MAY 2026

WHITE WING MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

TESTIFY CHURCH!

One Church, One Spirit: "Unified to Reconcile"

Firstfruits and Fire
BISHOP SYLVESTER SMITH, DMIN

One Church, One Spirit: Unified to Reconcile
JANICE MILLER

From Sinai to the Upper Room: Which Covenant Will You Follow?
TESSA DIETZE

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MESSENGER
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

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WE BELIEVE in the Holy Trinity—one God, eternally existing in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We believe in one God, the Father, creator of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. All things were made through Him and for Him. He is true God and true man. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin, Mary. He suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He will return to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who eternally proceeds from the Father. He is Teacher, Comforter, Helper, and Giver of spiritual gifts. Through Him the saving and sanctifying works of Jesus Christ are applied to the life of believers. He is the empowering presence of God in the life of the Christian and the church. The Father has sent His Son to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and bearing the fruit of the Spirit are New Testament signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that He died in our place. The believer's sins are forgiven by the shedding of His blood. We believe that healing of mind, body, soul, and spirit is available to the believer through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in one baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the grace of God brings forgiveness and reconciliation to those who repent, as well as transformation in holiness, enabling them to live a Christ-like life. Sanctification is both a definite work of grace and a lifelong process of change in the believer brought by the blood of Jesus, the Word of God, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one holy, universal church, composed of all true believers in Jesus Christ, offering fellowship and calling for service to men and women of all races, nations, cultures, and languages. We believe in the spiritual and ultimate visible unity of the church.

We believe that the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His will to humankind, sufficient for instruction in salvation and daily Christian living. The Bible is the Christian's rule of faith and practice.

We believe that God will ultimately reconcile all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Therefore, we look forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

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About the Church of God of Prophecy
The Church of God of Prophecy is a vibrant, worldwide body of believers, united in worship, working hand-in-hand to share God's love and a message of hope to the brokenhearted. The organization has more than a million members and more than 10,000 ministers, worshiping in more than 10,000 churches or missions in 135 nations of the world.

Church of God of Prophecy Core Values
- Prayer
- The Harvest
- Leadership Development
- Biblical Stewardship
- Service

Vision Statement
Reconciling the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

Mission Statement
The Church of God of Prophecy is a Christ-exalting, holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple-making, church-planting movement with passion for Christian union.

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Cover image: A group poses for a photo at the 2024 International Assembly.

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BISHOP TIM COALTER | PRESIDING BISHOP

TESTIFY CHURCH!

One Church, One Spirit: "Unified to Reconcile"

There is something powerful about a testimony. It is more than words: It is evidence. It is lived experience. It is the visible expression of an invisible work of God. And when the church testifies, we do not merely speak about Christ—we reveal Him.

I am reminded of the familiar refrain sung by the Alexandria Sanctuary Choir:

> I wanna testify.
> I wanna testify.
> What the Lord has done for me,
> He set my spirit free.
> He has made me whole,
> Put joy down in my soul.
> I wanna testify, testify!

That song captures the essence of the redeemed life. We testify because something has happened to us. We have been changed. We have been set free. We have been made whole. But as powerful as our individual testimonies are, there is an even greater testimony the church is called to embody—a corporate testimony of unity.

In John 17, we are given the privilege of listening in on what is often called "The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus." As He prepares for the cross, Jesus prays not only for His disciples, but for all who would believe through their message—including us. And what is the burden of His prayer?

"That they all may be one, . . . that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21 NKJV).

Jesus ties the credibility of our testimony to the reality of our unity. In other words, the world's ability to believe is connected to the church's ability to live as one.

This unity is not something we manufacture through human effort alone. Scripture reminds us that unity is first a gift before it is a responsibility. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:3 that we are to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Notice the language: *the unity of*

the Spirit. This is not man-made unity. It is Spirit-given unity.

The Holy Spirit does not produce division. He produces oneness. Paul goes on to declare, "There is one body and one Spirit, . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4–5). Unity is woven into the very fabric of who we are as the people of God.

However, while unity is given, it must also be guarded. We must endeavor to keep it.

This is where our testimony comes into focus.

The church does not testify to unity merely by preaching about it. Former Presiding Bishop Sam Clements noted that we often preach unity but practice division. We must not only preach unity—we must practice it. When we choose love over preference, reconciliation over division, humility over pride, and cooperation over competition, we are giving the world a glimpse of the kingdom of God. When the church walks in unity, it becomes a living testimony that something supernatural is at work.

And this testimony has a purpose: *that the world may believe . . . and be reconciled to Him*.

Our unity is missional.

We are not called to be unified for comfort, but for commission. God has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). We are ambassadors for Christ, carrying the message that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

But the message of reconciliation is most credible when it is seen before it is heard.

A divided church cannot effectively preach a reconciling gospel. But a unified church—one church, filled with one Spirit—becomes a powerful witness that reconciliation is not only possible, it is real.

So, I ask us: What is our testimony?

Can the world look at us and see unity? Can they see a people who, though diverse in background, culture, and perspective, are bound together by something greater—the Spirit of the living God?

Let us testify—not only with our lips, but with our lives. Let us demonstrate the unity that Jesus prayed for, the unity the Spirit provides, and the unity that the mission demands.

And as we do, may our collective voice rise with renewed conviction:

I wanna testify.
I wanna testify.
What the Lord has done for me. . . .

Note: This article was edited by ChatGPT for structure, grammar, and clarity.

FIRSTFRUITS *and* FIRE

BISHOP SYLVESTER SMITH, DMIN

It was like any other day: sun shining, air refreshingly calm. The city was quiet, resting peacefully after 49 days of worship festivities. In the distance, almost imperceptible, a sweet melody of songs and hymns could be heard. Those who heard it wondered, "Who could possibly be singing at this hour?"

From the throne room of heaven, the command went forth. "It is time. Go down and empower my servants." Just like that, Jerusalem was flooded with the sound of hurricane-gale winds. No Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale to document wind speed. No meteorologists to estimate a category rating. Just the worshipers, the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and a city disturbed by the sound of His presence. Unlike Elijah's experience on Horeb, God *was* in this mighty wind. This was no quiet whisper. This was the Almighty God shouting out to the whole world that His harvest had begun.

In the house where God entered, men and women were immersed in and filled by Him. It was a spectacular display of the Eternal God igniting

a signal fire in his people. That was significant enough, but more remarkable is that after 2,000 years, the signal fire has never gone out. Those 120 believers were the firstfruits of God's harvest.

From ancient times, the Feast of Firstfruits was one of the oldest and most beloved celebrations in the Jewish Levitical law. This feast was also referred to as the Feast of Weeks which was celebrated seven weeks and one day after Passover, which is why the Greek-speaking world called it Pentecost, from their word for "fiftieth."

Its origins were agricultural: a thanksgiving for the wheat harvest, a worship offering of the first baked loaves from the first wheat of the harvest waved to God at the temple in Jerusalem. It was one of three pilgrimage feasts observant Jews celebrated in the Holy City. And that is why, in Acts 2:5–11, people were present "from every nation under heaven."

Pentecost, the Feast of Firstfruits, is remarkably rich in analogies and metaphors—far too many to explore exhaustively in a single sitting—all pointing toward Christ and His work of death, burial, and resurrection. Consider just a few: The seven weeks or sabbaths speak of perfection and rest, while the burnt offering and the requirement of a blemish-free male lamb anticipate both atonement for sin and Christ Himself, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The firstfruits harvest calls the worshiper to thanksgiving and speaks of immediate readiness, recognizing God's own timetable: "When the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:29 ESV). The wave offering, lifted before the LORD in praise and thanksgiving, reminds us that Jesus is our wave offering, the One who makes us acceptable to God, while the "land that I give you" (Leviticus 23:10) points beyond Canaan to the land of promise, to rest, salvation, and our eternal home.

The phrase "on that day" (Leviticus 23:12) underscores that nothing in God's redemptive plan happens by accident or outside His appointed time (John 12:23). The grain offering carries its own stunning picture: The seed to be planted must die, just as Jesus declared, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies . . ." (John 12:24). The food and drink offering find their fulfillment in the One who said, "I am the bread of life. . . . For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (John 6:48, 55). Even the pleasing aroma, that recurring phrase throughout Leviticus and Numbers signifying God's acceptance of His people's worship, resounds in New Testament believers: "We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:15). And finally, the declaration that "it is a statute forever" (Leviticus 23:14) reminds us that true worship is no temporary ordinance; it is an eternal concept, pointing us toward unending communion with our God who planned it all. And His harvest continues down through the centuries to our day.

That vivid, first-century moment when flaming tongues settled on each one must not be discounted—never ignored, never mocked. In cinematic detail, Luke was anointed to describe the scene for all who are called to His harvest. It could only be described by one who was present and experienced the Spirit's baptism.

The sound of wind was heard, and tongues of fire rested on those in the house—and then a miracle occurred which had never happened in all human history. The Holy Spirit enabled them to speak languages they had never studied, learned, or

spoken. Pilgrims from across the known world, in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival, were astonished because they heard their family languages spoken by uneducated Galileans. It was, by any account, a confusing scene because neither the citizens nor the pilgrims understood what was happening. They could only wonder: What does this mean? But those who were immersed in the Spirit knew they were not drunk on new wine. They knew it was God fulfilling His promise right on time.

Apostle Peter explained it to the confused, skeptical, and mocking crowd. It is not drunkenness. It is not emotionalism. It is not heretical. It is not demonic. It is not for a select few nor even for the first-century church alone. It is the fulfillment of God's promise prophesied by Joel, God's prophet (Acts 2:16). It is assurance that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21 KJV). It is irrefutable proof that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:32). And it is just as irrefutable that God has made that same crucified and resurrected Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

But wait! Despite cessationist errors, the gift of the Holy Spirit is for "all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). I am so glad that God did not stop calling people in the first century. Otherwise, you and I would not be saved or filled with the promise. And the very fact that cessationists preach the gospel and invite people to be saved proves their beliefs to be wrong. God still graciously calls whosoever will to receive His promise of salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2, the fulfillment of God's promise—to pour out His Spirit on all flesh—was a continuation of God's promise to do a new thing (Isaiah 43:19) and to enact a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy would enable believers to become new creatures in Christ Jesus (Galatians 6:15), to obey a new commandment, and to live in "the true light [that] now shines" (1 John 2:8 JUB).

For Christians, then, Pentecost carries this dual weight: the ancient rhythms of harvest and covenant, overlaid with the unprecedented miracle which occurred in a room in first-century

Jerusalem on an otherwise unremarkable spring morning.

The early church did not celebrate Pentecost as a single day so much as a season of 50 days from the paschal sacrifice. It was a season of sacred joy in which fasting was forbidden and prayer was offered standing, not kneeling, as a sign of resurrection life. The season closed with Pentecost, the 50th day.

Over the centuries, the church celebrated Pentecost in diverse manners: some with pageantry, others with processions, still others with miracle plays. In medieval times, European congregations released doves through holes in the roof to signify the descent of the Spirit, though ascending doves do not correctly portray the descending Spirit. In France and Italy, pastors would scatter red rose petals from the gallery of their churches signifying the tongues of fire falling.

The Reformers, suspicious of what they saw as pageantry substituted for genuine piety, stripped away much of the theatrics and cleared the cathedrals of their rose petals and doves. But they kept Pentecost on the calendar. Even the most stringent Reformers recognized that it commemorated something too central to Christian faith to remove: God's Spirit poured out upon all people regardless of language, race, culture, or nation.

Much diversity exists across 21st-century Christianity: diverse practices, diverse theological thought, diverse traditions. Yet, something links them all: the conviction that Pentecost is not mere history. The Spirit that blew into a house in first-century Jerusalem is still present in the church. The fire still burns fiercely. That Spirit cannot be contained in a building, not in theological belief, not in a calendar's date. He resides in the hearts of believers everywhere who allow Him to come in.

“PENTECOST IS NOT A SECRET FEAST. IT RUSHES IN LIKE WIND. IT DEPOSITS A *fire*. IT SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE OF GOD AND OF ANGELS. IT DISTURBS THE INTELLECTUALS, THE SKEPTICS, AND THE UNBELIEVERS. IT *inflames* THE SPIRITS OF THOSE BAPTIZED IN IT.”

Pentecost is not a secret feast. It rushes in like wind. It deposits a fire. It speaks the language of God and of angels. It disturbs the intellectuals, the skeptics, and the unbelievers. It inflames the spirits of those baptized in it.

Every year, when the church celebrates this Feast of Firstfruits and the Acts 2 narrative is read aloud, the fire blazes and souls cry out, “*Come, Holy Spirit. Let your fire burn in me.*”

BISHOP SYLVESTER SMITH, DMIN
ANNISTON, ALABAMA

Bishop Smith and his wife, Bobbie, have served COGOP pastorates for 51 years. They are bilingual (English and French), having served pastorates in both languages. Sylvester has been a CBL instructor in East and West Canada, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Tanzania, and has also taught in Lee University's online school. His academic achievements include a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, a Master of Theological Studies, and a Doctor of Ministry degree. In addition to his pastoral ministry, Sylvester has an online ministry, Courage Today at drsysmith.com. The Smiths have two adult children and a wonderful grandson. They reside in Anniston, Alabama, where they serve a great congregation.

One Church, One Spirit: Unified to Reconcile

JANICE MILLER

The sequence was not random:

- The fire was personal – ". . . and *one* sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3 NKJV).
- The power was corporate – "And they were all filled . . ." (Acts 2:4).
- The witness became global – ". . . and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

That day in the upper room, something shifted. God's fire ignited them, His power equipped them, and their lives became a living witness from that moment forward. Their testimony was more than information; it was the evidence of transformation they had personally experienced. C. S. Lewis describes God rebuilding us from the inside out; that is what happened at Pentecost—not improved people but transformed ones.

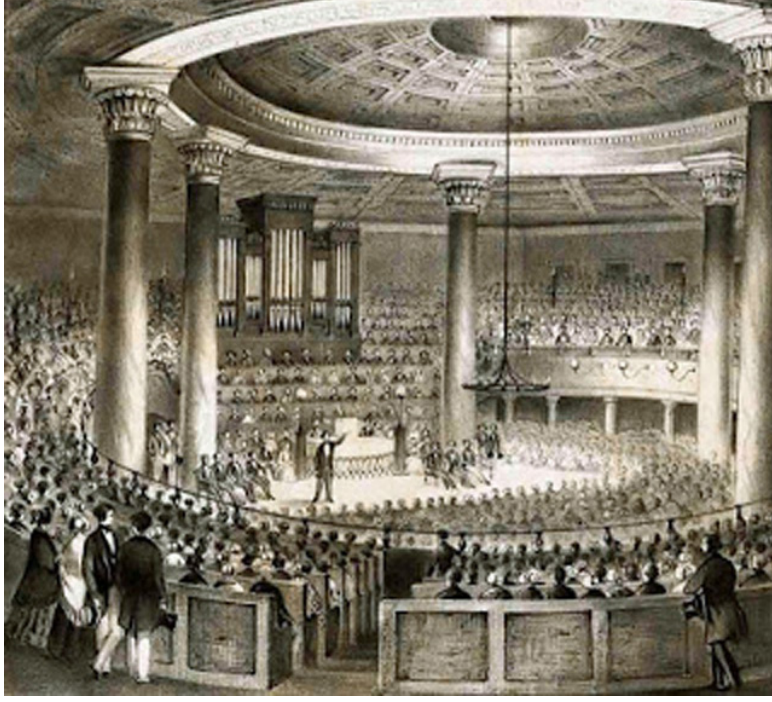
Acts 2:1 states, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." This verse describes the timing—God's appointed moment had fully come; the unity—they were with one accord (agreement in truth and aligned with the Spirit); and the commitment to be present—in one place. When the moment was right and the people were aligned with God, heaven responded. Pentecost did not happen in a room full of division; it happened in a room full of surrender. It had only been about 53 days since the Last Supper, the night before crucifixion, when the disciples were arguing about "which of them should be considered the greatest" (Luke 22:24). In just over seven weeks, God took them from arguing over position to being unified in purpose—and then He filled them with power. Power flows where division is removed. All the old offenses had been put to rest. Control had been released. There was no competition—just waiting in the presence of God.

▲ *"The Descent of the Holy Spirit" by Gustave Doré*

The Greek word used for “one accord” in Acts 2:1 is *homothymadon*, which means “with the same passion,” “with one mind and one impulse,” or “in unified purpose.” The word is stronger than just “agreement.” It is not just thinking the same thing or being in the same room. It is about hearts being aligned, desires being aligned, and moving in the same direction internally. At Pentecost, they were not just in the same room—they were in the same spirit. They shared the same hunger for God. Without unity, momentum starts to slip, focus gets scattered, and people end up pulling in different directions instead of moving together. In the upper room that day, people believed something was about to happen. They were aligned, waiting for what Jesus said would come—the promise of Acts 1:4–5.

Pentecost Sunday reminds believers that God never intended His church to live on memory alone but by the *present* power of the Holy Spirit. More recent historical accounts of revivals and outpourings of the Spirit give us a taste of what God has in store for our day. Here are a few examples:

- The First Great Awakening (1730s-1740s) in the American colonies and Britain was characterized by deep conviction of sin, mass conversions, and powerful preaching accompanied by emotional and spiritual responses.
- The Second Great Awakening (early 1800s) occurred in frontier camp meetings in the United States. These large outdoor gatherings were marked by intense conviction and repentance. It resulted in growth of churches and the birth of many reform movements.
- The Prayer Revival (1857-1858) started in New York City and spread globally. It began as a simple noon prayer meeting that exploded into thousands of daily gatherings. Business districts shut down for prayer. Revival spread to Europe.
- In 1901, Charles Parham, a key figure in Pentecostalism, gave an account of a move of God that started at the Bethel Bible School in Kansas (USA). His report, paraphrased from “The Latter Rain,” is as follows:



▲ *Broadway Tabernacle in New York City, 1850, built by Finney, a leader of the Second Great Awakening.*

In December 1900 Parham designated 40 students to determine the biblical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost and to report their findings in three days. He was on a trip to Kansas City, and the students were to prepare their findings while he was gone and be ready to report them when he returned.

Their studies had already covered the following topics: repentance, conversion, consecration, sanctification, healing, and the soon coming of the Lord.

Parham returned in the morning before the watch night service on December 31, 1900. He was astonished when the students reported their findings that, while there were different things that occurred when the Holy Ghost fell, they spoke in other languages.

About 75 people gathered with the 40 students for the watch night service. They reported there was an intense power of the Lord present. At the service there was a student named Agnes Ozman (later LaBerge) that asked for them to lay hands on her to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She believed she was called to be a missionary. At first Parham refused to lay hands on her because he didn’t have the Holy Ghost. She persisted. They laid hands on her head and prayed. Parham

◀ *Bethel Bible College, Topeka Kansas, 1900*
▲ *Agnes Ozman*

said he prayed about 3 dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking in Chinese. She didn't know Chinese. But for 3 days every time she opened her mouth to speak, it was Chinese. She decided to write a note to the others, but when she started writing, it was Chinese.

The students decided to tarry for two nights and three days. On the night of Jan 3, 1901, Parham preached at a Free Methodist church in Topeka. He told them he expected to return to the school that night to find everyone baptized with the Holy Spirit. On returning to the school, he heard sounds coming from the prayer room. He said the room was filled with a sheen of white light above the brightness of the lamps in the room. There were people gathered from 12 denominations. They had all received the baptism of the Holy Ghost and were speaking in other tongues. Some were trembling under the power of the glory that had filled them.

A Sister Stanley, an elderly lady, came to Bro. Parham and said she saw "tongues of fire" sitting above their heads just moments before he arrived. Parham asked God for the baptism. He heard God's voice calling him "to declare this mighty truth to the world." God told him that he would receive the baptism if he was willing to stand for it

▲ *Welsh Revival*

▲ *312 Azusa Street, meeting place of the Azusa Street Revival*

with all the persecutions, hardships, trials, slander, and scandal that it would entail. He made the commitment to God, and he was immediately filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak in other tongues.

- The Welsh Revival (1904-1905) in Wales was defined by intense worship, repentance, and Spirit-led meetings. Its influence spread worldwide.
- The Azusa Street Revival (1906-1915) in Los Angeles, California (USA), marked by speaking in tongues, was renowned for its miracles and interracial worship, which was considered radical for that time. This revival birthed the global Pentecostal movement.

Maybe you have been waiting on God, but there are still places in your heart that feel pulled in two directions: between fear and faith, between control and surrender, between your plan and God's purpose. You do not have to stay there. Let's pray and ask God to ignite something fresh in every one of us. If you are hungry for more than just going through the motions, if you are tired of feeling dry, if something in you knows there is more—more power, more fire, more purpose than what you have been walking in—God is inviting you (and all of us) to surrender and let Him do what only He can do: transform us from the inside out.

Holy Spirit, we come into alignment. We lay down every distraction, every divided place. Fill us again. Send Your fire. Clothe us with Your power. Make us bold witnesses.

"Unified to Reconcile" is a purpose statement. It addresses why the church must be in unity. At its core, it means we come into unity so we can carry out the mission of reconciliation—together.

Resources

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JANICE MILLER
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Janice Miller loves studying and teaching the Word of God. She has published two books, *While Men Sleep* (2016) and *Critical Thinkers* (2018), and has recently begun screenwriting. Married since 1975, she and her husband, Roy, live in Gallatin, Tennessee, where both are active in ministry at the Gallatin COGOP.

From Sinai to the Upper Room: Which Covenant Will You Follow?

TESSA DIETZE

Scriptures: Exodus 19–24; Acts 1–4

Biblical history is not a series of random events, but a deliberate progression of God's desire to dwell with His people. Two of the most significant moments in this journey occurred exactly 50 days after a miracle of divine deliverance: the *gathering at Mount Sinai* and the *gathering in the Upper Room.*

While separated by centuries, these two "covenant-forming" moments serve as a mirror for the modern church, challenging us to evaluate where our hearts truly reside this Pentecost. Shavuot, which is the Feast of Weeks, marks the counting of seven weeks after Passover to the divine giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which highlights the covenant God made with the Jewish people. The same seven-week period marks Pentecost for the Christian—the coming of the Holy Spirit, inaugurating the new covenant that was provided through Jesus's death on the cross and His overcoming death through His resurrection. Fifty days after Passover, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred. Two covenants. Two promises. One great fulfillment:

> "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33 NIV)

The Anatomy of Manifestation

Both Sinai and Pentecost were defined by supernatural manifestations of God's presence. On Sinai, the mountain was cloaked in a *dense cloud,* consumed by *smoke*, and shaken by *thunder*, *lightning*, and a *loud trumpet blast.* Exodus 24:17 says, "The glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain."

Centuries later, the pattern repeated:

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them." (Acts 2:1–3)

Just as the mountain trembled in the Old Testament (Exodus 19:18), these early believers

experienced the place being shaken when they prayed, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). In both instances, God was not a distant concept but a tangible, trembling reality.

Fellowship and Expectation
Before both the law and the Spirit were given, there was a season of fellowship and waiting.

- In the **Old Testament pattern,** Moses spent *40 days and nights* in God's presence. Earlier, God showed grace by eating with Aaron, Hur, and the elders—a moment of divine fellowship (Exodus 24:9–11). The people were called to consecrate themselves and wait—in expectation—at the foot of the mountain.
- In the **New Testament fulfillment,** Jesus, after His resurrection, appeared to His disciples over *a period of 40 days*, eating with them and commanding them not to leave Jerusalem, but to "*wait for the gift*" (Acts 1:3–4).

Both groups were waiting "together in expectation," but their responses to the wait defined their legacy.

The Great Divide: Disobedience versus Empowerment
The contrast between these two events provides a sobering warning for modern believers. At Sinai, despite agreeing to do the Lord's will, the people grew impatient. They traded the invisible God for a *man-made substitute*, a golden calf, leading to the *death of roughly 3,000 people*.

At Pentecost, the wait produced a different fruit. When the Spirit fell, Peter boldly proclaimed the *resurrection of Jesus*, citing the promise spoken by the prophet Joel. Instead of death, there was life: *3,000 souls joined the church*.

The difference was the "location" of the law given at Sinai. The Mosaic covenant was *external*, written on stone, leaving the people to struggle in their own strength to live up to its requirements. The new covenant is *internal*, where, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the law—a new law of grace—is inscribed on human hearts. This transformation by the Spirit enables us to follow God's law with "glad and sincere hearts."

A Call to the Modern Church
The presence of the Lord is as accessible today as it was in the Upper Room. As we approach Pentecost, we must ask ourselves, *"Which covenant is our congregation offering? Which heart am I offering to God?"*

Are we standing at the foot of the mountain, agreeing to God's covenant with our lips while our hearts turn toward "man-made gods"—the distractions, comforts, and idols of this world? Or are we in the Upper Room, in a state of pure anticipation, waiting for a manifestation that changes our behavior and empowers our witness?

One path leads back to the world and eventually leads to death. The other path leads out into the world, with boldness, and results in life. This Pentecost, the question remains: *Where is your heart in the waiting?*

TESSA DIETZE
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Tessa and her husband, Johannes, live in Germany, where they serve at their local church and in Europe as the Youth Ministries Directors for Wider Europe and the Middle East. They have been blessed with the miracle of three children.

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

BISHOP DUKE STONE | NORTH CAROLINA STATE BISHOP

Every leader knows the tension. We need to confront a situation, but we don't want to hurt or discourage the person. We don't want to crush their confidence. When that tension rises, whether at home, in ministry, or in leadership situations, it is easy to drift toward one of two extremes. We either become sharp and forceful or quiet and avoidant. We either say too much too harshly, or we say nothing at all. Neither response leads to growth in the individual or in any of us.

Difficult circumstances have a way of revealing what is really inside us. Conflict reveals our character. Misunderstandings uncover one's level of maturity.

Scripture gives us a better way: "Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ" (Ephesians 4:15 NLT). Paul provides the model to navigate difficult conversations that was demonstrated by Jesus. Our Lord was never afraid of truth, and He also never separated truth from love.

The Tension Between Care and Challenge

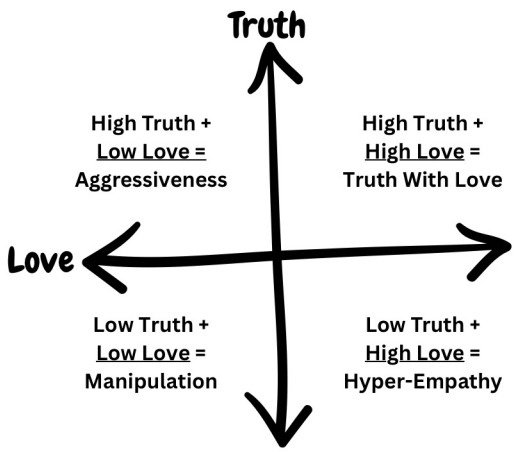
"Truth in love" requires two commitments. The first is to have deep compassion for the person. The second is to have enough compassion to confront what needs confronting. It means you genuinely care about the person in front of you. And because you care, you will tell them the truth, not as a weapon to put them in their place, but to bring them to a place of growth. At the same time, you don't show so much compassion that you drift into avoidance. You commit to share truth wrapped in love.

When we fail to hold both together, we drift into unhealthy patterns. If we think of a two-by-two grid with "love" on one axis and "truth" on the other, the point where those lines intersect determines how we navigate difficult moments.

If we share truth without love, we often become obnoxiously aggressive. Correction becomes blunt and cutting. While it may produce short-term compliance, it also damages trust. People withdraw or become defensive.

If we neither show love nor express truth, we become insincere and manipulative. We smile publicly but criticize privately. We protect the public image of our relationship instead of strengthening it. "An open rebuke is better than hidden love" (Proverbs 27:5 NLT).

When we show only deep love while avoiding challenging truths, we risk being overly empathetic. This is the drift that occurs with many who are in ministry. We don't want to hurt or discourage anyone, so we soften hard truths or overlook patterns that need attention. Yet Hebrews 12:11 (NIV) reminds us that "no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness."



The biblical sweet spot in difficult conversations is "truth with love." Truth with love is a balanced mixture of caring deeply while challenging directly: "I value you, and that's why I need to share something I've noticed." It is honest and kind at the same time. It builds trust because it proves that love and truth are not competitors.

Emphasize the "Why"

Within the life of the church, guidance and correction are not merely tools for improving performance. They are instruments of spiritual formation.

The writer of Hebrews reminds believers that the Lord disciplines those He loves and shapes them through correction so they may share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:6–11). Loving guidance is one way God forms maturity in His people. When leaders approach tough conversations through this lens, correction becomes less about criticism and more about discipleship.

Jesus Himself modeled this pattern throughout His ministry. He corrected His disciples when they demonstrated a lack of understanding, misplaced motives, or even when they struggled in the faith. Yet His correction always served the greater purpose to prepare them for the mission they would one day carry. His words were sometimes direct, but they were always rooted in a desire to shape their character and strengthen their calling.

Ministry leaders are entrusted with a similar responsibility. Addressing issues honestly is not an act of impatience or frustration; it is an act of stewardship. When leaders care deeply and speak truthfully, they help others grow in wisdom, responsibility, and spiritual maturity.

Difficult conversations also tend to unfold more constructively when leaders begin by clarifying the deeper purpose behind the discussion. Leadership author Simon Sinek (2009) says people are far more receptive when they understand the "why" behind an action. In leadership settings, this principle can be especially powerful. When a leader begins a difficult conversation by affirming the shared mission of serving Christ faithfully, everyone is reminded that the discussion is not about personal criticism but faithful service and spiritual growth.

In practical terms, this means beginning difficult conversations by emphasizing the compassion and purpose that motivate the discussion. When people understand that the goal is their growth and their faithfulness to God, the tone of the conversation often changes. Clarity becomes easier to receive because it is clearly connected to a shared purpose.

Conclusion

Difficult conversations are an unavoidable part of leadership, especially in ministry. In spiritual leadership, relationships matter deeply. Yet Scripture reminds us that truth and love were never meant to compete with one another. Jesus modeled a better way by caring for people deeply while speaking with clarity when correction was needed.

When ministry leaders approach conversations "speaking the truth with love," they create environments where trust deepens and maturity develops. Difficult conversations are opportunities for discipleship and strengthening the mission of the church.

Source:

Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action.* New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2009.

Holiness Goes Beyond Upright Conduct

JUAN MANUEL ADAMES SILVA | SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Sanctification does not spring from human effort to avoid sin but from the work of Christ in the believer, who transforms life through His truth.

In many Christian settings, holiness has often been presented almost exclusively in terms of moral uprightness. For many believers, to be holy has meant, above all, to behave well, avoid sin, and maintain an outwardly blameless life. While obedience, purity, and godly conduct are certainly important, reducing holiness to that framework can profoundly weaken our understanding of the gospel.

Biblical holiness goes beyond upright conduct. It cannot be reduced to human effort, personal discipline, or the determination not to fail. Holiness, in its deepest sense, is the work of God in the believer. It does not begin primarily with external behavior; rather, it begins with the transforming action of Christ in the heart. *Before holiness is something seen in conduct, it is something produced by grace.*

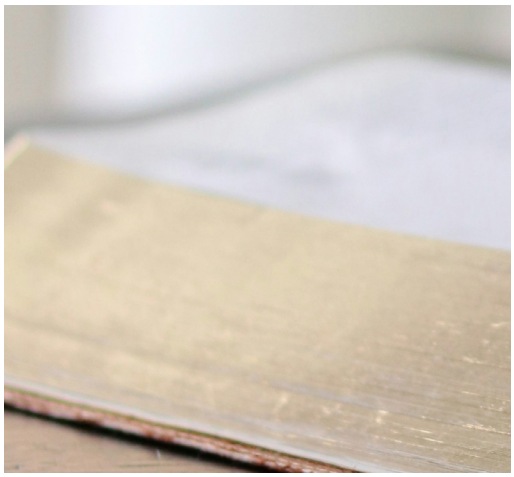
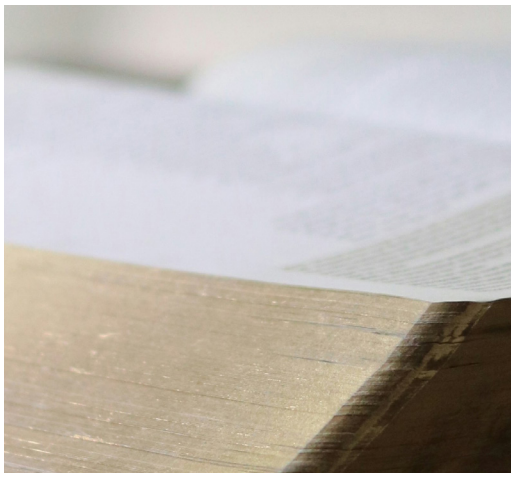
Jesus expressed this clearly in His high priestly prayer: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17 NKJV). In this petition, the primary actor is not the disciple, but God. Jesus did not say, "Teach them to sanctify themselves," nor did He say, "Make them holy by their moral resolve." He said, "Sanctify them." The force of that prayer directs our attention to divine action. First and foremost, sanctification is not the achievement of man but the gracious work of God through His truth.

This distinction is crucial. Good conduct does not create holiness; rather, true holiness produces transformed conduct. *Christ sanctifies, and upright conduct is the fruit of that work.* When that order is reversed, the Christian life becomes burdensome, defensive, and deeply centered on performance. The believer begins to measure his standing with God by how well he is doing rather than by his union with Christ. Spiritual life becomes a constant self-assessment, and holiness turns into an exhausting attempt to preserve a personal image of purity by sheer effort.

Many sincere Christians have lived under this weight. At some point, they were taught explicitly or implicitly that the essence of discipleship was to spend their lives trying not to sin. Their spiritual energy revolved around avoiding failure, resisting temptation, suppressing weakness, and maintaining appearances. Yet in that framework, the Christian life can quietly become self-centered, even when it appears devout. The focus rests so heavily on personal struggle that Christ Himself ceases to be the center and becomes more like a mere backdrop.

The Lord, however, calls His people into something deeper. He does not simply summon us to fight sin; He calls us to know Him, follow Him, love Him, and abide in Him. He does not sanctify us by making us more conscious of ourselves but by drawing us into communion with Himself. Sanctification is not merely about restraining evil habits. It is about being set apart for God, transformed by truth, and increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ.

This change in perspective brings freedom—not a careless freedom that excuses sin, but a gospel freedom that breaks the power of legalism. Legalism wears the appearance of seriousness, yet it rests on a false center. It places the weight of spiritual life on the believer's shoulders and leaves the soul weary. *Grace does not lower*

the call to holiness; it grounds holiness in Christ, where it truly belongs. The gospel does not say that holiness is unnecessary. It says that holiness is impossible apart from the Lord who sanctifies.

This does not mean that conduct is unimportant. On the contrary, conduct matters deeply. Obedience, moral integrity, purity, humility, and faithfulness are necessary expressions of a life being sanctified. Scripture never dismisses the importance of a holy life. But it is essential to keep cause and fruit in their proper order. The believer is not sanctified because he behaves well; he begins to live differently because Christ is sanctifying him. Holy conduct is not the foundation of sanctification. It is its visible evidence.

This is why holiness cannot be reduced to religious ethics. There are many people who live disciplined and morally respectable lives without having a living relationship with Jesus Christ. External correctness alone is not the same as biblical holiness. Christian holiness is more than self-control, propriety, or moral seriousness. It is participation in the life of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in those who have believed in Christ and have been united to Him by faith.

Jesus's prayer in John 17 also teaches that sanctification is inseparably linked to truth. "Your word is truth," He says. The Word of God does far more than supply information. It penetrates the inner life. It confronts motives, exposes falsehood, realigns passions, purifies desires, renews the mind, and shapes character according to Christ. Holiness is not sustained by empty rules detached from relationship. It is cultivated through a life continually formed by the truth of God's Word.

For this reason, holiness must also be understood relationally. It is not merely the avoidance of certain acts; it is the orientation of the whole life toward a Person. The one who loves Jesus desires to please Him. The one who follows Jesus learns to deny himself. The one who believes in Jesus no longer lives to accumulate spiritual merit, but to respond to grace. *Holiness matures not in the soil of pride, but in love. It grows where there is surrender, communion, reverence, and delight in Christ.*

When believers lose sight of this, holiness can easily become moralism, and moralism always distorts. It can produce fear instead of freedom, appearance instead of authenticity, and exhaustion instead of joy. A person may look externally correct while inwardly living under deep spiritual fatigue. But when holiness is taught as the work of the Holy Spirit in a life surrendered to Christ, obedience takes on a different character. It is no longer the anxious effort of someone trying to prove himself to God. It becomes the grateful response of one who belongs to the Lord.

The church urgently needs to recover this vision. If holiness is preached only as behavior, we risk producing people who are polished on the outside yet drained within. If it is proclaimed only as prohibition, it may result in pretense, discouragement, or a culture of hiding. But if holiness is presented as the gracious work of Christ in those who know Him, trust Him, and love

Him, then we cultivate disciples whose obedience flows from communion rather than mere pressure.

The Christian life is not a solitary race of moral self-improvement. It is the life of a redeemed person yielded to the Christ who sanctifies. Holiness is not the trophy of the most disciplined, nor the reward of human effort. It is the evidence of divine grace at work in the believer. It is not merely the absence of sinful behavior; it is the presence of a life increasingly given over to God. It is not only upright conduct; it is a life consecrated by truth and sustained by grace.

This is why Jesus's prayer remains such a powerful anchor for the believer. He still intercedes for His people, and His words still define the essence of sanctification: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." The believer's confidence rests there—not in self-sufficiency, not in moral record, not in the ability to maintain a spiritual image, but in the Lord who calls, sets apart, transforms, and keeps His people for His glory.

A merely moral life can produce discipline, but it cannot produce holiness. Personal effort may restrain certain outward sins, but it cannot generate spiritual life. Human determination can modify behavior, but it cannot sanctify the heart. Only Christ can do that. Only Christ can take a person and make him holy in truth. Only Christ can form in the believer a life that reflects not merely external correctness, but inward transformation.

For this reason, holiness must never be preached as though it were simply a matter of trying harder. It must be proclaimed as the gracious work of God carried out by the Spirit in those who belong to His Son. The believer's call is real: to obey, to walk in truth, to reject sin, and to pursue righteousness. Yet even that pursuit is sustained by grace. The Christian does not strive toward holiness apart from Christ; he walks in holiness because Christ is at work in him.

The deepest freedom in the Christian life comes when a believer understands this. He no longer lives with holiness as a private project of self-construction. He lives as one who has been claimed by Jesus. He no longer defines spiritual maturity merely by how well he avoids failure. He begins to understand that *true maturity is found in deeper communion with Christ, deeper submission to truth, deeper love for the Lord, and deeper dependence on grace.*

Thus, holiness does indeed go beyond upright conduct. Upright conduct matters, but it is not the center. Christ is the center. Truth is the means. Grace is the power. Love is the atmosphere. And the fruit is a transformed life.

Good behavior by itself does not sanctify. Christ does.

MARIE PROCTOR | LANCASTER, SOUTH CAROLINA

My Experience

Many people might expect that someone raised in a Pentecostal church would be very familiar with Pentecost Sunday. This was not the case for me. About 13 years ago, I stumbled upon the liturgical church calendar. I often heard friends mention Advent and Lent; however, when I asked about these observances, I was informed that we do not practice them per se—that we only celebrate Christmas and Easter. No reason or explanation was given, neither did I seem to need one at the time. I felt satisfied celebrating Christmas and Easter. As I grew older, I discovered that Lent is a season of fasting, and I was grateful we did not participate in it. That would be a lot of fasting coming off the heels of the "21 Days of Prayer and Fasting" initiative in the COGOP!

In 2013, I left my home church to lead a new group, which allowed me to grow and connect with people from different backgrounds in the Christian faith. Talking with these individuals helped me recognize that the Holy Spirit was encouraging me to explore my own faith history and to ask about the experiences of others. I suppose faith can be handed down, but it takes openness to the Holy Spirit to help make sense of it. This was the case for me.

For many in liturgical churches, the church calendar has been a simple way to share the Christian faith year after year. For me, there was nothing simple about this calendar. It was an enormous learning curve. I had many questions as well as judgments. I truly wondered if it even mattered, yet the Holy Spirit kept stirring my curiosity. I learned about Advent and introduced it to our congregation over the next few years. Next, I introduced the season of Lent, and then Pentecost Sunday. Who knew the color to wear on Pentecost Sunday was red? Filled with excitement, we dressed in red and even brought red balloons. I had years of missing out to make up for! This was indeed a wonderful day—Pentecostal people celebrating Pentecost Sunday.

As great as this was, I felt ignorant and even a little disappointed. How could someone who was raised in a Pentecostal church not know about Pentecost Sunday? Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, is where we trace our roots. This is what we celebrate as Pentecostals. My questions

continued, but the judgments once directed toward people who knew about and understood the church calendar were now projected on my own people. I would like to say this was resolved quickly, but it wasn't. I can say that I began to wrestle with God on many issues that surfaced because of my questions. I did not need to wrestle with my family or question how I was raised. I did not need to wrestle with church folks or other ministers in leadership. God was inviting me to wrestle with Him; I only hoped that He would win. And He did!

Today, I make no judgments on whether or not someone chooses to celebrate Pentecost Sunday. I realize many Pentecostals do not celebrate a specific day because they celebrate Pentecost every day. The fact that I am writing this article on the topic of Pentecost Sunday for the *White Wing Messenger* tells me more about the Church of God of Prophecy that I did not know! We do celebrate it! Has this always been the case? I do not know, nor does it matter. What does matter is that we believe in the empowerment, embodiment, and mission of the Holy Spirit. When we are completely united in purpose, the Spirit of God moves mightily.

Scripture

> And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4 KJV)

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come. . . ."

To me, this phrase signifies it was time. A mother bird instinctively knows when to nudge her chicks out of the nest, knowing that keeping them there any longer might expose them to significant risks. For the disciples, it was time to fly. They had their wings. All they needed was the sound of a rushing mighty wind.

"One accord, in one place"

Sadly, when people come together for worship, prayer, or the Eucharist, they are often not completely united in purpose. The same was true at the Last Supper; chaos surrounded this meeting. Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray Him, leaving them to inquire among themselves as to who would do such a thing (Luke 22:23). There was also strife among them about who was greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus told Peter he would deny Him, but Peter did not believe Him (Luke 22: 31–34). They were all in one place, but they were not fully united in purpose. This was evident when Jesus was arrested and the disciples scattered. Even after the crucifixion, the disciples met behind locked doors because they were afraid (John 20:19). They were in one place, but still not in one accord.

After the resurrection, they began to unite in purpose more frequently. Each time they

gathered, they shared the news that they had seen Jesus. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary ran to tell the disciples that the tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive (Matthew 28:8). The disciples on the road to Emmaus hurried to tell the others that the Lord was risen (Luke 24:34). Each encounter caused them to draw closer to one another in unity. Each time they shared the good news that Jesus was alive, Jesus appeared. Such is the case when we share good news with one another.

"Suddenly"

The period from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday is known as Eastertide, or the Easter season. This is the season I encourage others to look for the miracles of God—the ones that happen all around us. One simple way to do this is by hanging a small crystal in a sunny window or in a car's rearview mirror. Once the light strikes the crystal, it refracts, creating small rainbows. It is common to see rainbows dancing in my car. The sudden, unexpected appearance of rainbows never ceases to amaze me. It beckons me to pause and become more aware of God's presence in the moment.

I imagine that the intentionality of the disciples to gather with one accord and in one place was quite an experience. They encountered the resurrected Jesus and shared these stories. They saw the resurrected Jesus ascend into the sky. And now they remained together. They were no longer scattered or in chaos. "And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God (Luke 24:52–53).

Conclusion

I am often struck by how God appears in everyday moments. Even when I feel scattered and distant, a small shift can bring clarity and a renewed sense of God's presence. This is a miracle. Gaining insight into my inherited faith is a miracle. To wrestle with God is a miracle. To be open to the Holy Spirit is a miracle. To wonder is a miracle. To be in awe and to be speechless when God's glory is revealed is a miracle. To witness creation praising and worshipping God is a miracle.

Whether one celebrates Pentecost every day or as part of the liturgical church calendar, God will show up!

Unexpectedly.
Suddenly.
As the sound of a rushing mighty wind.
As a warm fire.
In another tongue.
And you will know.

When They Want What You Have

> *"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 8:18–19 NIV).

Simon reveals a profound truth. It is not his sin, which we understand well, but his hunger that stands out. He was a man who had captivated an entire city with signs and wonders. Luke reports that the people of Samaria, from the least to the greatest, called him "the Great Power of God" (Acts 8:10). Simon was no novice. He had studied unseen forces and wielded influence over crowds. He recognized real power when he encountered it.

But when Philip arrived in Samaria to preach the kingdom of God, Simon witnessed something unprecedented. Luke describes him as being "astonished," a term also used for those who saw Jesus cast out demons. Philip's miracles were not merely for show. They were genuine. They resulted from a life deeply filled with the Holy Spirit, not performative acts. Simon—the renowned Simon—could not look away.

He followed Philip everywhere. When Peter and John arrived from Jerusalem and laid hands on the new believers, Simon saw the Holy Spirit descend on ordinary Samaritan men and women with undeniable power, and something inside him snapped. Simon reached for his money, eager to buy it.

The church body has discussed Simon's intentions for centuries. However, before condemning him, let us consider what his desire exposes about the church.

The Testimony that Needs No Stage

We live in an era filled with Christian noise. We broadcast, create platforms, and promote the faith. We craft logos for revivals and develop strategies for spiritual development. While there is nothing wrong with these activities individually, they become problematic when they replace the only true form of advertisement the Spirit of God ever wanted: a life so visibly filled with God's presence that others are compelled to ask, "How much?"

Philip did not organize a campaign in Samaria. Instead, he fled there as a refugee fleeing persecution (Acts 8:3–4). He was not an official evangelist by design. Originally a table server, he became a vessel spreading seed. Despite this, "the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard

him and saw the signs that he did" (Acts 8:6 ESV). These signs were not mere tricks but were the natural outcome of a man who walked so closely with the Spirit of God that heaven seemed to seep through his every action.

Simon did not hear a testimony about the Holy Spirit. He witnessed one.

Simon never heard a testimony about the Holy Spirit. He observed one firsthand. He saw unclean spirits leave bodies with shrieks, watched paralytics stand up, and saw lame men walk. Then—and this is the moment the text emphasizes—he saw ordinary, Spirit-filled hands laid on people, and something unprecedented happened, something that no amount of money, no matter how long Simon had practiced his mystical arts, could produce. An authentic presence, alive and real, descended on those people. It was something genuine, impossible to fake, especially to someone like Simon who had dedicated his life to mastering the dark arts.

That is the power of a Spirit-filled witness. It is not just the words. The words are important; after all, Philip preached Christ. But it was the undeniable force behind the words that sparked an irresistible longing in a man who had seen everything.

What Samaria Saw

The early Pentecostals instinctively understood this. The revivals at the Azusa Street Mission, starting in 1906, were not mainly founded on polished preaching. Instead, they depended on a community so moved by the Holy Spirit that strangers would wander in off the street, drawn by something truly unprecedented. Skeptics often entered as mockers but left in tears, speaking in tongues they had not learned. Reporters visited to write exposés, yet they often left having been influenced themselves.

This core message in Acts 8 emphasizes that the church not only speaks of the Spirit but also demonstrates it. When believers in Christ walk in genuine, Spirit-filled unity and cross cultural divides like the Jewish-Samarian boundary—just as Philip, Peter, and John did—the observing world will be drawn in. They will approach, imitate, and desire what we possess.

And what we have cannot be bought. That is exactly Peter's point (Acts 8:20). The gift of God is not a commodity. It cannot be exchanged through techniques or acquired through transactions. It is given by grace to those who have fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and that surrender in itself serves as the most powerful testimony a human life can offer.

Unified to Reconcile: The Samaritan Dimension

We should not overlook the significance of geography. Samaria was a land marked by ancient scars. Jews and Samaritans shared a common bloodline, but their divisions predated Philip's arrival. Normally, a devout Jew avoided going to Samaria. However, the Spirit directed a Spirit-filled man into the midst of this division, and the revival that ensued transcended traditional boundaries.

When Peter and John went to pray for the Samaritan believers, they crossed a line shaped by centuries of religious hostility. They placed Jewish apostolic hands on Samaritan shoulders, and the Holy Spirit was poured out without distinction—the same Spirit, the same gift, a unified church.

This is the unifying power of the Spirit that is poured out, and it remains as vital today as it was in Acts 8. Our communities remain divided, and many churches are often still segregated by race, class, and culture. However, the Pentecostal legacy—the story of Azusa, where Black, White, and Latino believers knelt together—has always been that God's fire disregards our divisions. When the Spirit descends, He brings reconciliation. He fosters unity. He builds within the church a community so remarkably united that the observing world is compelled to ask, "What is this happening here?"

The fire of God does not observe our divisions. When the Spirit falls, He reconciles.

Testify with Your Life

As Pentecost Sunday nears, the church is called to reconnect with her origins, not as mere nostalgia, but as a celebration of renewal. The gifts of the Spirit are active, not relics. Healing continues to occur. Prophecy still nourishes the community. Speaking in tongues remains a sign that the Spirit's work is ongoing. New churches continue to emerge as Spirit-filled men and women spread like seed into the soil of uncharted territory.

But Samaria's question is not just "Do you believe in the gifts?" It is also "Do you possess something so authentic that even Simon, a man who has seen it all, would follow you through the city and reach for his wallet?"

That reality is not created through service. It is nurtured through surrender, developing quietly in hidden moments. It flourishes in the daily, unpressured yielding to the Holy Spirit during prayer, Scripture reading, and in everyday places where no one observes. This growth then spills over into neighborhoods, broken families, and even into the Samarias we were advised to avoid. The testimony spreads like fire, causing people who have never heard our words to long for what they observe in our lives.

The church does not need a louder voice. The church needs a deeper fire. When we have that fire, we won't need to persuade the world. We will only need to show up, and the Simons of our generation will come running.

This month, ask the Holy Spirit not for better words, but for a deeper witness. Pray for the fire to fall—not because you planned it, but because you carried it. Then go to your Samaria—the neighborhood, the coworker, the estranged family member—and let your life do what no platform ever could: make someone lean in and ask, "What is it that you have?"

ALBERT MURZA
ACCREDITED MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT ACADEMIC DEAN

▲ *A young member of the Victory Chapel congregation (Adawukwa Local Church) in Ghana helps lead the service.*

HOW LEADERS SHAPE CONFIDENT YOUNG VOICES

Before a young person ever finds the courage to share their faith, someone believed their voice was worth hearing. When we talk about empowering the next generation to testify, we often think about the big moments like camp testimonies and mission trip reports, but a testimony begins long before someone steps up to share it. The confidence a young person may have to share their faith is built up through dozens of smaller moments where elders gave them the opportunity for their voice, perspective, and ideas to make a difference. The question is not just "How do we create opportunities for youth to testify?" but "How do we create cultures where young voices are valued every day?" When young people know their voice matters in the mundane, they will speak with confidence in the extraordinary.

In leadership contexts within our churches, there seem to be two common viewpoints of young people. The first is seeing youth only as a lost generation, corrupted by culture, music, and media, needing to be saved from themselves, even if they are already walking with God. It is worth noting that this is not unique to Gen Z. Every generation tends to view the next one as more lost, more distracted, and more influenced by the world than they were. When youth are approached as a problem to solve rather than souls to disciple and empower, opportunities will be missed. Another viewpoint is the "cool factor" view—when a leader tries so hard to be modern, hip, and relevant. While rooted in good intentions, authenticity gets lost in the effort to connect. Young people need dependable leaders they trust and who will give guidance, even if those leaders don't know the trends or use the newest slang. Both approaches miss what this generation really craves: community, connection, and authenticity. There is a reality worth naming: Anyone can access incredible sermons, professional worship music, and teaching content on their phone 24/7. What cannot be downloaded is relationship and the experience of being known and valued.

Think about the people who made a difference in your life at a young age. Much of their impact

likely came simply from presence in the everyday. When I look at my own life, I see a youth pastor who came to birthday parties and volleyball games, and pastors and youth pastors who saw where I was gifted and gave me real responsibility to grow leadership skills while I was still young. When our youth praise band was encouraged to lead worship in the main sanctuary and not just in the church basement, my value was reinforced. There have been leaders in my life who gave students real ownership of decisions that mattered. In addition, I had parents who valued my input in family decisions and gave me opportunities to grow. To me, these are a few things that had a great impact on me. You probably have had similar experiences.

What is powerful about this approach is that elders walk alongside youth throughout life rather than outsourcing that responsibility to a program or a moment. They create space for young people to use their gifts, while still providing guidance and room to fail. Jesus modeled this beautifully in John 6:5–13. He could have multiplied the loaves and fishes without the small boy's offering, yet He chose to involve the boy. The miracle was not only about feeding the five thousand; it was about a young person's contribution mattering in something far bigger than themselves.

For many, the meaningful inclusion of young people can bring forth tension between excellence and the inclusion. As a self-proclaimed perfectionist, there is always the instinct to pursue the best idea, the most effective strategy, and strive for the most polished outcome. Many leaders experience this to some degree, and it is not wrong, because excellence does matter. God calls us to do things well so that it honors Him, but we cannot ignore a developing voice in our pursuit of perfection. Looking back at my youth ministry experiences, many of my own ideas and the ideas of other youth were underdeveloped, yet leaders took our thoughts and ideas seriously and created space for our imperfect contributions. They were forming something more valuable than a perfect program—they were letting us know our perspective had worth, while being guiding mentors to us. In Luke 10:1–2, Jesus sent out the 72 disciples knowing they would face hardship and that He could accomplish the mission more efficiently alone. The goal was not a flawless performance, but their formation.

This principle extends far beyond churches and youth groups. Many churches are small, with no formal youth ministry at all. However, everyone has a young person in their life, whether you are an aunt or uncle, maybe a grandparent, or even a neighbor to a youth; we have the opportunity to encourage and uplift their voices. This is a principle that educators have long understood. Montessori methods, for example, do not just teach skills to young children; they create a space where children contribute meaningfully to real work. Children practice doing things like pouring water, not just for the sake of it, but because the plants actually need watering. The learning happens through contribution, not simulation. The same principle applies to empowering young voices. Youth need to be a part of the decisions that affect them—whether it is helping plan a service project at church, contributing to decisions, or being given an opportunity to lead. When the voices of the youth shape real outcomes across everyday contexts, that is where "testimony confidence" is built.

Being treated as a valued voice by youth pastors, my parents, and leaders who trusted me with real responsibility made me feel like the leader people always said I was. That is what we get to offer the next generation. Empowering young voices is not just about creating testimony opportunities at camp. It is about forming the confidence that makes testimony authentic. When young people are included in real decisions, they learn their perspective has weight, and God can work through them now; and from that place, testimony is not something they perform, it is something they live.

CAMILLE LYNN MCCALEB
GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COUNCIL

UPDATE FROM URUGUAY

2026 National Children's Camp Report

Melisa Fagundez, National Children's Leader

The National Children's Camp took place on February 14 and 15 in El Monte, Montevideo. This event was organized to provide children with an opportunity for spiritual formation, personal growth, and Christian fellowship in a safe and uplifting environment.

A total of 41 children, ages 5 to 12, participated. The staff consisted of 26 adults, including teachers, leaders, pastors, cooks, and volunteers, who took on the responsibility and commitment of conducting every session and activity of the camp. National Bishop Marco Benavides was also present.

The camp's theme was "Be of Good Courage," based on the biblical text of Joshua 1:9 (NKJV): "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Based on this teaching, the children were taught that true courage comes from trust in God. It was emphasized that being courageous does not mean being fearless, but rather acting in faith, knowing that God is with us and always sustains us.

For the Bible lessons, the children were divided into four age groups, each led by three teachers. In addition to teaching the lessons, these teachers were responsible for caring for and supervising the children throughout the two-day camp.

The Bible lessons focused on the lives and examples of figures such as David, Esther, and Daniel, highlighting the courage they demonstrated through obedience, faith, and trust in God amid difficult circumstances. Through these stories, the children learned that courage does not depend on age or human strength, but on a close relationship with God.

Through various activities, group exercises, and moments of reflection, the children learned these lessons:

- Courage comes from God, who dwells in their hearts.
- They can show courage by obeying God, even when others choose not to.
- They are courageous when they control their emotions and act with love and respect.
- God equips them from an early age to grow, serve, and fulfill His purpose.

The theme “Be of Good Courage” helped the children understand that they are not alone, that God strengthens them every day, and that they can live with confidence, knowing that He always keeps them safe.

Noteworthy was the special participation of international guest Nelson Torres, from Puerto Rico, who attended the camp and shared a meaningful moment during the service for the children, offering a lesson of great spiritual value. We were also joined by National Bishop Benavides, who was present at the camp and helped with the overall organization of the event.

Local teachers who participated included Ximena Falco (Piedras Blancas), Gabriela Perez, Mónica Ramos (Las Piedras), Solange Suárez, Maria Rey (Vista Linda), Patricia Docanto (La Paz), and Luzmila Ibañez (Paso de la Arena). Other teachers were Melanie Fagundez, Priscila Giles (Piedras Blancas), Jimena Ibañez, Jazmin Pose (Paso de la Arena), Luz Alvarez (Vista Linda).

Pastors Leandro Cardozo, Olga Miraballes, Jonathan Cantero assisted, along with Diego Motta (National Youth Leader) and Pamela Moreira (National Media Leader). Jorge Suárez and Juan Hernandez served as cooks, and Tatiana Cardozo and Marco Cruz Costa served as musicians.

The 2026 National Children’s Camp was an enriching experience that not only strengthened the children’s faith, but also reaffirmed our commitment to raising brave, faith-filled generations who are steadfast in their trust in God and equipped to make a positive difference in their communities and the world.

Youth Reunion

Church of God of Prophecy, Uruguay
Melanie Suarez and Pamela Moreira / Communications

On March 12, 2026, a national youth gathering was held in Lomas de San Isidro, Canelones, with 60 young people in attendance.

The day began with opening remarks by the 2026 camp influencer. This was followed by a workshop led by Juan and Solange, youth leaders from COGOP Vista Linda, who spoke on the topic "How do I know that God is calling me to serve?"

During this session, they emphasized that God calls ordinary people and that the call often begins in our hearts as we grow in our relationship with Him and use our gifts and talents to bless others.

This was followed by a rewarding time of reunion among the young people, fostering integration, fellowship, and unity. During this time, the youth enjoyed various recreational activities, including swimming and soccer, in a joyful, friendly atmosphere.

Later, a second workshop was led by Abigail, the youth leader at COGOP Las Piedras, working

▼ TOP (Youth Reunion, left to right): *Preaching – National Youth Leader Diego Motta; Workshop – National Teen Leader Ximena Falco; Workshop – Dr. Jorge Patpatian;* BOTTOM: Youth Reunion activities

with the youth, and by Ximena, the national teens leader, working with the teens. The workshop addressed the topic “Who am I?” with a focus on identity. During this time, we reflected on the importance of recognizing that our true identity is not determined by external opinions nor fleeting emotions, but by what God declares about us: beloved children with a calling and a purpose.

The day concluded with a special service in which the youth national leader, Diego Motta, shared the Word, challenging those present with a direct question: Are you willing to answer God’s call?

Undoubtedly, it was a significant time in which God spoke into the lives of those present, ministered to their hearts, and reaffirmed His call on this generation. The experience left the youth inspired, motivated, and ready to pursue God’s purpose with renewed confidence for the future.

“Revolution” Youth Camp

Church of God of Prophecy, Uruguay
Melanie Suarez and Pamela Moreira / Communications

“Revolution” Youth Camp was comprised of three days of holistic training and spiritual growth.

On January 16–18, 2026, the “Revolution” Youth Camp took place at the El Monte Complex in Montevideo with 84 teenagers and young adults participating. The event consisted of three intensive days of training, fellowship, and spiritual guidance, conducted in an atmosphere of order, unity, and commitment, which fostered the personal and community growth of all participants.

During the camp, a variety of training workshops were held, led by professionals and leaders with extensive experience in their respective fields.

Dr. Jorge Patpatian, a sexologist, addressed the topic “Sexual Pressure, Sexting, Pornography, and Social Media,” offering a preventive and educational approach, along with practical tools for addressing current issues affecting teenagers and young adults.

International Youth Director Kirk Rising led the workshops “Discipleship that Transforms” and “God’s Will: Good, Pleasing, and Perfect,” aimed at strengthening values, personal commitment, and social responsibility. Likewise, National Education Leader Jorge Falco led the workshop “Ambassadors of Christ in This World,” promoting a consistent, lived-out faith across the various areas of daily life.

Pastor Marcela Bastías led the workshop “Running the Good Race,” which focused on perseverance, purpose, and consistency in personal and spiritual growth. In turn, psychologist Yeni Kerikian offered a professional perspective through the workshops “The Role of Emotions in Decision-Making” and “The Role of Adolescents in Non-Traditional Families,” creating spaces for reflection, support, and practical guidance for daily life.

In addition to the training sessions, general services were held featuring sermons and moments of spiritual reflection, led by Joel Domínguez (local youth leader), Pastor Leandro Cardozo, National Women’s Leader Fabiana Altez, Bishop Dan Miller (pastor), and Bishop Kirk Rising (International Youth Director). These gatherings fostered processes of self-reflection, reconciliation, and meaningful decision-making.

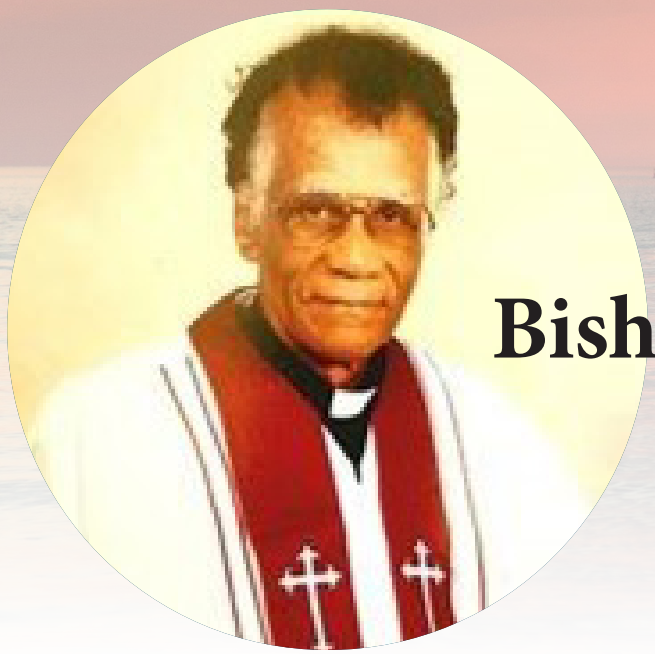
A key aspect of the camp was the unity and teamwork among the leadership, which was reflected in their organized, committed, and

▲ BOTTOM ("Revolution" Youth Camp, left to right): *Workshop – International Youth Director Kirk Rising; Youth Workshop – Abigail Gomez; Licensed Psychology Workshop – Yeni Kerikian*

harmonious service. The support provided by the national youth leaders, Diego and Ximena, was noteworthy, along with that of the local leaders, who worked closely in every area.

Abigail, the leader from Las Piedras, was in charge of the overall dynamic of the games; Pamela, the leader from Paso de la Arena, was responsible for the special activities and social media management; Juan and Sol, leaders from Vista Linda, ensured the proper organization and adherence to the schedules for each activity; Melisa, the national children's leader, was in charge of the camp's overall decoration; and Melanie led the social media and content generation areas. This collaborative effort demonstrated a clear unity of vision and purpose, which resulted in an atmosphere of service, excellence, and overall care for the participants.

The "Revolution" Youth Camp left a lasting, positive impact, deepening relationships and reaffirming values that inspire authentic, responsible faith in daily life. This experience confirmed that personal transformation is a holistic process that begins on the inside of each individual and extends outward when there is unity, commitment, leadership guided by solid principles. Participants were equipped to lead and serve with confidence as they carry these lessons forward and continue shaping their world.



IN MEMORIAM

Bishop Rufus R. Rogers

SUNRISE: SEPTEMBER 15, 1940
SUNSET: OCTOBER 23, 2022

Who is the biblical servant? What does the servant look like, and what are the qualifications required to become one? Do I possess what it takes? For those who desire to follow in the footsteps of the servant, Bishop Rufus R. Rogers wrote *The Church and Pastoral Care*, where he sought to answer these questions by presenting the essential elements of the servant's work.

To whom is the servant sent? Not to the privileged or the powerful, but to those who may be resistant, wounded, or in need, often likened to sheep in need of guidance and care. The qualifications for such service run counter to human nature, yet they are essential. The servant places the needs of others above personal interests. The shepherd-servant recognizes the vulnerability of the flock and provides care, protection, and guidance rooted in love for God and His people.

For the spouse, particularly the wife, this work highlights the indispensable role of faithful partnership. It reflects the spiritual, emotional, and personal strength required to support ministry with stability and grace.

The work of a servant is often unseen and uncelebrated, yet it is honored by the Lord. In Bishop Rufus R. Rogers, we saw a servant who stooped to lift the fallen while remaining mindful of his own humanity. His wife, Verona, a minister in the Church of God of Prophecy, wrote, "I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude and reverence for the journey my husband and I shared over nearly six decades. Our life together was a testament to the power of faith, love, and unwavering dedication to serving others." Bishop Rogers's heart was for pastors. He wrote *The Church and Pastoral Care* to pass on the experience and wisdom he gained throughout many years in ministry.

He and Verona met in a small church, bound by a mutual calling to serve and uplift their community. From the very beginning, their relationship was anchored in a shared vision of spreading hope and compassion. Their journey took them across continents, to bustling cities and remote villages, always with the mission of supporting and guiding those in need.

Passing the torch is the substance of a shepherd's life. Sharing lessons learned through years

The Church and Pastoral Care
by Bishop Rufus Rogers

of caring in the trenches of ministry, Bishop Rogers's booklet highlights lessons from the heart of a faithful servant who endured adversity alongside his wife and children. The fabric of his ministry was tender care for God's people. The tenderness with which he poured in oil and wine to the hurting, restored the fallen, and reconciled the straying was remarkable.

Minister Evelyn G. Gardiner, senior pastor (Brockton, Massachusetts) and Northern New England district supervisor, wrote of the Rogers:

> Bishop Rufus and Minister Verona Rogers were both pioneers, serving with their entire family, each supporting the other with unwavering loyalty and commitment. They served as examples of a couple who both devoted themselves to each other, the service of the Lord, and the Church of God of Prophecy. The expansion of the work into areas despite hardships attests to the genuine love for God and a spark of ministry that began with his conversion when Bishop Rogers fell in love with God and later embraced a divine call on his life.

The Global Missions Ministries department recently shared the Centennial Celebration of the region where Bishop Rogers served. The Paragon Region, formerly Northeast Caribbean Region, reported the following:

> In 1978, under the leadership of Bishop Rufus Rogers, the region grew to include the Leeward Islands, the ABC Islands, and Suriname. The area is multiethnic and multilingual. The languages spoken include English, Spanish, French Creole, and Papiamento.
>
> The region continues to blaze new paths as we move into the future with the confidence that the same God who faithfully brought us through these 100 years will continue to open doors for ministry that will contribute to the growth and impact of the Church of God of Prophecy.

We honor Bishop Rufus R. Rogers for his legacy and the impact he has had on the Church of God of Prophecy.

IN HIS PRESENCE

DECEASED MINISTERS | REPORTED AS OF APRIL 1, 2026

WILLA M. BRIDGEWATER
Bahamas
February 18, 2025
Licensed minister for 20 years

BETTY S. CLEARE-KEMP
Bahamas
February 14, 2026
Licensed minister for 24 years

MOROLENE A. COX
Bahamas
January 31, 2025
Licensed minister for 22 years

WILLIS W. GRANT
Bahamas
October 23, 2024
Licensed minister for 41 years

RUDOLPH W. MCKINNEY
Bahamas
March 6, 2026
Licensed minister for 38 years

ADELLA L. MORRIS
Bahamas
June 2025 (exact day unknown)
Licensed minister for 44 years

RANDOLPH P. CURTIS
Bahamas
May 31, 2025
Licensed minister for 30 years

TOMASI RAUSOLO
Fiji
December 24, 2025
Licensed minister for 7 years

EMOSI TILA
Fiji
2022 (exact date unknown)
Licensed minister for 3 years

FERDINAND EDWARDS
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 11 years

ALDYTH I. GARDNER
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 63 years

ERIC A. LEWIS
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 35 years

GILBERT O. PALMER
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 63 years

BEATRICE L. RUSSELL
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 40 years

LOUISE E. WALKER
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 24 years

BARBARA S. WHYTE
Jamaica
Reported July 31, 2024
Licensed minister for 15 years

CYRIL O. ODENDO
Kenya
March 23, 2026
Licensed minister for 39 years

ISSA L. BANGURA
Sierra Leone
March 5, 2026
Licensed minister for 15 years

WILLIAM U. NOE
Alabama (U.S.)
February 26, 2026
Licensed minister for 56 years

THOMAS E. SHEPHERD
Alabama (U.S.)
February 19, 2026
Licensed minister for 23 years

CORNELIUS WILLIAMS
Florida (U.S.)
March 8, 2026
Licensed minister for 48 years

CHARLES C. WINCHESTER
Kansas (U.S.)
February 17, 2026
Licensed minister for 67 years

DIANE B. BUNCH
South Carolina (U.S.)
March 18, 2026
Licensed minister for 51 years

DAVID S. COOPER
Wisconsin (U.S.)
February 27, 2026
Licensed minister for 16 years

HERITAGE MINISTRIES

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Hosted by
MARSHA ROBINSON

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Episode 9: Called, Equipped, and Connected
Episode 8: Designing Digital Evangelism
Episode 7: The Call: To Send and Support
Episode 6: Unwavering on Mission
Episode 5: Living Missionally in Everyday Life
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Episode 3: A World of Christmas
Episode 2: Revival
Episode 1: On Mission Around the World

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