

Together

Worldwide Church of God News

September/October 2007

Volume 2, Number 5

An International Gathering

General Conference of Elders



More than 800 elders and spouses from around the world gathered July 25-29 at the Hyatt hotel in Indian Wells, CA, for several days of lectures, workshops, worship and fellowship. The conference included discussions about theology, spiritual formation and many other subjects (details below).

The meeting also provided countless opportunities for elders to talk with one another about the challenges and rewards of serving their churches. These face-to-face “meetings after the meeting” are an invaluable part of any conference. Lectures could theoretically be recorded and sent out, but the informal personal contacts cannot

be duplicated or replaced, and these experiences helped elders feel more a part of a worldwide fellowship.

One pastor’s story is probably similar to many more. He had not planned to attend for financial reasons, but when his congregations found that out, they worked together to pay his expenses. They commented, “You came back from the 2005 conference with such energy and enthusiasm, it is well worth the money to send you again. You will be a better pastor.”

The conference was not just a lecture series; it was not merely a time for friends to catch up with one another—it was an experience that should help pastors, elders and, through them, the members, to draw closer to Christ in life and work.

An “aha” moment for me was understanding the deep, deep love of the Father for his children. We don’t stop loving our children when they do wrong, and neither does God. You feel their (your children’s) pain. I also enjoyed the opportunity to meet people from different areas who seemingly don’t have anything in common with me. Yet, I met a pastor who has a prison ministry and when comparing his ministry with our nursing home ministry, we were able to share stories with one another. I felt like a sponge absorbing everything, ready to burst! —Joyce Wendt, Wausau, WI

ACCM classes

Some elders arrived on Monday, July 23, to attend a two-day intensive Ambassador College of Christian



Brenda High (South Holland, IL) talks with Jonathan and Susie Martinez (Antelope Valley, CA).

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Baxter Kruger uses gimmick glasses to illustrate the point that most people have a distorted view of God.

Ministry class in Christian Leadership, taught by John McLean, Australian National Director; Mike Feazell, WCG Vice-President, and Randy Bloom, Director of U.S. Church Multiplication Ministries.

These three instructors also taught "Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ" on Monday and Tuesday after the conference.

To ensure that pastors serve their congregations well, U.S. Church Administration & Development requires pastors to take at least one theology-related class each year, either at an accredited school or through ACCM. Most ACCM classes are offered online, for maximum flexibility for our scattered pastors, but some



Ruth Tucker and Dan Rogers.

pastors and elders find the on-site classes an attractive option. The undergraduate classes are open to everyone.

District and international meetings

The conference itself began on Wednesday, July 25, with meetings for U.S. church pastors and elders. As announced in the Nov./Dec. *Together*, U.S. churches are organized into 30 district pastoral networks, and on Wednesday the pastors met with their respective district pastoral leaders. There was a special workshop for other elders in the afternoon.

Starting on Wednesday, worship was led by Higher Ground, from Altadena, CA, composed of Craig Albright, Nathan and Sue Braden, Mike Hale, Al and Katie Killebrew, and Linda and Terry Willhoite. Ross Jutsum, of State of the Heart Ministries, also led us in worship several times.

Randal Dick, Superintendent of Missions, met with international leaders on Tuesday through Friday. These meetings included Hector and Paulina Barrero (Latin America), Charles and Carmen Fleming (Caribbean), Eugene and Lulu Guzon (Philippines), James and Shirley Henderson (England and Africa), Rod and Ruth Matthews (Asia), Tim McGuire (South Africa), and Gary and Wendy Moore (Canada).

Under Randal's guidance, the group reached the conclusion that the position of Superintendent of Missions is no longer necessary for the effective administration of the church's international operations, and an outline for moving forward without that position was developed. The participants discussed the ways in which mission efforts would be coordinated within the WCG in coming years. By common consent, participants extended this meeting another day.

Workshops

On Thursday morning, workshops were offered on several topics:

- The Offering as Worship, by Mark Vincent, who is with the Christian Stewardship

Association

- Visual Worship Leading, by Paul Jackson, sales agent for MediaShout
- Theology Questions & Answers, by John McKenna, WCG Doctrinal Advisor
- Nuts and Bolts of Automated Messaging for a Congregation, by Michael Euliss, Director of Marketing for PhoneTree
- Ministry Marriage: The Joy, the Tears, and the Intimacy, by James Kissee
- Ambassador College of Christian Ministry, by ACCM President



Richard Foster and Dallas Willard share a light moment.

the numerous churches that have been started within the last 10 years. There is abundant growth in many nations. Charles Fleming, Eugene Guzon, Rod Matthews, David Perry, Hector Barrero, Alan Redmond, and James Henderson gave reports on work that has been done in other nations.

Ruth Tucker, former professor of church history at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI, spoke on “Good News for the ‘Left Behind’

Russell Duke

- Team Ministry—Unified and Intentional, by James Roberts, president of the Center for Church Based Training, publisher of the Discovery Series
- Technology and Bible Study, by Landon Norton, agent for Logos Bible Software
- Next Church: Multiplying New Churches, by Randy Bloom
- Prayer Path, a separate room and curriculum for quiet prayer

Pastors had time to attend only two of the workshops, and for many it was a difficult decision. Later on Thursday morning, WCG President Joseph Tkach gave the conference opening message, noting our focus on spiritual formation, and expressing his delight

that the speakers we wanted to address us were able to do so.

In the afternoon, Randal Dick gave a PowerPoint tour of the WCG in international areas, with statistics about the number of members and churches in each nation, with special note of

When Mark Vincent called us “one of the sanest denominations I know,” I understood even more what a marvelous work Jesus has done in our fellowship. What a compliment! The radical increase in humor and camaraderie in the sessions and workshops tell me that this part of the body of Christ is becoming very vibrant and healthy. The Worldwide Church of God has never been a dull place, I just can’t wait to see where the Lord is going to take us next!
—Doug Johannsen, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN



I highly commend Randal Dick for his courage and leadership over the years in bringing our international regions to the place where his role is no longer needed. Randal will continue to serve as elder, and he and Susan are looking forward to serving God and the WCG in whatever new ways Christ has in store for them. We applaud them for their long and productive years in the employ of our church fellowship, and we are grateful to them for the service they have given and will continue to give. We pray for their safety and God’s blessings upon them in this new chapter of life. —Joseph Tkach



The conference gave elders multiple opportunities for informal discussions. Here, Sue and Lee Berger (Round Rock and Waco, TX) talk with Katherine Carter, ministerial intern in Altadena, CA.

Church.” She referred to the churches “left behind” after the growth of megachurches, noting that small

- Teaching for Transformation, and Raising up Spiritual Champions (both on children’s ministry, by Marla Barritt, with Gospel Light)
- Twelve Daughters of Eve, by Ruth Tucker
- Financial Q&A, by Mat Morgan, WCG Treasurer
- Churches Training Leaders, by James Roberts
- Leadership and the Engaged Church, by Michael Euliss
- Tech Tools for You and Your



Attendees from Martinique listen to a translation in French.

churches cannot be small imitations of the megachurch. For example, large churches emphasize celebration, and although tragedies may befall a member or two each month, the megachurch continues to celebrate. Small churches can take time to grieve with those who grieve, and can give a more personal touch.

That evening, Ruth Tucker and her husband John Worst, professor emeritus of music at Calvin College, along with Ross Jutsum, presented “Three Centuries of Gospel Song,” with hymns from Martin Luther to modern times.

Trinitarian Theology

Workshops were again offered on Friday morning—some of them the same ones as on the day before, and a few new ones:



Charles Adams, pastor of Richmond South, VA, with Martin Manuel, pastor in Charlotte, NC.

Church, by Robert Meade, manager of the WCG Information Technology department

After praise and worship on Friday morning, Mike Fezell introduced our guest speaker: C. Baxter Kruger, president of Perichoresis, a nonprofit ministry in Mississippi. Dr. Kruger studied under Professor James Torrance in Scotland, has published several books, preached in 50 churches in 20 denominations in four nations. He has also been interviewed for “You’re Included,” a program produced by the WCG and posted on the www.wcg.org website.

Dr. Kruger emphasized that God created humanity because he wants us to share in the love that characterizes the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus has done everything that is needed for us to enter this relationship—if we think that there is a barrier, it is only because we have a distorted view of reality. The stunning truth of the gospel is that Jesus has accepted us into his life.

Dr. Kruger spoke again in the afternoon. Then, after a short break, Mike Fezell, John McKenna and Mike Morrison joined him on stage for a plenary Q&A session. For many, the conversation continued at dinner as attend-

I found the conference spiritually nourishing. The workshops were excellent, providing numerous practical applications. The additional time allowed for fellowship provided opportunities to discuss the various presentations and workshops. —Keith Hillman, Wyandotte, MI

ees ate together in the hotel dining hall or in nearby eating establishments.

Spiritual formation

On Saturday, the theme was spiritual formation, as we heard from Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, both of whom have written books on this topic, with awards from *Christianity Today* and with enthusiastic reception in many denominations. Dr. Foster spoke in the morning, and Dr. Willard in the afternoon, and then they came together on stage for a dialogue about how people grow to become more Christlike.

“The gospel is not that if you repent you will be forgiven. That is a sin-management ‘gospel.’ This does not lead into a life-transforming en-



Greg Williams, from Lawrenceville, GA, with Mark Stapleton, pastor in San Diego, CA.

I came to see that the only way we can come to a relationship with God is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This rich, genuine and undivided love and unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit has been introduced to us by Jesus Christ as the only way to build that Trinitarian relationship of the true God in his human creation. —Goraiah Papayya, Guyana



Richard and Renee Roberts (San Francisco, CA) talk with Robin Chester (Bend, OR). Right, Carmelita Dizon (Pasadena, CA) talks with Debbie and Craig Minke (Vancouver, British Columbia). Below, Tim Brassell (Portsmouth, VA) with Jonathan Stepp (Nashville, TN).

The conference was about spiritual formation. We pastors need it so we can pass it on to others. These conferences are an excellent way to remain connected. I am very happy that about 20 of us were able to come from the Philippines. It's one thing to hear the tapes, but quite another to be here in person. Our discussion about Trinitarian theology gave us insight in how to communicate that to our congregations. Even pastors need nurturing, and a conference is an excellent way to do this. I'm hoping we'll be able to have another one in two years. Three years may be too long. —Eugene Guzon, Quezon City, Philippines

counter with Jesus,” said Dr. Willard. The gospel is that Jesus has already forgiven us, and repentance is accepting his forgiveness and following the lead of the Spirit. “Grace is God acting in your life, and we would need it even if we never sinned.”

After dinner that evening, the elders enjoyed the humor of two Christian comedians, Ron McGehee and Kerri Pomarolli.

Dan Rogers gave the sermon on Sunday morning, followed by offering and communion messages by Al Barr, pastor in New York City. Services ended at 11:00 so that everyone could check out of the hotel by noon.

About 350 conference attendees then drove to Glendora for an open house at the church's denominational offices. Joseph Tkach gave tours of our facility and everyone enjoyed food and fellowship in the lunch-room. 🌐

Photos by Doug Johannsen, Melinda Morrison and Mike Morrison

Encouraging, uplifting and inspiring would be the words I would use to describe the conference. Our entire family had an incredible, fun and learning experience. —Charles Taylor, Miramar, Florida



Elders who visited the Glendora offices were asked to put a pin on the map to indicate their church areas. Below, Len Joson points out the churches in Mindinao, the Philippines.



Mitch Vasseur and Mat Morgan cook at the Glendora facility.



Mike Swagerty Celebrates 40 Years of Ministry

Mike Swagerty, 60, celebrated his 40th year of ministry in the Worldwide Church of God this past June 2007. Currently pastor of the Sacramento, CA, congregation and district pastoral leader for the



Northern California area, Mike has also served over the years in Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

People came from as far as Akron, OH, to attend the special 40th anniversary service and evening “roast.” Pastor General Joe Tkach, Jr. raised eyebrows with the story of his first meeting with Mike Swagerty.

While still a high school student, Joe Tkach worked at Ambassador College cleaning the dorms. One evening as he was vacuuming, Mike stopped him and demanded to know, “Who are you and what are you doing here?” There had been some thefts in the dorms, but Joe didn’t know anything of that when he answered, “I’m Joe Tkach, and I work here.” Joe turned the question around. “Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Mike then stood at his full height and declared, “I am Michael Swagerty, and I am the student body president of the whole student body of this college and I am in charge around here!”

There was laughter all around as this story, and many others, were shared by family and friends alike. Earlier that day, Mike had shared his 40-year story, from when he first heard Mr. Armstrong, to his most embarrassing moment, to the years of doctrinal changes, when he felt he lost another piece of his own flesh and was left bleeding each time someone left his congregation. In that dark time, he says he finally experienced God as the kind of friend who never leaves nor forsakes you, in the midst of the worst of mental and emotional turmoil.

Recently, Mike has seen God’s hand at work in the development of a video ministry. This ministry provides for individuals and small groups around the country who want to be fed by a church service, but find themselves too ill, too distant or for other reasons not able to attend a WCG congregation that they have been used to. (For more information, see www.wcgsac.org.)

“I have loved the ministry because I love people,” he shared at the anniversary services. “Every congregation has been a family. Let’s tell our stories to each other. Let’s laugh, let’s cry together.” There was more than one moist eye as this veteran pastor recounted his greatest hopes and griefs of 40 years.

Then, as if to keep the day from being too sentimental, the evening banquet was dubbed a “roast.” A wide variety of people shared their stories of Mike’s past, from Mike’s mother, Gladys Swagerty, to Bernie Schnippert, general counsel of the church’s legal department.

There was much laughter and smiles at the presentation of gag mementos, but in the end, everyone was of one spirit celebrating 40 years of faithful ministry and wishing Mike

Swagerty another 40 blessed years in God’s service. —*Teddi Deppner*

New Wine and Old Wineskins

By Mike Swagerty

When I first heard of the denomination’s new focus on church planting and multiplication, I confess I was not a happy camper. My initial reaction was “I am barely able to keep existing ministries going in my congregation—how in the world will I spin off a church plant?” The fact that I am 60 years old, and most of my congregation is older, did not help. Other pastors I talked with shared my doubts. But a recent discussion in Glendora with Dan Rogers, Randy Bloom, Ken Williams and some of my fellow District Pastoral Leaders helped give me a more positive view of what our denomination is trying and not trying to do. Let me briefly explain.

First, I came away with a new sense of appreciation that our headquarters leadership has for longtime loyal ministers and church members. They are not asking us to do things we are not capable of and/or gifted to do. How then can we help? While we may not have the energy or talent to be a candidate to plant a church, can we identify and encourage others in our congregation who might have these skills and desires? If we find such an individual, there are resources available from the denomination to assist us in mentoring them. If we do not have an individual in our congregation, can we help support the training and mentoring of someone from another congregation?

If your church is blessed with a few extra dollars that are looking for a good cause, I am sure Dan Rogers could help you find a match. Along these same lines, can we give a helping hand to our Generations ministry? In particular, the summer camps and other activities that are geared

toward our young adults and teens. I think all of us can quickly see that if we don't retain and use our young people, they will be lost to us in time, and our denomination will simply grow old and fade away!

Last, we can all be prayer partners, that God will bless our efforts to find and train new leaders. God is not trying to burst old wineskins, but he is in the business of asking the old wineskins to help make some new wineskins that are capable of holding the new wine of church plants and multiplication. Surely all of us can look carefully at our congregations and in whatever we can, help with this new direction that has promise of a bright future.

Churches Host Community Picnic

Batavia (NY) Christian Fellowship (BCF) of the WCG joined with the First Wesleyan Church of Batavia, Eastern Hills First Wesleyan Church and the Heart of Christ Fellowship to host an interdenominational worship service and church family community picnic on Sunday, July 22.

Pastor Charlie Pero of the First Wesleyan Church offered everyone a warm welcome and gave the opening prayer. Pastor Charlie Piscitello of the BCF delivered the sermon, encouraging listeners to live their lives wholeheartedly for Christ. Pastor David Appleton of the Heart of Christ Fellowship operated the sound system and gave the offertory prayer.



Five pastors: Paul Markell, Charlie Pero, Charlie Piscitello, David Appleton and Henry Pokrywa.

Following the worship service, folks enjoyed a good old-fashioned church picnic. Games for folks of all ages included water balloons, horseshoes, and bocce ball, with lively conversation and warm Christian fellowship making the day a wonderful success! —*Judi Piscitello*



Reconciliation Service: "Let the Walls Fall Down"

Two very different churches met in a blocked-off street in Tipp City, OH, on June 10 for a special Reconciliation Service. CrossRoads Christian Fellowship, a predominately white congregation, and the Temple of Praise, a predominately black congregation, met together and praised God in words and songs. There were 140 in attendance, including George Lovett, Tipp City mayor.

CrossRoads has held a Reconciliation service each year for the last six years, but this is the first service shared with another church. Marjorie Pirtle said, "We don't want to wait another year to get together again." Lay members voiced the same sentiments. The service ended with communion. —*Levada Bibbs*

Family Reunion in Anniston, AL

The former Anniston, AL, WCG church had a "Family reunion" on June 23. It was a potluck social, which allowed the attendees time to eat and to enjoy renewing friendships. There were over 70 in attendance, including four former pastors. The ones who trav-

eled the farthest were Gilbert and Mary Nell Flournoy, from Leesburg, FL. The oldest attendee was Emma Haynes, 95, and the youngest was Autumn Owens, 4 months old.

Bob Miller, WCG pastor in Birmingham, AL, had people sign up for information about having a local Bible study. Several asked if we could have another reunion. —*Don Johnson*

Vacation Bible School in Ohio

Edgehill Community Church in Cleveland Heights, OH, hosted Vacation Bible School for 22 children ages 3-14, in the evenings of July 16-20. Children were divided into two groups and experienced a "Quest for Truth." Each night the older students were used to help the younger ones through a seven-site activity rotation. During the activity at each site, the children took down clues to discover the truth about Jesus for that night.

This is our fourth year in providing the VBS program. The church found dinner before class to be a big help to busy parents who are getting off work. This year we added a fifth night and provided transportation. We are looking forward to adding a teen section next year.

Edgehill Church is grateful for the 12 adult members who volunteered, pouring their time, heart and passion into making this a memorable experience for the kids. —*David Kaiser*

Wisconsin Dells Fall Fellowship Retreat Sept. 27-30

This year the theme is "The Journey," with special workshops on many topics. Come Celebrate Christ at the Kalahari Resort, featuring the world's largest indoor water park! For details, see www.wcg.org/events or phone Doug Johannsen at 763-576-1086.



Births

Elisa Geffroy, May 8, first daughter and second child of Emmanuel and Jamie (Logrono) Geffroy, of Allen, TX.

Luke David Goddard, June 28, first child of Mark David and Daretta Roller Goddard, of Rancho Santa Margarita, CA.

Ashlee Delaney Myers, June 21, first child of Troy and Arlen (Orogo) Myers of Glendale, CA.*

Madison Lea Newsom, May 1, first child of James and Tonya (Brady) Newsom of Brownsboro, TX.

Olivia Rose Quade, May 7, third daughter of David and Laura (Zager) Quade of Tampa, FL.*

Elder ordinations

- Rolando Alivio, Masbate, Philippines
- Brian Barnes, Invercargil, New Zealand
- Jorge Cruz, Santa Fe Springs, CA
- Jonathan Martinez, Lancaster, CA
- Francis Novak, Mt. Pleasant, PA
- Celestine Olive, Pasadena, CA
- Johan Retief, Riviera, South Africa
- Linda Smith, Frederick-Chewsville, MD
- Bruce Turner, Denver (South), CO
- Gary Weldon, Tipp City, OH
- Annette Winston, Opelika, AL

Graduations

Ted Johnston, national director of Generations Ministries, graduated on May 12 from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL. Ted was awarded the Masters of Arts degree in Christian Studies, Summa Cum Laude. He also has a Master of Arts degree in Liberal Studies (Psychology) from Regis University in Denver, where he studied family ministry and counseling.

Andrea Sodaro, of York, PA, graduated Summa Cum Laude from West Chester University with a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences.

Obituaries

Kenneth Elliott, 37, died on June 7 of a massive heart attack. He was the son of Pam Elliott (of the Santa Barbara/Ventura, CA, congregations) and Bill Elliott. He is survived by his son Jamisen, his older brother Wendell and his parents. You may reach his parents at elliottww@msn.com or 429 Marianne Dr., Grand Junction, CO 81504. Donations may be made out "For the benefit of Jamisen Elliott" and mailed to Pam Elliott for deposit into a trust account.

Mary Joseph, 105, died on May 5. Born Oct. 5, 1901, in Guyana, Mary came to live in Canada with her husband in 1965. She had nine children, had twins twice, and was the grandmother of 14, the great-grandmother of 14 and the great-great-grandmother of 12. Only four of her children remain alive. Her husband pre-deceased her in 1991. She was baptized in 1973 and stopped attending church services only the last two winters due to her health. Her love of God and his word and her commitment to her family and church is part of the legacy she leaves.*

Else (Schloetel) Kuhar died on March 15, one day after her 68th birthday, in Vienna, Austria, after a one-year battle with cancer. Else became the first native German to attend Ambassador College in Bricket Wood, England, and in Pasadena, CA. When Else died, her face beamed a smile of happiness, an unforgettable experience for those who saw her. Else leaves behind her husband Gerhard, daughter Manuela-Evelyn and sister Metta.

Gladys Roberts, 83, of Canton, OH, died July 3, only 18 days after her husband (see below). She loved working outside the home and caring for people; her hobbies were crossword puzzles and shopping. She and her husband were members for 23 years. Her son, Dean (Akida), a missionary pastor in South Africa; sister, Ella Mae Daily; four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren; daughter-in-law, Joyce Kumasi; and many others survive her.

Robert J. Roberts, 85, of Canton, OH, died on June 15. He was a member since 1984. Bob was a veteran of the U.S. Army in World War II and worked for the U.S. Postal Service for 32 years. He was a very devoted husband

to his wife, who suffered with Alzheimer's. Survivors include his son Dean (Akida), brother, Douglas, granddaughter, Keyatta Green, daughter-in-law, Joyce Kumasi, and three great-grandchildren.

Dottie Marie (Preston) Skidmore, 68, of Cincinnati, OH, died July 16 of complications from surgery. She was a member of Christ Community Church, beloved wife of Russell A. Skidmore, devoted mother to Vickie and Chuck Cain, Terry and Jim Collett, Beverly and Stephen Hill, loving grandmother to Russell (Billy) Skidmore, Imogene Buhl, Jeremy, James, and Jacob Collett, Nathan Cain, Olivia and Elise Hill, and great-grandmother to Carlieann Harris, Alexis and Grace Braun.

William Kirby Stough, 95, of St. Clair, MO, died on July 13. He married Delores Duffy in 1935, and they had two children. He married Betty Ellen Horn on Nov. 28, 1981. He is survived by his wife Betty, a son, William Hugh Stough and wife, Scarlett; a daughter, Shirley Ann McManus and husband, Maurice; a sister, Era Claire Collins and husband, James; three grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, three brothers and one sister.

William served in the U.S. Navy from 1931 until 1935. He was baptized in 1960 and began to work on the Ambassador campus in 1964 as an estimator and project manager, until 1975. He moved to St. Clair, MO, and in 1989 was ordained an elder in the St. Louis congregation.*