass away in Honduras, the church’s transformed perspective on stewardship and love kicked in. “Without any notice on Sunday morning, our church came up with a $600 love offering to help her get down there.”

Dittman considers Financial Peace University to be a beneficial and practical discipleship and outreach tool for local churches. “It addresses one of the great needs of helping people understand true stewardship and what it really means to handle everything we have as a gift from God. The current material we are using is just filled with Scripture. There are so many in our culture now that are struggling financially.” One unchurched family could not afford to take the class, so the church stepped in to assist and effectively demonstrated God’s love. “I believe we are truly making an impact,” he concludes.

Church of God Ministries and the Transformation Teams encourages individuals and congregations to conduct biblically based financial and stewardship training, and recommends Financial Peace University (www.daveramsey.com/fpu) or Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org). Financial Peace University teaches sound biblical teachings about money but does so in a format that makes it an effective outreach ministry into your community. Crown Financial Ministries offers the same teachings but in a more in-depth biblical context, making this more appropriate for use among believers.

Discounts are available for Financial Peace University by mentioning when ordering that you are part of the Church of God with offices in Anderson, Indiana.
Time to SHAPE Up! Ministry to Pastors Expands Reach

By Paul Dreger

Changed lives. Revived ministries. The renewal of hope and trust. The building of a strong community that reflects the heart and passion of Christ. These results and many more reflect the impact of the ministry of SHAPE within the Church of God, an impact which continues to grow.

Introduced in seventeen regions across North America, SHAPE—Sustaining Health and Pastoral Excellence—touch the lives of pastors, drawing them into safe, supportive communities where greater health and ministry effectiveness can be nurtured. Expansion of the ministry continues this year, as Western Pennsylvania will launch its first cohort in early December. About every twelve to eighteen months, new cohorts, such as the one in Pennsylvania, are formed.

SHARE—Sustaining Health and Relational Excellence—is currently being developed as a companion ministry for congregational leadership. Focusing upon the elements that foster healthy relationships and ministry effectiveness within a congregation’s leadership team, SHARE brings the principles and practices of SHAPE to the local congregation, aiding in the development of a mission-focused, God-honoring congregational experience. Currently being piloted by congregations throughout the United States, we are pleased to announce that SHARE will be made available in 2013 to pastors who have experienced the SHAPE journey.

SHAPE is an initiative that began in 2003 through a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment of Indianapolis, Indiana. It continues to change the lives of pastors throughout North America. In its tenth year, SHAPE continues to generate stories of life change that is leading pastors to a fresh understanding of what it means to “be the body of Christ fulfilling the mission of Christ in the world” in healthy, supportive community.

As one SHAPE participant recently testified: “The Lord has used SHAPE in my life to bring me healing by better understanding myself, my story, who I am in Christ, and accepting complete forgiveness. I have learned to trust others and become vulnerable in a safe environment. SHAPE has improved my relationship with all those around me by enabling me to better understand who they are and how God created them. What I have learned from SHAPE I use every day. It has become who I am and how I live life and do ministry.” Beyond the blessing of the fellowship of others involved in vocational ministry, the desired outcome of SHAPE is to lead pastors to active participation in the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the passion and power of the Great Commandments.

Directed by regional leadership and resourced by Church of God Ministries, SHAPE is open to all pastors and associate pastors. Please contact your regional pastor to see if SHAPE is available for you.
Are you seeking ways to take your ministry to the next level? Are you ready for resources that will equip, encourage, and inspire you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then 12-12-12 Ministry Toolbox has something especially for you!

Join us on December 12, 2012, for a live online webinar event hosted by Randy Montgomery and Mark Richardson, co-directors of the Leadership Development, Church Multiplication, and Congregational Health Ministry Group at Church of God Ministries. This live webcast event will feature twelve presentations by top scholars from across the Church of God. Our slate of presenters will share insights and resources on a wide range of topics, including ministry in your local context, Church of God history, Church of God Wesleyan theology connection, culturally relevant ministry, pastoral health, pastoral care, dealing with ethical issues in your ministry, reconciliation, sermon preparation, and much more.

The Church of God Ministries Leadership Development team has partnered with Anderson University, Mid-America Christian University, Warner Pacific College, Warner University, and Anderson University School of Theology to bring you knowledge and tools to support and resource you in effective, practical, everyday ministry. Be watching for more information and save the date! This will be an excellent opportunity to gather other pastors or church leadership teams and grow for kingdom ministry.

Access to the 12-12-12 Ministry Toolbox Webinar will be available through Church of God Ministries website live on December 12, 2012. Following this initial webinar, additional support material will be provided each month for those who wish to go deeper on any topic presented. And it’s free!

Save the date and plan now to get connected. Visit www.chog.org/12-12-12.

For more information, contact Randy Montgomery (RMontgomery@chog.org) or Mark Richardson (MRichardson@chog.org), or call 1-800-848-2464.

Global Gathering

which will feature displays and information from every country in which the Church of God has a presence. On Wednesday, June 26, the General Assembly will meet.

This is the time for the global church to stand together, so register today at www.chog.org/globalgathering, or call 800-848-2464, ext. 2130! Registration is required. Individual registration is $15; $25 for two from the same household, and $5 for each additional person from same household.

A portion of your registration will help sponsor meals to be packaged during the Global Gathering and then distributed around the world. However, additional financial support is needed to bring you this historic event. We invite you and your church to sponsor a named delegate from around the world or make a gift to the Global Gathering. To take advantage of these and other giving opportunities, visit www.chog.org/globalgathering.
Child Sponsorship Ministry Celebrates Spiritual Harvest

You’ve heard the common saying, “The children are our future.” With the potential for greatness, the children we influence today may someday grow to create a better tomorrow. But what about the child that doesn’t even have access to the basic necessities? What is their future?

Reaching twenty-seven countries and more than 4,250 children around the world, Children of Promise lends a helping hand to those children who cannot help themselves.

Founded in 1992 by Jean and Sidney Johnson, Children of Promise (COP) was established with a firm vision and an unquenchable passion to assist every child in need around the world. Like many other programs, COP provides children with nutritious food, education, and health care; but the mission doesn’t stop there. Offering spiritual guidance, COP works through each country’s Church of God to introduce Jesus Christ and nurture the developing faith of those children in need.

To ensure the program’s vision, COP works through a group of passionate and dedicated program directors, three of whom are serving as missionaries through Church of God Ministries. Stationed around the world, these program directors typically live within the local communities and regularly attend to the needs of the children, including taking them to the doctor or even playing a game of soccer. With COP, no need goes unnoticed.

After twenty years of active service, COP is seeing the enduring results of their program; living out the effects of COP, these once needy children have grown into independent adults, becoming pastors, teachers, doctors, and so much more!

Next year, COP intends to celebrate its twenty-first anniversary by holding their second-ever training conference for program directors. Honoring their determination and diligence to serving the Lord, the training conference will unite these leaders from all corners of the globe.

COP has made incredible bounds over the years, saving thousands of children from the crippling effects of hunger, sickness, abuse, and homelessness. For more information about the work of Children of Promise, please visit www.echildrenofpromise.org.

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MID-AMERICA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Mid-America Christian University (MACU) President John Fozard announced that student enrollment at the institution had increased again for the fourteenth straight year. Fall enrollment for 2012 stands at 2,424 total students, which is up an impressive 18 percent from the preceding year.

According to President Fozard, “This dynamic growth is a response to the university’s commitments to providing both an extraordinary Christian liberal arts education to our residential and daytime students in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and to our increased outreach to adult learners at home and around the world.”

In 2008, Mid-America began an aggressive initiative to make college education affordable and accessible to adult learners from all walks and stages of life.

University Provost Kathaleen Reid-Martinez explains the importance of this initiative. “In these challenging economic times, men and women are looking for a door of opportunity to improve their knowledge base and skill sets that will impact their earning potential and ability to better provide for their families. At MACU, we’ve opened that door of opportunity to the busy working adult. If they are motivated to learn—there’s a way to learn without having to put on hold personal and professional lives.”

The university’s growth is also due in part to an aggressive Learning Partnerships initiative with churches and corporations, among others.

For example, the university has established more than a dozen Church Partnerships through its affiliation with the Church of God (Anderson, IN). Church Partnerships, led by program director Pastor Michael J. Thigpen and championed by pastors such as Bishop Timothy J. Clarke, of the First Church of God, Columbus, Ohio, provide answers to many of the challenges adults face when they desire to return to school.

Through the partnership, students pursue their degrees online and are able to stay engaged in their jobs and continue to develop as leaders within their home churches. In return, the church provides a continuous source of encouragement and community for the students.

The university is also pleased to be engaged in a growing number of Corporate Partnerships within Oklahoma City. These corporations promote MACU to their employees and, if they choose to attend the university, pay a significant portion of the employee’s tuition. One corporate president is so pleased with the result of a MACU education that his company pays the full tuition of those who choose to attend MACU, online or in the classroom.

By every indication, the Mid-America multifront approach to meeting educational needs appears to be working. In the fall of 2008, the university had 909 students. The 2,424 fall enrollment reflects a 176 percent increase since 2008.

“What is also especially encouraging to us is the increase in the number of students pursuing ministries degrees,” said President Fozard.

This year, more than 460 men and women are engaged in ministry-related degrees. In fact, when you also include the first class of twenty-five Honduran pastors who will be earning certificates in ministry this fall through the Mid-America Thomas School of International Studies, just over 20 percent of MACU students are engaged in ministry-related programs.

“The vision of MACU is Preparing People to do Greater Things for God and His Kingdom, and it’s thrilling to see men and women embrace the calling of Christ on their lives. These people represent the next generation of leaders for the Church of God, as well as other Christian churches, at home and abroad,” said President Fozard.

As a result of growing numbers, Mid-America broke ground on October 10, 2012, on the main campus in Oklahoma City for a new 37,000-square-foot-educational facility.

MACU Enrollment Up for Fourteenth Straight Year
Double First Cousin to an Outright Lie

By Sam Collins

When I was growing up, testimony times were a regular feature of Wednesday and Sunday evening services. In those days, when dinosaurs roamed the earth and new Oldsmobiles still traveled the highways, folks would be invited to recount their Christian conversions, share their experiences of healing, or simply highlight what God was doing in their lives.

Many of these testimonies were inspirational. They had the ring of humble, understated authenticity and gave hearers a taste of the variety of ways God can work among everyday people.

Other testimonies seemed about as believable as a carnival sideshow Barker’s spiel at the entrance to the Gecko the Lizard Man exhibit. The temptation to rejigger and amplify details and impress the congregation seemed irresistible to a few individuals. The removal of a hangnail would become the miraculous healing of a malignant cuticle tumor. A co-worker’s stifled yawn would be characterized as a sinner’s attempt to swallow tortured tears of conviction in the face of the testifier’s compelling Christian witness.

There are exaggerations—and then there are EXAGGERATIONS! Some are harmless and actually useful in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Our Lord, for example, made use of a form of exaggeration known as hyperbole. Jesus often employed intentional, transparent, carefully calibrated exaggeration for effect. That’s why we read that he sometimes sent a camel sliding down an esophagus or shimmying through the eye of a tiny, sharp sewing implement (Matt 23:24 and Mark 10:25).

Unlike those who reach beyond pulling the wool over our eyes in an attempt to encase our entire skulls and upper torsos in mutton fur, Jesus never pretended that his amplifications were meant to be taken literally. His hyperbolic statements sought to playfully, pointedly open the door to truth; by contrast, disingenuous overstatement is more often focused on personal advancement and self-aggrandizement.

That’s an important distinction for us church folks to keep in mind as we share the gospel and what we say God is doing in our midst and through our lives. Whether we are local preachers, national or regional leaders, or individuals offering a testimony in a gathering that could comfortably fit inside a photo booth, we must resist the urge to overstate in an attempt to make ourselves or our achievements seem more impressive.

Playful, nonliteral embellishment—with a nudge and a wink—is one thing. It’s a time-honored communication device that’s been used since back before Methuselah got the world’s first AARP card. But the inflating of facts, the distorting of details, and the reworking of reality in order to hoodwink the hearer into believing what sounds too good to be true (because it is too good to be true), that is something that is awfully close to being the double first cousin to an outright lie.

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.