

SPECIAL ISSUE

TIDINGS

Volume 83, Number 7, July-August 2020

THE TRUTH AROUND THE WORLD

Celebrating Success and Overcoming Obstacles



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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY:
ROBERT HARRIS (RICHMOND, VA)

Location: Andes Mountains, Peru

"While traveling with a Meal a Day team in South America, we came upon a young boy shepherding his family's flock."

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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PREACHING AROUND THE WORLD

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The gap between the tremendous preaching successes in Africa and India and the obstacles to growth we face in traditional areas is astounding.

We need to rejoice in the former and overcome the latter. The Tidings will do all we can to encourage both. We'll be eager to provide an ongoing forum for continued discussion and reporting of progress.

This special issue on "*Preaching Around the World*" follows these principles. We hope it provokes celebration over the growth where it is happening and correction of the problems inhibiting growth in the other areas. The articles describe preaching efforts across the globe.

In "*The Shape of Things to Come*," **Bro. Jeff Gelineau** reviews the dramatic changes that are occurring in our community. The future will not look like the past. We must embrace change.

Bros. Tim Galbraith and Tej Chippada

describe preaching efforts in India. Bro. Tim writes about the importance God places on people hearing the gospel in their mother tongue. "Thoughts, feelings, and actions must all be involved in the conversion process, and hearing the gospel in the language heard at your mother's knee is hugely important to help this process." Bro. Tej tells the story of the impact the gospel has had on his life: "I was able to identify with the Christadelphians much better because they seemed more like me and I could see how they lived out their beliefs... Another thing I appreciated about the Christadelphian beliefs was that it was free from superstition and strict rules... I learned that the teachings of Christ are more powerful than any barriers such as culture, caste, age, language, or social status."

Bro. Steven Cox reviews the recent mission work in the UK's Iranian émigré community. Among other things, he highlights how they adapted the preaching of the gospel to the needs of this situation: "The redirection of resources in the UK from evening lectures into activities like the hostel classes is more than just a change of venue and addition of a translator; it is also a change in methods, and a change in message." He also describes the positive impact these efforts are having on UK brothers and sisters: "If we can work out what is saving fundamental doctrine and what is cultural baggage it should be good for the indigenous English Christadelphians too. If we can be re-converted to the core doctrines about Jesus, then that should make us want to put our house in order, to make Christadelphians again the clear and attractive first choice for those who do not see Jesus as a pre-existent being."

Bro. Matthew Blewett, Matt Bilello, and Dave Jennings describe developments in Africa. Bro. Matthew recalls an episode in 2005 in which a wise brother issued a challenge for change: "If you were in my company, I would fire all of you. Each year you come back here and report the same poor results using the same methods." They embraced the challenge. They established a "cast your net on the other side" philosophy. "The first principle... was Touch and Teach. As a country where poverty and inequality are amongst the highest in the world, we could no longer teach without manifesting the message of our teaching through touching. The more we could integrate these elements of practice and theory, the more we

could emulate the method of our Lord in the gospels."

Bro. Matt Bilello summarizes lessons learned from his time as a missionary in South Africa. After listing practical Do's and Don'ts, he writes, "Doing preaching work is a highly rewarding experience, one that I recommend highly without reservation." On the other hand, he also writes, "It is not one that should be entered into lightly."

Bro. Dave Jennings writes about the amazing growth of the gospel in Malawi and Mozambique: "Combining the total population of Malawi and Mozambique, there are about 48 million residents. Of that, over 20,000 are Christadelphian brothers and sisters!"

Bro. Clive Drepaup reviews the history of preaching efforts in the Caribbean and Panama. The story involves many inter-woven themes, some headwinds and some tailwinds. "The fact that the local populace is ever willing to listen to the gospel tips the scale in favor of seizing the opportunities against being overwhelmed by the challenges."

Sis. Ethel Archard describes the challenges facing African refugees who come to North America. She concludes: "Every refugee has unique needs, and these may vary depending on their home country. Whether newly arrived refugees learned the Truth in Africa, Iran, Pakistan, or another country, they may underestimate the challenges they will face. On the other hand, local brothers and sisters may underestimate the opportunities they bring."

Bro. Dave Jennings writes about the history of preaching in southern California and especially their experiences putting on the “Learn to Read the Bible Effectively” seminar. He summarizes the impact: “There is a huge benefit to individuals and ecclesias involved in the public seminars. It sharpens our message, builds faith, and accelerates spiritual growth. It helps us to avoid isolation from the public, which is a grave danger to ecclesias... It reminds us just how beautiful and inspiring the Truth is.”

deliberately implement strategic plans to benefit our spiritual health.”

Bro. Joe Hill closes the issue with his article, “*Learning from Each Other*.” He identifies issues that can inhibit growth of the gospel by citing the results of five different surveys, two by Christadelphians and three by non-Christadelphians. Although there are no easy fixes, he recommends we learn from the stories shared in this special issue. Applying these lessons, he offers three simple, back-to-basics ideas that can help us improve our preaching of the gospel: (a) Focusing of the gospel;

Change is hard for institutions.

It’s not easy to move the fixed habits and ideas of a group. But change happens, whether we like it or not. We can choose to stick with the evolutionary type of change, the one universally associated with decline. Or we can control the change and deliberately implement strategic plans to benefit our spiritual health.

Sis. Melinda and Bro. Kevin Flatley provide a book review of the short but insightful book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, by Thom Rainer. The book’s lessons are a warning to us. Sis. Melinda and Bro. Kevin summarize one of the key issues: “Change is hard for institutions. It’s not easy to move the fixed habits and ideas of a group. But change happens, whether we like it or not. We can choose to stick with the evolutionary type of change, the one universally associated with decline. Or we can control the change and

(b) Balancing external and internal needs; (c) Changing lives.

Change is happening. We either adapt or die. Let us do everything we can to improve our planting and watering of the gospel seed, knowing it is our Heavenly Father Who gives the increase.

*John Bilello (Ann Arbor, MI)
and Joe Hill (Austin Leander, TX),
Guest Editors*



THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

One out of every four Christadelphians live in Mozambique.
15% of all Christadelphians live in Malawi.

When you read those two statements above, what thoughts come to mind?

For some people this might be information that they are very familiar with, but for the majority of brethren in North America I think those two statements will be quite startling. Those of us who live in North America typically enjoy pleasant living conditions and easy ecclesial lives. Many don't travel much outside of our country and do not know the changes that have been occurring in our community over the past 25 years.

Historical Reference

The Christadelphians began in the United States and Canada, flourished in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand and have recently grown dramatically in Africa and Asia. Getting accurate numbers for our community is quite difficult, as there has not been an organized worldwide census. Bro. Peter Hemingray has done extensive historical research, and although his results are much more detailed than this, and contain numerous different fellowships, I will attempt to summarize the numbers as follows:

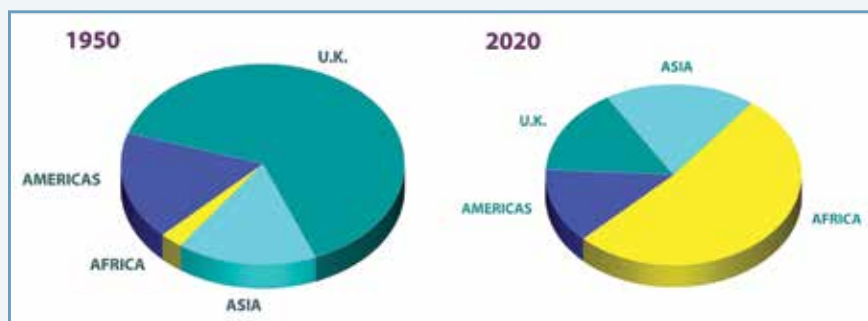
Year	USA	Canada	Latin America	UK	Europe	Asia Pacific	Africa	TOTAL
1850	100	50	0	0	0	0	0	150
1900	1,500	500	300	5,500	100	1,250	300	9,450
1950	3,000	1,000	450	18,000	100	4,500	750	27,800
2000	4,250	2,250	800	10,000	600	9,000	4,500	31,400
2020	4,500	2,500	700	8,000	900	11,000	30,000	57,600

During our lifetime, a major change has occurred in the worldwide brotherhood. Around 1950, the UK reached its peak at about 18,000 Christadelphians. There were ecclesias with 2,000 members! This active group of believers in the UK, Australia and North America became serious about sharing the faith around the world.

Sharing Our Faith

The Truth has been actively received in Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Asia. The growth in these areas has been quite dramatic. Africa saw initial response in South Africa, Kenya, and then Malawi, and there has been significant growth in Mozambique in the past few years. India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines have grown quite a bit, as well.

The change is well represented by comparing these two pie charts:



What an exciting time for us to live in! To see the Truth so readily accepted in so many places, and to experience growth like we haven't seen for decades! It's a new reality that has arrived and probably will not change again soon. Brothers and sisters that speak English are now in the minority. There are more Christadelphians in developing

countries than there are in developed nations. Doesn't this make you think of Jesus' parting words?

"And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Mark 16:15-16 ESV)

Bible Missions

This global change has been driven by the efforts of the Bible Missions. The CBM in the UK divided up the responsibility in the 1960s to the ACBM in the Asia-Pacific and the CBMA/CBMC in the Americas.

The blessings that we have received from the Lord in these mission areas are something for which we are very thankful. Literally tens of thousands of baptized brothers and sisters spread around the globe that weren't here 25 years ago.

While developed countries like the United States only have about 14 Christadelphians for every 1,000,000 citizens, a country like Malawi on the east coast of Africa has 600 Christadelphians for every 1,000,000 citizens. Imagine the opportunities that a community like this presents!



The challenges are great

Asia-Pacific is a great example of the challenges ahead. We are thrilled to welcome 4,000 new brothers and sisters in this area. That seems like a lot until you stop and think about the size of the population in that area! Well over 4 BILLION people live in the Asia-Pacific region. Almost 2/3 of the world's population lives there. There are 250 cities in the Asia-Pacific region that have over 1,000,000 people in them. There are Christadelphians in only 35 of those cities. That leaves over 200 major cities where there isn't even a single brother or sister!

Many of our brethren live at a very low economic status, and their living conditions are quite poor. Mozambique, the country with the most Christadelphians in the world, recently experienced terrible cyclones that wreaked havoc on their country. Over 500 ecclesial halls were damaged in Mozambique during these storms. **500!** I don't think that there are that many ecclesial halls in all of the US and Canada combined. Imagine them all being damaged at the same time!

Some countries with Christadelphians are opposed to Christianity and our

brethren live under fear of political persecution. For that reason, we must remain careful to not expose them to scrutiny by the government.

You can help

Worldwide, our community spends about \$3,000,000 on sharing our faith through mission work, and about \$5,000,000 helping to care for the needs of brothers and sisters and those in extreme poverty. Those of us who have been blessed with plenty can give of our increase. North America contains 34% of the world's wealth and only 5% of the world's population. Mission work is limited by our funds and human resources, not the lack of opportunities. The financial need to help feed, house, properly clothe and care for those in poor areas far outstrips the amount that we are giving.

Change

Our community is changing. Things in the future will not look like they did in the past. It is a blessing and joy that the glorious message of our Lord's salvation is being received so eagerly in places that we have never been to before. Let us embrace this change.

Jeff Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA)



OUR GOD AT WORK IN SOUTH ASIA

A blast of hot, odor-laden air assailed me as I stood at the top of the stairs on the Air India jumbo jet at Mumbai's airport in April 1976.

It was the first time I had left the shores of Australia, and the scenes and sounds and smells of my first 24 hours in India were amazing, an incredible contrast to the leafy quiet pathways of Parkville, Melbourne, where I lived and worked. After a long sleep, the shock of those first hours vanished, and I soaked up the vibrancy, the color, the fascination that is India. I was there partly as a tourist, partly as a guest of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, and of the Guild of Service, Madras (now Chennai), and partly as a preacher of the gospel to readers of literature sent out by GPL — Gospel Publicity League (Sydney).

This preaching of the Bible message in India, by a Christadelphian brother, was not happening for the first time

in the world's modern history. Over 100 years before Bro. Daniel Brown, a brother of the hymn writer Bro. David Brown, writer of many hymns in the Christadelphian Hymn Book, was captain of a merchant ship plying the Ganges River in India in the 1860s. He founded an ecclesia at that time in Calcutta, the remnants of which continued for 90 years. This is the same Bro. Brown, at the time a seeker of truth, who funded the second printing of *Christendom Astray* by Robert Roberts. (See *My Ways and My Days* — R. Roberts). Two world wars and divisions within the Christadelphian community led to the isolation of the Calcutta and Madras Ecclesias, and those in isolation in Burma. The last surviving Christadelphian sister from those earlier days in India, slept in the Lord 13 years before the work began again in 1976.

Although the GPL had over one 150 readers of their publications in India at that time, this first trip was to focus on two readers in the state of Andhra

Pradesh — one in the city of Hyderabad and one in the village of Kadium, 180 miles to the east. Those two visits led to the giving of five Bible classes, with over 100 people hearing the Word. Now over 40 years later, Kadium and Hyderabad continue as the two largest ecclesias in India. I was not used to such an eager interest in the word of God. Notes were taken, questions asked, and requests were made for more classes than my schedule would allow. If this was the interest for just following up two names, surely I needed to plan for a much longer return trip to follow the other 150 names on the GPL list! Besides, a very interested and attractive young lady, named Sarah, had attended the Bible Class in Hyderabad.

As soon as possible I took advantage of long service leave and due leave entitlements, and I returned to India for five months in 1978. Sitting in a small guest house in Madras, I had only written to seventy of those on my mailing list (no photocopying in India in those days), when I was swamped with enough replies to keep me busy for the available time. The next 4 months involved 4,300 miles of train travel and an average of two classes a day through the five most southern states of India and one in the north. The readiness of people to sit and listen seemed to have no limit. Initially, the thought in the minds of many group leaders was that as a foreigner I had come with funds to appoint representatives for my Mission. But when I explained that I was just there as an individual offering Bible teaching, not money, the reply was nearly always — “Fine, let us have a Bible meeting then.” Until this time,

my life plan was to become financially independent by my late thirties and thus be in a position to do full-time Bible teaching, preaching, etc. But why should I expect God to bend to my planning? It was clear India needed the gospel teaching now, and I should step out in faith, trusting God’s call, timing and planning rather than my own. His provision of a faithful partner from India to help me in this work made the decision clear.

Thus, Sarah and I settled in Hyderabad, India in late March 1979, later starting a printing and publishing business to support ourselves while doing the preaching work with the assistance of the ACBM. As India had earlier been under CBM purview, the initial years were a time of joint ACBM/CBM co-operation. However, since I was from Victoria, Australia, and had been on the local ACBM committee, the Victorian Regional Committee of the ACBM soon took on the planning and funding. Instruction was initially all in English as, (a) I knew no other language, (b) India has 87 official languages, and (c) I wanted the initial converts to have access to the vast array of Bible study helps that were available in English. This provided a strong local launching pad from which brothers and sisters could take the message to their own languages. When we returned to Australia for a few weeks in 1981, there were seven brothers and sisters in three locations, 21 when we made another trip to Australia in 1984, and 63 by the time of our third vacation in 1988.

With this base representing seven different language groups, the work was able to spread more easily through

the Indian languages, and the work of the local brothers and sisters. Today we have over 80 ecclesias with more than 2,000 members, and of those only three use any English in their services — the languages being primarily Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali.

With many more preaching opportunities in the South, Bangalore was obviously a suitable center, with a pleasant climate, so when Bro. Ray and Sis. Barbara Allanson and children from New Zealand moved to India to help with the work in the early eighties, they established a base there that became a center for the work for over twenty years. Many Mission fieldworkers from various places have been based there, and although the ACBM office closed there a number of years ago, the Bangalore property still provides a spacious residence for Mission fieldworkers and an ecclesial hall for the Bangalore Ecclesia.

Over the past 40 years of Christadelphian presence in India, there have been many wonderful examples of faithfulness among the brothers and sisters in different areas. On one occasion a village ecclesia that was growing strongly, and owned a small hall for worship, aroused the jealousies of some other Christians. With the support of some non-Christians, they attempted to physically take over the hall, and charged our members with having physically attacked them, resulting in the arrest of some of our members and causing others to flee elsewhere. When the matter was settled, and a fine paid on behalf of our members, they were released, but the hall key remained with the police. (It was returned to our members about

a year later.) The ecclesia continued to meet under a tree each week, but decided also to hold a special gathering every Tuesday evening at which, in addition to Bible readings, they would particularly pray for those who had persecuted them. After six months the key people who had instigated the trouble came to them and said: “We have been seeing your reaction to this trouble for the past six months, and realize you have a faith in God that we do not have. Would you please teach us, so we too may share this faith?” To this our brethren readily agreed, and a few months later the group requested baptism, attended a Bible Truth Camp at Moinabad and were baptized there. How often actions speak louder than words!

Another positive result from this incident was that, as in the days of the apostles, *“They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.”* (Acts 8:4). In their new locations, three families continued their faithful witnessing. As a result of this preaching work done by the families who fled the village, two new ecclesias developed and continue years later as vibrant, growing ecclesias. God at work may bring hardship and pain, but that can bring glory to God, a glory that those who show such faithfulness will one day share.

In a similar incident in a different village, jealousies led to an attack on our brothers and sisters. A recent young convert fled the scene, and we had no news of him for nearly nine years. Then quite unexpectedly he contacted us to ask our assistance; he had been preaching for the past nine years in the village of a relative to which he had fled, and there were now six people seeking

baptism. He felt too embarrassed to contact us earlier because of his fleeing on the day of the trouble. We reassured him and welcomed him, of course, with many hugs, and arranged a Bible Truth Camp in his village and the six had all been well prepared and were baptized. One of those baptized became his wife and a very faithful family they are. *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).*

The countries bordering India: Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and more recently Myanmar and Afghanistan, all have a Christadelphian presence, usually arising from new

we appear to keep a low profile, are allowed to worship in private. Some of our members who actively preached the gospel have faced persecution and life threats, and have either been resettled in other countries by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or are currently refugees or asylum seekers registered with the United Nations.

As one seeks to follow the Lord Jesus, one constantly becomes aware of the general needs of those in society around you, particularly in a country like India. Our primary focus has been to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, but when requests come from people genuinely in need, I found the response — “Sorry, we

Our primary focus has been to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, but when requests come from people genuinely in need, I found the response — “Sorry, we cannot help you” — was not an honest one. We could help if we really cared and made the effort.

initiatives in conjunction with the work in India, with cultural and language similarities being major factors in that regard. The growth in Pakistan has been particularly rapid since the first baptisms there in 2002. We now have over 1,200 brothers and sisters in more than 20 ecclesias. Urdu being a common language for most in Pakistan, has made our task somewhat easier here. In addition to regular ecclesial meetings, three Bible Schools and two CYC Camps each year help provide a spiritual focus. We are a registered religious Trust here, and provided

cannot help you” — was not an honest one. We could help if we really cared and made the effort. And so, in 1976, with the co-operation of a retired medical superintendent, we began the Supplementary Nutrition Program, providing natural ingredients, for a locally prepared supplementary nutrition drink three times a week, for children in vulnerable areas. This has continued to this day for around 2,400 children at any one time. It has been of great assistance to children generally, to Sunday School children, and to the brothers and sisters involved in

running it. Later the needs of poor and abandoned children were addressed through the Moinabad Homes project, and many children who grew up there are driving forces within ecclesias in India and abroad. Moreover, the needs of the homeless suffering from Hanson's Disease (Leprosy) on the streets of Hyderabad have been addressed in ongoing treatment programs, currently covering medical needs of over 250 patients in our street clinics or residential center. The educational and care needs of their children then became a priority, and so Shunem Home was born, providing also a facility for the care of aged brothers and sisters and other aged in need of care. Today there are 128 children and about 20 elderly persons under Shunem's care. Later, Nithsdale School was established to provide quality education for these children.

An early program in Hyderabad was VIPSIB (Visually Impaired Persons Services and Information Bureau). Some years later this moved to Bangalore and operates today as the Bartimaeus Center. The local brothers and sisters have been active in all these programs, and in initiating and running similar programs – "Faith Home" and "Christadelphian Compassion India" at Kadium, "Elvira Home" at Tampatapalle, "Edith Home" near Madurai, "Aadharana Home" at Hyderabad, and many others. All these have been a wonderful adjunct to our preaching work as we seek to show the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to a troubled world.

On the day of Pentecost it is recorded; *"...how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"*(Acts

2:8). There would have been one or two common languages that could have been used, but the vast array of languages mentioned clearly indicates the importance God gives to people hearing the gospel in their mother tongue, the language of their heart. Thoughts, feelings and actions must all be involved in the conversion process, and hearing the gospel in the language heard at your mother's knee is hugely important to help this process. Because they are in cosmopolitan cities both the Hyderabad and Bangalore Ecclesias still use a lot of English in their services, but in all other ecclesias the preaching, the worship, Bible study, singing, etc., is done in the mother tongue. Incorporation of activities using the mother tongue is important in any ecclesia worldwide, where there is any member who grew up with a language other than English.

Gradually the bubbles that persisted to the seventies and eighties that the "West is wonderful." and "Whites have all the answers." have burst, and workers in India, and in many other parts of the developing world, realize it is not in man to direct his own steps (Jer 10:23). This is the Lord's work, not ours, and so as we await the coming of Christ, we are confident that as our brothers and sisters continue to sow and water, our Lord will give the increase for His glory, not ours.

*Tim Galbraith
(Hyderabad, India)*



THE EFFECT OF MISSIONARY WORK IN INDIA ON MY LIFE

Have you ever wondered what effect you would have on someone's life if you did missionary work? This is the story of how God used missionaries in India to affect my life and bring me into Christ's family.

My Background

Growing up in India, our family (father, mother and two younger brothers) were Hindus. When I was around age nine, our family experienced some problems and my dad had to take care of my brothers and me all by himself. He was looking for some help to raise us and he found a Christian boarding school that accepted us. After that, for several years, we moved from boarding school to boarding school, each of which belonged to various Christian denominations. We were exposed to many different Christian beliefs and teachings.

When I was about 13 years old, I came out of boarding school and stayed with my dad. By that time my dad had been introduced to Christadelphians, and I started tagging along to the meetings and Sunday School. I am thankful to my dad for this exposure. Unexpectedly,

I was attracted to Christadelphian doctrine because it was so different from other denominations, which seemed to esteem the pastor as a “holy father” figure and follow mindless rules. I was able to relate to Christadelphians much better because they seemed more like me and I could see how they lived out their beliefs. Uncle Tim (Galbraith) and his family were the biggest examples to me in this way. I was very privileged to be able to go to Sunday School and CYC. Slowly I increased my knowledge of first principles from the Bible, which seemed like a breath of fresh air. Eventually I got baptized in 2001.

The Effect of Missionary Work

During school holidays in my college years, I traveled with Christadelphian missionaries to some of the remote villages in India, as an interpreter. This gave me firsthand experience of the

missionary life and as a bonus I grew in my knowledge and understanding of Bible truth. One thing that made a big impression on me was, as I translated, I had to explain what the missionaries were teaching to the audience using relevant examples and idioms they would understand. The role of interpreter gave me the unique experience of both hearing the missionaries' ideas, and seeing the struggles and issues people were going

many decades. Although I gained immeasurably from Uncle Tim's teaching, which was powerful and extremely relevant, I gained even more from observing how he lived his life. From watching his family I could directly see them living the Truth and setting an example. They were different from pastors in other churches who lacked transparency. Within the ecclesia, I would see the Galbraith family being very down to earth and

Although I gained immeasurably from Uncle Tim's teaching, which was powerful and extremely relevant, I gained even more from observing how he lived his life. From watching his family I could directly see them living the truth and setting an example. They were different from pastors in other churches who lacked transparency.

through in their daily lives and how their interest in God's word could help them practically. Even though they were fellow Indians, their challenges were more difficult than mine and they still wanted to serve God. I was very inspired by many missionaries who came to India to work hard and preach and by the sacrifices made by the people who come and listened. Even though many contacts relied heavily on their low-income jobs to survive, they would still take time away to listen to the truth about the Bible. It is important to note even a supporting role (as an interpreter, or someone who is not the main teacher) can be very valuable in mission work.

The other example of missionary life came from Uncle Tim, who moved to India from Australia and had been living and preaching there for

living the principles from the Bible in their everyday life. There was a perfect harmony between work, home and ecclesial life. This was unique and really inspired me. Traveling and teaching as a missionary is one way to preach the truth. But living among a group of people (no matter where that is), it is possible to be a missionary just by being an example of what you believe. A quality I saw in Uncle Tim's family was kindness and compassion, without judgment. They were constantly giving to others and showed me a new kind of Christianity, different from the other Christian groups I had seen.

Another thing I appreciated about Christadelphian beliefs was that it was free from superstition and strict rules. Instead, I understood a person would want to follow Christ out of gratitude and appreciation for what he has

done. Following Christ is a response to Christ's love and not a lifelong attempt to earn salvation by following a set of rules. This was evident from the fact that many Christadelphian missionaries do this work not as some obligation or a burden, but because they want to willingly share the wonderful gospel to others. I am always thankful for gaining this knowledge and understanding.

Lessons from Missionary Work

From my exposure to the Truth through missionaries, I learned that the teachings of Christ are more powerful than any barriers such as culture, caste, age, language or social status. People may follow Christ in their own cultural contexts, but what matters is that they respond to the Truth and follow Christ.

There are many different personalities and styles. But when it came to the Truth, all of the missionaries had a special love for God and a strong desire to go through any trouble to teach it to others.

When you experience missionary work, there are many benefits. Some of these include, being able to be more flexible in your thinking, gaining courage to take action, teaching without much time to prepare, improvising as needed and working as a team.

When I saw people coming to listen to missionaries teach the Truth, and respond by getting baptized, it was very rewarding and

inspiring. A lot of people who came to listen to missionaries had simple faith. Some were illiterate and therefore not able to study the Bible as much as those who can read, but they had faith and trusted in God, jumping in with both feet, ready for Christ's redemption.

After reading how missionary work has affected my life, I hope you are inspired to consider doing it, or reflect on the work you have done. Missionary work is valuable, even if it is in your hometown, and through you, God can completely change someone's life. The work you do may seem very tiny and insignificant, but you are giving a precious and eternal gift to the receiving person. It is like sowing a mustard seed which, to the recipient, can turn into an enormous tree.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." (Matt 13:31-32 NKJV).

Tej Chippada (Ann Arbor, Michigan)





MISSION WORK IN THE IRANIAN ÉMIGRÉ COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Christianity in Iran from Acts 2 to the Arab Conquest

The first Jewish converts to Christianity in Iran were those “Parthians and Medes and Elamites” who returned home to Ctesiphon, Adiabene, and other Jewish centers to break away from synagogues and found churches. There is little evidence of sustained persecution by Zoroastrians, and after 431 AD, when the Nestorian churches in the Sasanian Empire split with Rome, refusing to accept Mary as “Mother of God,” Christianity became an established and tolerated religion in Persia. While Christians mainly used Aramaic, they also produced the first Bible translations into Middle Persian. Of these pre-Islamic Persian translations only a few pages of Psalms survive, discovered in a Silk Road Monastery in 1905.¹

The Arab conquest of Iran in 651 AD ended more than 400 years of the Sassanian administrative empire and the previous state religion, Zoroastrianism, was violently suppressed by the Muslim conquerors. Christians fared better under Arab rule, but gradually came to be regarded as a minority ethnic group in Iran rather than a religion into which people could freely convert. Nevertheless, this history is still important today since many, if not most, Iranians are aware that Christianity has a longer history in Iran than Islam.

Current Christian revival in Iran

The revival of Christianity in Iran and the rapid growth of house churches have a number of causes, but most writers pinpoint growing social discontent during the two presidencies

of Ahmadinejad (2005-2012), and the growth of access by Virtual Private Network (VPN) to western Iranian Christian TV channels and social media apps as significant factors.^{2,3}

The growth of house churches in Iran, and the frequent raids and jailing of leaders, is an important part of the reason why so many Iranians attempt asylum overseas. Christianity tends to spread cautiously only among people who have long-standing relationships, friends from primary school rather than university, cousins rather than colleagues. Those attracted are often, not surprisingly, those who are already disaffected with Islam and at odds with the system.

Asylum system in Europe

To understand how the Christadelphian Auxiliary Lecturing Society (CALS) in the United Kingdom (UK) ended up with 1,800 Iranian Bible students, it helps to understand the refugee road. At the end of this article are some YouTube links which will be more informative than filling a page with text in the *Tidings*. First, most follow a long route through Turkey and the Balkans to the European Union (EU) where it is possible to apply for asylum in any country, but many head to the Calais jungle seeking a route to the UK. This sometimes occurs with good reasons for not applying for asylum in France and Germany, sometimes purely because they know a little English and sometimes due to a large amount of fear and misinformation about EU countries.⁴ Once in the UK, the asylum process starts: (a) Initial accommodation in a large hostel

in London, Birmingham, Derby, Wakefield or Liverpool.⁵ An Iranian migrant tells the story of her wait for an asylum claim to be processed (see reference).⁶ (b) Allocation to smaller houses in inner cities, typically one Iranian sharing with three others such as Africans and Kurds. At this point, the asylum seeker can get a legal-aid lawyer and start preparing for the Home Office interview. (c) The Home Office interview itself. (d) Home Office refusal, leading to a chain of appeals. Or (e) acceptance leading to a five-year refugee visa and work permit.⁷

History of Christadelphian preaching

The first Iranian Christadelphians were baptized in Pakistan. The first baptisms in Iran, with the assistance of Christadelphians from India, took place in 2009 and 2011. In 2012 the Christadelphians in Iran were arrested and visitors from India, being named by the Iranian authorities in the court hearings, were warned to cancel plans for future visits. After their release on bail, some of these escaped from Iran to Turkey and Sri Lanka. From there, after a long process with assistance by the United Nations, Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF), Karolyn Andrews Memorial Fund (KAMF) and the Christadelphian Bible Mission (CBM), they were able to obtain refugee visas for Germany, Canada and the United States.

In Turkey teaching and evangelizing to Iranians both in Iran and Turkey continued and the CBM22 course was translated into Persian. Subsequently, ecclesias of refugees formed in Denizli

and Kayseri in Turkey around 2015, and were further supported by the WCF and CBM. The WCF and CBM had already been working together in Turkey with Turkish contacts, but the emphasis shifted to Iranians. There are currently around 100 Iranian Christadelphians in Turkey.

Liverpool

For the first two years of active Persian language preaching in the UK (2016-2017) work was heavily centered in the Liverpool City Ecclesia — a city with three large hostels, but where the ecclesia depended on a handful of core English members commuting from Manchester and London to run translated classes. Liverpool quickly became a majority-Iranian ecclesia by the end of 2017.

Preaching methods of the CBM and CALS

First, the materials — the main courses in use are the CBM22 (as a series of bilingual PowerPoints) and CBM40 (as a large blue book, more suitable for self-study). There is considerable overlap between CBM22 and CBM40 and students usually do either one or the other in class. Following this are the CBM Preparing for Baptism and CBM New Life Courses.

Preaching in the Midlands by the CALS began in April 2018, kick-started by the arrival in the UK of an enthusiastic contact, Mehrdad H., who had been in the camps in Greece with a brother from Liverpool. Three classes a week were immediately set up at the Edgbaston hostel, and over the next months, the teachers followed students when “The Home Office” moved people between accommodation centers. Also,

once people have a right to remain, they move to other cities for family or employment reasons. This meant that a class in one location soon led to classes in other locations. Specifically, hostel classes in Birmingham led to classes at the other major hostels in Derby, Wakefield and London. By March 2019 we had covered all the bases; anywhere the “Home Office” could send an Iranian asylum seeker classes were set-up and running.

This inevitably presented a significant challenge and the need for change. Ecclesias vary in their ability and willingness to respond to these challenges. Many have made adaptations to meeting times and formats and welcomed the opportunity to support the work. Conversely, it is sad at times to observe ecclesial halls that are within walking distance of Iranians continuing with untranslated Sunday evening lectures with no visitors, while local Iranians take an hour’s bus ride to an ecclesia providing Farsi translation.

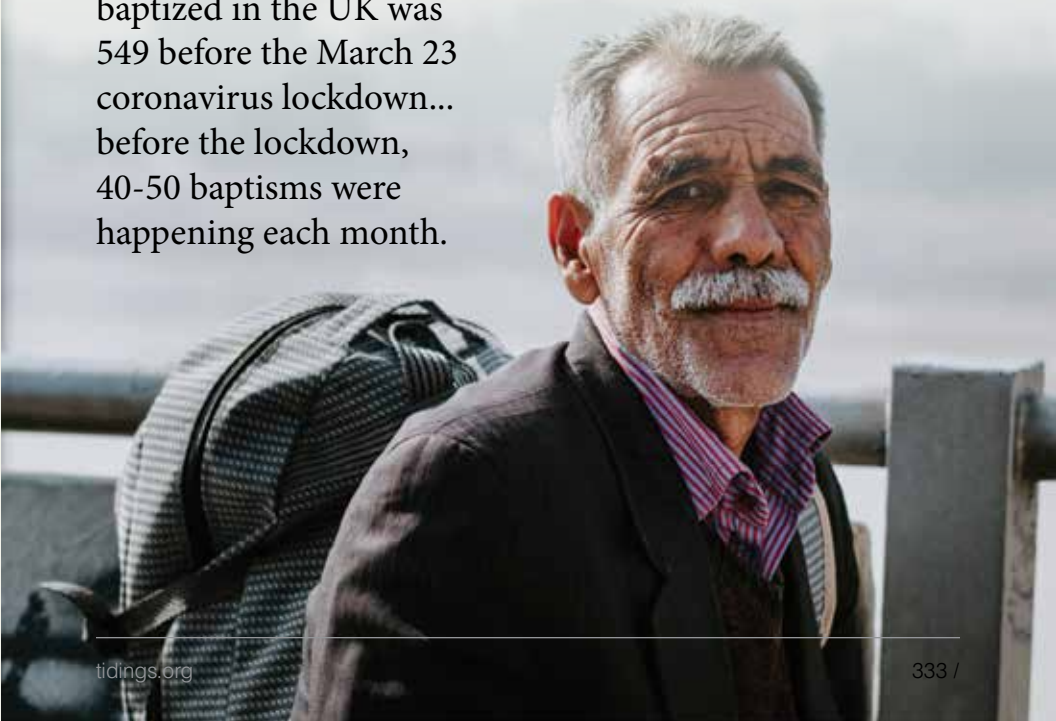
Most ecclesias with Iranians regularly attending could see that, despite the challenges, this was clearly the work of the Lord, and initial concerns about people’s genuineness were overcome. Ecclesias without direct contact tended to be more cautious, or simply occupied with their own members and activities. In terms of winning over and reassuring UK ecclesias, the release of the Sale Ecclesia’s Iranians video in October 2019 was a watershed.⁸ It opened the doors of ecclesias up and down the UK to Persian-translated classes. Suddenly there were ecclesias in the prosperous south offering to find jobs and houses for Iranians with work visas to move south and join them.

What attracts Iranians to Christadelphians?

Hopefully, this article won't be read without accessing and watching the Sale Iranians video. That video answers far better any questions that anyone can have about why Christadelphians attract such a large proportion of Iranians coming to the UK. The doctrine of the Trinity is a big factor. Our preaching leans very heavily on Jesus being the Son of Man, Son of God, not God. Another big factor is the emphasis on study. Iranians like study. Even without the enforced leisure of the Home Office system, Iranians enjoy structured study, and discussion. A very big factor is that the Christadelphians have a UK network that retains people as they undergo the many moves

through the many geographical areas that occur in the UK asylum system. An Iranian Christadelphian student knows that if he or she finds their name on the hostel noticeboard for "displacement" to a house-share at the other end of the UK, they only need to "WhatsApp" a location-pin and Christadelphians from the local ecclesia will be waiting to plug them into the local Persian-translated Bible classes. Also, since we have to show both sides of the gospel, there is help to register with a medical doctor, dentist, etc. This Iranian-Christadelphian network is extremely important, and functions because many of our contacts are constantly engaged in *besharat* (evangelizing) to other Iranians they meet.

The number of Iranians baptized in the UK was 549 before the March 23 coronavirus lockdown... before the lockdown, 40-50 baptisms were happening each month.



Numbers of baptisms

You will still hear some of us saying, “Of course, we don’t count numbers,” but the Acts of the Apostles starts with the author doing exactly that. The redirection of resources in the UK from evening lectures into activities like the hostel classes is more than just a change of venue and addition of a translator; it is also a change in methods and a change in message, although oddly, the heavily first principles-focused message in CBM Persian materials harks back to the very earliest preaching.

The number of Iranians baptized in the UK, most within the last 18 months, was 549 before the March 23 coronavirus lockdown. Also, before the lockdown, by God’s grace 40-50 baptisms were happening each month. It was a big jolt when the Prime Minister specifically mentioned no baptisms in his address. Under these circumstances, we cannot flout the law. But the lockdown has not stopped students from completing pre-baptismal instruction by Zoom classes. If anything, the enforced home study has only sped things up and increased the numbers requesting baptism. We pray that by the time this article is published some logistic solutions following both the letter and the spirit of the social distancing laws will have been found.

Integration problems faced by English members

A term frequently discussed is “integration,” which is sometimes misunderstood by those on the periphery of the changes in the UK to mean Iranians must learn English. For those in ecclesias which are now majority Iranian on Sunday mornings they know that “integration” is a

two-way street. Ecclesias that are majority Iranian are primarily in the Northwest, Northeast and London, but note that in March 2020 Iranians passed the 50% mark among attending 20-40-year-old Christadelphian males nationwide. (This figure discounts estimated non-attending members from the Big Conversation survey of Christadelphians in the UK.) There are inevitably small cultural differences on both sides. One which has been unlearned is the charming, but not always helpful Iranian tradition of *ta’arof* — of saying “no, thank you” to a lift, help with bus fares, phone top-up for online classes, second helpings, etc., when you really want to say “yes”! On the English side, there are similar do’s and don’ts. The big logistic integration issue obviously is language. It isn’t that UK ecclesias are unwilling to provide translation, particularly after Iranian students are baptized and take full part in Sunday meetings, but logistically how do you translate a full Sunday meeting? And how do you do it when Persian-speakers are spread across 90 meetings, but the total number of translators in the country may only be 40 or 50?

What can Christadelphians in North America do to help?

There are many more students in the UK than it is possible to teach. Therefore, help from North American Christadelphians would be very welcome. Now that everyone can videoconference, time zones don’t have to be a problem. Zoom and Skype make it possible for someone in the USA — EST to teach a morning class (Bible or English), which is the afternoon in the UK. At the time of writing a small

group of teachers from the United States and Canada is planning to learn how to get involved.

What can Christadelphians in Britain do better?

What about the Brits themselves? This article is not meant to be a self-congratulatory pat on the back. Some from North America seem to think that the UK is doing amazingly well with both preaching and retention. Words like “miracle,” “revival” and “Pentecost” are in circulation. But that’s only true if your benchmark is the handful (or in some years less than the fingers on a hand) of baptisms of genuinely non-Christadelphian contacts per year for the whole of the UK in recent decades.

Even as regards asylum seeker contacts, many of our frontline workers in this effort don’t really feel that we are doing well enough. Anyone involved in the Iranian effort will have equally great awareness of the numbers (that word again, numbers, souls, people) being missed because of our failures to also provide classes and support for the other nationalities among the asylum seekers — Kurds, Eritreans, Arabs, and

more. We could double the number of classes and still have students wanting more.

What about our community as a whole?

Maybe the Iranians are more of an opportunity for us than we are for them? If we can work out what is saving fundamental doctrine and what is cultural baggage, it should be good for indigenous English Christadelphians too. If we can be re-converted to the core doctrines about Jesus, then that should make us want to put our house in order, to make Christadelphians again the clear and attractive first choice church for those who do not see Jesus as a pre-existent being. We have already seen dividends in a more outward-looking community. We have seen a few baptisms of English people who are encouraged by Iranian baptisms. In some towns, practical needs driven by the arrival of the Iranians have brought ecclesias to work together again after decades of local mistrust.

Steven Cox
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Notes:

- 1 Thomas K.J., *A Restless Search: A History of Persian Translations of the Bible*, American Bible Society, 2015.
- 2 Bradley M., *Too Many to Jail: The Story of Iran’s New Christians*, Elam Ministries, 2014.
- 3 Khosravi S., *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- 4 ITV News 3 Jan 2019, “Iranian migrants ‘willing to risk everything’ to reach UK,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChQP0kAlrds>
- 5 ITV News 13 Nov 2019.
- 6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmbZkNn9DGo>
- 7 *Manchester Guardian*, “How does asylum in the UK work?,” 7 March 2017, but still up to date <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GeSDuMVUXY>



SOUTH AFRICA - CAST YOUR NET ON THE OTHER SIDE

A Challenge for Change

In July 2005, at the Hebron Haven Bible School in South Africa, a wise and experienced brother issued a challenge for change. A few of us had gathered together to share updates on preaching efforts across the country. The efforts and results, which were pretty much the same as the previous year, could be summarized as sparse. As the meeting drew to a close, the brother spoke for the first time, “If you were in my company, I would fire all of you. Each year you come back here and report the same poor results using the same methods.” After overcoming the shock of his stark assessment, we collectively committed to take up his challenge to change.

At the time, the country of South Africa was experiencing a period of significant transformation, underpinned by a

spirit of optimism and new beginnings. Having emerged from a history of segregation under Apartheid over the previous decades, the country was buoyed by a spirit of nationalism and optimism as it prepared to host the world’s largest sporting event, the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2010. The time was ripe for change and progress both in the country and our spiritual community.

Facing Decline

Like in most other countries, preaching efforts in South Africa before 2005 took the form of lectures and seminars presented in existing ecclesial halls, special campaigns at hired venues and correspondence courses sent to students throughout the country. There was little coordination of effort, primarily short-term 12-month planning, and most preaching

was concentrated in the wealthier suburbs near established ecclesial halls. Little emphasis was placed on developing long term relationships with target communities and welfare was typically limited to members of our own community. Consequently, we scarcely reflected the diversity of the South African population or the transformation being experienced throughout the country. To exacerbate the situation, our community was in decline, as many families chose to emigrate to Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The 2010 Campaign is Born

Over the next five years, this context and the challenge to change led to transformation extending beyond our methods of preaching and impacting our community at its core. The **2010 Campaign** was born. Ten years later, its vision, strategy and philosophy continue to ignite our community in South Africa.

The **2010 Campaign** was the result of a unique gathering of many who encouraged long-term planning and out-of-the-box thinking. A strong base of members from a range of ecclesias in South Africa agreed to support the long-term outreach plan with clear goals, strategies and principles. For all of those present at the time, the ideas and goals posited were way bigger than anything we had ever sought to achieve before. This required a new level of faith as we faced the prospect of stepping out of our comfort zones into new and untested waters.

Touch and Teach

One of the foundational principles

of the **2010 Campaign** was the “Cast your net on the other side” philosophy (John 21:6). The first principle of this philosophy was Touch and Teach. In a country where poverty and inequality are amongst the highest in the world, we could no longer manifest the message of our teaching without touching. The more we could integrate these elements of practice and theory, the more we would emulate the method of our Lord in the gospels. In a country characterized by a history of racial mistrust, we soon found that developing a relationship through “touching communities” (direct involvement in real, tangible works), helped turn stony soil into fertile land.

The Good News of the Kingdom of God

Two other themes that emerged early in the **2010 Campaign** have remained cornerstones of preaching in South Africa. The Enablers for Laborers principle challenged us to diversify our preaching methods. Jesus tells us the real constraint in the harvest is not the field of opportunity, but rather the lack of workers (Luke 10:2). By creating a diverse range of activities supporting the overall Touch and Teach preaching campaign, the **2010 Campaign** enabled laborers, from teachers to caregivers, from builders to healthcare workers, from musicians to sports enthusiasts. All these roles were combined through coordinated 2010 activities and united under a single preaching theme. Our diverse platforms and programs were unified under Jesus’ original preaching tagline: the Good News (gospel) of the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:23). From signs at centers (appropriately called

Good News Centers), to T-shirts worn by volunteers and decals on motor vehicles, the same message consistently displayed under this divine banner.

The blessings and abundance that followed our stepping out of the boat in 2005 were beyond anything we could have hoped or imagined. The Lord sent laborers and the field turned white for harvest. After five years, the **2010 Campaign** came to an end, but the results left us without any doubt the work must continue. **Ignite 2020**, an even more ambitious campaign followed and this year we celebrate the conclusion of that program. Over this period we implemented many innovative platforms and programs. Not all of them have been effective, but some have endured and remain the central thrust of the preaching activities today.

Meeting People Where They Are

Bible Education Centers (BECs) have proven to be a powerful and consistent platform for teaching the Good News in the streets and byways. Today we operate five BECs located in city centers and urban townships. Not only do the BECs allowed us to locate teaching closer to these communities, they have provided open and convenient access to Bible teaching. No longer do we require the people to come to our suburban ecclesial halls at times convenient for ourselves. The BECs allow us to meet people where they are. A typical BEC stocks a limited amount of Bibles in different versions and languages. The BECs also act as a depot to receive and return lessons from Bible courses and a place to attend live Bible and adult education classes. All BECs host

bi-annual graduation celebrations, for those who have completed Bible study courses, at nearby ecclesial halls to help bridge the gap between Bible education, worship and fellowship. Many of the current leaders in the **Ignite 2020** campaign first learned the Good News at one of the BECs.

Connecting with Communities

Another key platform has been the establishment of multi-purpose centers in marginalized communities. These Good News Centers help establish a deep, relevant and consistent relationship with the local community. Over the years we learned to truly touch people by understanding their needs. Consequently, each Good News Center offers different services and activities tailored to the needs of the local community. These include:

- Pre-school for children aged two to five
- After school homework and support classes
- Feeding schemes
- Artisanal training
- Gogos Teas (Gatherings for Elderly women)
- Sports programs

At the heart of every Good News Center is an ecclesia that offers spiritual growth and fellowship. Currently, eight centers are active in communities across the three most populous provinces in South Africa. The Lamontville Good News Center, surrounded by an extremely poor informal settlement, was opened on December 7, 2007. Over the past dozen years it has proved a flagship example of how to build trust and relationships over time. Not only does the center

offer a respected Pre-school and youth development program, it is the home to a BEC and thriving ecclesia. Over the years, the center, like many others, has become a key responder to personal and community emergencies. In the darkest days, a hand outstretched is a lifeline for today and a beacon of hope for the future. When such a light shines, it illuminates the path to a future Kingdom where sorrow and sighing are removed.

Help from Afar

Over the years the support of local and international volunteers, with their diverse skills, has contributed hugely to the success and growth of the campaign. A partnership with the Prepare-2-Preach (P2P) program, first started in Australia, has resulted in hundreds of young people experiencing and supporting the many platforms and programs. In 2008, the **2010 Campaign** project hosted the Amanzi International Youth Conference followed by a P2P preaching project, the first of many since hosted at centers across the country. A gathering of over 250 young people from 10 different countries provided a stream of volunteers who returned over the years that followed. From teachers to musicians, some returned for a few months while others for a few years. Changing lives is life-changing!

Celebrating 2010

In 2010, South Africa hosted the world at the FIFA Soccer World Cup. At the time our ambitious **2010 Campaign** hosted an international Bible conference. This Bible conference represented the first fruits of the

campaign that began five years earlier, evident not just in the number, but also in the diversity of the attendees. At this celebration it became clear the Lord had only started his work in this field. A five-year journey into the unknown now became the foundation to move forward with even greater passion and faith. As brush fires raged on the mountains around the conference venue, a new 10-year campaign was born. **Ignite 2020** continued the many platforms and programs established in the **2010 Campaign** with an emphasis on igniting new lightstands throughout the country.

Igniting God's Name in the Earth

Ignite 2020 called for a focus on sustainability and the development of local talent to lead and operate the platforms and programs. New ecclesias in urban townships, mostly based at the Good News Centers, provided fertile ground to develop new spiritual leaders who could also play an active role in managing and running the programs. This led to further nuanced programs such as Breakfast Clubs and the Learn to Earn program. The Breakfast Club provides children a nutritious breakfast at the center while on their way to school. Combined with a short prayer and spiritual lesson, young ones receive natural and spiritual food to extract the best from the day. The Learn to Earn program encourages community members to participate in “learning” activities which range from attending classes to actively helping the community in cleaning or feeding programs through a reward voucher system. The vouchers

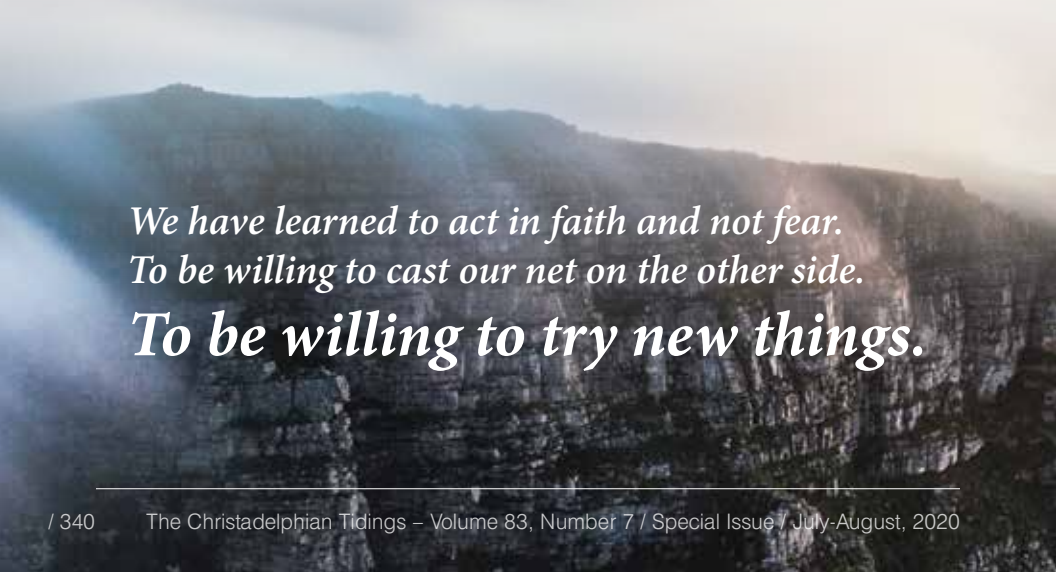
allow the participants to buy items from a thrift shop at the center. In this way, providing for the needs of the community is intertwined with a commitment to learning and growth.

One of the great lessons of the preaching experiment in South Africa is that we are laborers for the harvest. Any preaching campaign should ultimately have the harvest as its focus. At the outset, our primary focus was, as with many preaching campaigns, about bringing new converts to Christ. But, to borrow from the parable of the sower, that is just the beginning of a potential harvest. Many seeds will spring up and never produce a harvest. We all grow together through the seasons of life. Creating spaces and opportunities for sowing the seed and growing together has become our focus over the past ten years. We learned how integrated the natural and the spiritual become during this growth process. We have come to understand we don't touch and teach, but rather we touch to teach and teach to touch! In practical terms, this means our faith manifests the values we share, the hope we aspire

to and our complete reliance on the Lord. Through this integration we move from being missionaries trying to produce a harvest to missionaries becoming a part of that harvest. *"but God gave the increase."* (1Cor 3:6).

Lessons Abound

As the **Ignite 2020** campaign draws to a close, blessings abound with fertile opportunity to innovate and grow. We are constantly amazed at how the project has grown. By the numbers, the **Ignite 2020** campaign operates eight Good News Centers and five Bible Education Centers while supporting many associated programs. All of this is made possible by over 30 local full-time volunteers, many part-time volunteers and a steady stream of international volunteers. We have also been incredibly blessed by open-handed donors, especially from the USA. Many of these donors have not only opened their hands with funding, but their hearts and time in coming to South Africa to share in the impact personally.



*We have learned to act in faith and not fear.
To be willing to cast our net on the other side.
To be willing to try new things.*

We have learned that we are called to commit to fruitfulness. If we believe our God is abundant, then He will return a good measure pressed down, shaken together and overflowing (Luke 6:38). We have learned to act in faith and not fear. To be willing to cast our net on the other side. To be willing to try new things. They don't always work, but even then we learn and grow. We have learned that if we plan for the long-term, in humility, knowing the Lord can and will change our plans, we can think and dream bigger. We give ourselves the time and space to tap into the unlimited power of our Lord. We have learned that in all our planning and organization we will always leave place for God. We constantly seek His direction and look for signs and guidance from the Lord of the harvest. The past 15 years have passed as if in a moment. We have much we would still love to do. If the Lord remains away, a new campaign will replace **Ignite 2020**. It will carry on the current platforms

and programs while also reinvigorating us towards innovations and goals.

Looking Forward

As we look forward into an uncertain future, no doubt deeply impacted by the current coronavirus crisis, we are sure of a few things. The need for help today and hope tomorrow in our communities will be greater than ever before. The opportunity for us to provide for such needs has never been better placed. As the world and South Africa pass into this new era, the foundations laid over the past 15 years hold significant potential for eternal impact. May we not retract in fear. May we not grow weary. May we soar on the wings of the eagles that have gone before. May we join Isaiah's timeless refrain, "*Here am I. Send me.*" (Isa. 6:8)

*Matthew Blewett
(Westville, South Africa)*



EXPERIENCES IN MISSIONARY LIFE

Spending four years doing missionary work will change a person. The basic mantra I developed was “If you’re not changed by the experience, you’re not trying.”

What I mean is that if you are the same person after doing this work (and it is indeed work), then you didn’t put in enough effort (physical, mental, spiritual). Four years in South Africa changed me in several ways and taught me lessons I think can be helpful to people who may be interested in doing mission work themselves. We’ll start with what mission work taught me.

What I’ve learned

The first lesson I learned is to slow down. (This may seem a bit odd since much of global society is at a standstill due to the coronavirus as I write, but

the lesson is still applicable.) I found life in the United States much too fast. The constant go-go nature of society, the push to succeed in modern western society was never something that suited me. I found life in South Africa more to my liking. Make no mistake, South Africans work hard, but they also know when to relax and enjoy life. I became well acquainted with the concept of “Africa Time,” meaning if Bible class started 10 minutes late, no one got upset. Now more than ever we need to remember to slow down. Most Sundays I attended the Mariannahill Ecclesia, which is located in a township outside of the city of Durban. A hymn that was often sung there comes from *Psa 46:10*, “*Be still and know that I am God.*” I never did learn how to sing it in Zulu, but it is a very calming hymn. The events of the day can be too much for some. Unplug from technology from time to time. Slow down and

remember that God is in control. Jesus wants to take that stress from us; we just have to let him.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV).

The second lesson is to prepare. In my ecclesia in the USA, I would speak, at most, twice a year. In South Africa I was speaking multiple times per month as well as leading Bible classes every week, not to mention all the informal discussion that would occur when I spent time at one of the Bible Education Centers (BEC) in the area. This constant work made me a much better Bible student and a better, more confident speaker. Many of the best talks I gave were ones with little or no preparation. One Sunday in Mariannhill I sat in the hall waiting for service to start when the brother in the row in front of me turned around and said, “Brother Matt, I will preside and you will exhort.” One can imagine the bit of panic that ran through me as I tried to figure out what I would exhort on. For the record, it was an exhortation on the Beatitudes from Matthew 5. When the same thing happened the following Sunday, I made it a habit of never leaving home on a Sunday morning without at least a few thoughts in my head or some notes scribbled on a half sheet of paper. This constant practice made it easier for me to write and give an exhortation or a Bible class. The stress and anxiety I

used to have before giving a talk are no longer there.

The third lesson is to not overcomplicate things. To understand this, one needs to know a little about the history of South Africa. During the Apartheid era (1948 until the early 1990s) blacks and whites were kept apart. Racial segregation was the law of the land. After the end of apartheid, preaching efforts were made to the black population of the country. Black and white South Africans had different cultures, customs, languages, etc. Possibly the best decision made was to not force new black converts to completely adopt “white” Christadelphian culture if they did not choose. Many black meetings still sing hymns and conduct services in their native languages (Zulu in the case of my home base of Durban) and retain other customs. This was not always without controversy. There were times when the traditional culture of new converts clashed with so-called standard Christadelphian culture (and people).

This situation was reminiscent of the early days of new believers in the first century, illustrated in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In that epistle, Paul dealt with the controversy of whether Gentile converts still had to adhere to the Law of Moses and its litany of rules and regulations developed over the centuries since the Ten Commandments. Paul argues against such thought in the letter and says in chapter 3 verse 28: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

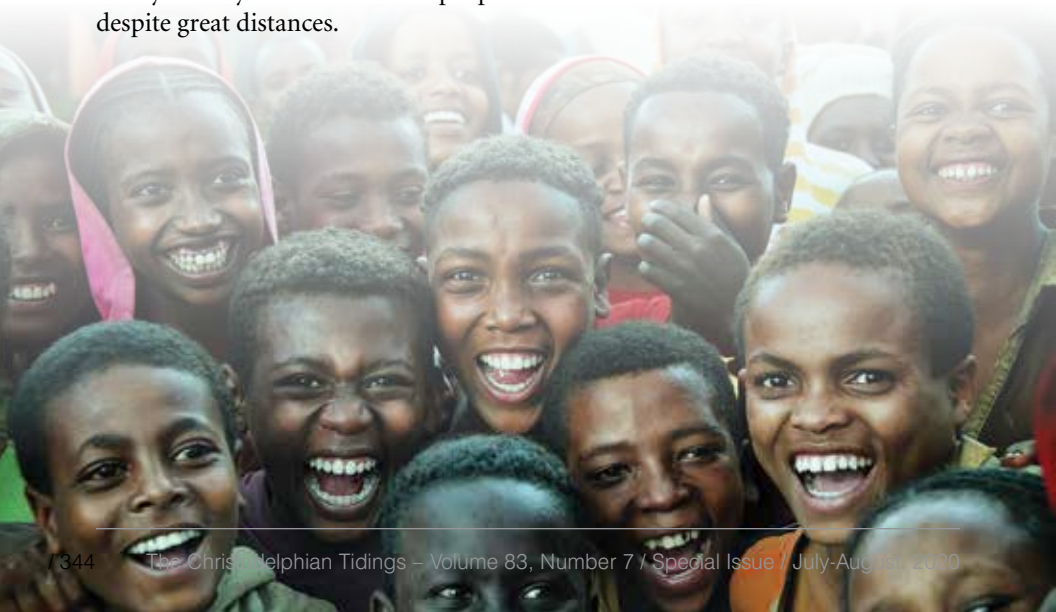
What this meant for me in dealings with people in South Africa was to not get caught up in the traditions that I grew up with and insist that new converts adopt those customs. What works in one part of the world may not necessarily work in another part. In Matt 22:36-40, Jesus boiled all the complexities of the law into two: love God and love your neighbor. If we have both of those in our hearts and minds, then we can work out any differences tradition and culture may put in our path.

The final lesson is the impact missionary work will leave on you as a person. In the 3-1/2 years since I left South Africa not one day has gone by that I have not thought about my time there. One day it may be about one of my friends, another about a specific event. I cherish all the friendships I made, whether it's the local South Africans who are still there or the multitude of volunteers I served with (I was once asked how many volunteers I worked with. I stopped counting at 50.) A benefit of modern technology is the ability to stay in contact with people despite great distances.

There was one thing that I did not anticipate — it was all the people I would make connections with who were not part of my specific preaching duties. There were Tony and Charl who ran the repair shop where we took our cars for service, and Vanessa and her mom who ran the book supply where we got Bibles and related supplies for the Bible Education Centers. One of the most powerful preaching tools was my American accent. Countless times while I was out shopping, out to eat, or at the movies people would ask me where my accent was from. It is only natural for the next question to be “Why are you here?” These everyday interactions were a great, yet simple form of outreach.

Do's and Don'ts

In this section, I want to share a few suggestions I believe will make the experience of doing mission work a more enjoyable time. Every person and every situation is, of course, different but I think these ideas are general enough to apply most everywhere.



Do soak up the culture of the place you are in. This can take many forms. One way is through food. Every country has native delicacies you can't find elsewhere (or at least that taste as good). Some of my best memories of South Africa involve food. One such memory occurred on a Sunday afternoon in 2014. After memorial service in the previously mentioned Mariannhill Ecclesia, Sister Sylvester Cele asked me if I had any plans for the afternoon. I told her "no," so she invited me to her house for lunch and fellowship with the rest of the ecclesia. When I got to her home (a short walk down the hill from the meeting), I saw her husband, Brother Phinda, pull a sheep out of the back of a truck. The sheep was a gift from his brother. Without going into gory details, I'll just say that a wonderful lunch was enjoyed by all, followed by the requisite nap on their couch. Sis. Sylvester (or Vester as most call her) also makes an excellent chicken curry dish (she shared the recipe with me but unfortunately I've since lost it,) and chakalaka, a spicy bean and vegetable side dish. I was never a big fan of spicy food until I lived there, but became a convert with South Africa's mix of African and Indian cuisine.

Do try as best you can to learn some of the local languages. Whether you are only there for a week or two or a few years, it helps to learn at least a few words and phrases. South Africa has 11 official languages, with English being spoken by almost everyone. In Durban, the predominant language is Zulu. I was by no means fluent, regrettably, but picked up many words and phrases, a great benefit when interacting with

people. Just knowing basic terms such as hello, goodbye, thank you, etc. is very much appreciated by people. It is a simple and easy way of showing people that you care. Brother Phinda suggested I buy a Zulu Bible and use it side by side with an English version to help learn words. This proved to be very helpful.

Don't treat it as a vacation. It's not an excuse to post pictures of yourself with cute children to your social media feeds. It is work and should be treated with the same seriousness you would any other job. To do otherwise would be disrespectful to the very nature of preaching God's Word, not to mention the people you are preaching to, as well as the local brothers and sisters. There were days when I would be on the go all day from place to place and project to project and then come home and work on a Bible class or talk. This is not to say that you shouldn't have fun and do plenty of sightseeing. Both are necessary and highly encouraged. But you should not forget the primary reason you are there.

Don't force the way you "think" things should be run on the locals. Always remember you are the visitor and you shouldn't try to impose on the locals an order of things you may have experienced back home. You have to be adaptable to the local way of doing things. There has to be give-and-take. It can sometimes be frustrating, but if people see you as being flexible to the local customs, then they are more likely to be open to new ideas you may have and wish to incorporate. Volunteer work is not about bossing people around, it is about working together,

whether it's with other volunteers, the local ecclesias you're assisting, or to potential converts. I am not saying you should compromise on values or morals; just don't get upset at the little things that may not go your way. I found South Africans to be very warm, friendly people. There was a genuine appreciation that someone would voluntarily move halfway around the world to do this type of work and they were open to new things as long as they felt they were being treated respectfully.

Don't think volunteer life is all sunshine and rainbows. I loved my time in South Africa, the people, the places — all of it! However, I would be lying if I said there were no bad days. We cannot escape the negative parts of life no matter how hard we may try. There were times when disagreements and disputes happened, but they were usually solved. These incidents were part of what I would call normal human interaction. You have to remember the spirit of Christ and use that to solve conflict.


Another aspect of volunteer life that can be harder to deal with is related to the personal connections you make. I want to share a story of a friend of mine from South Africa named Nana whom I met in 2013. Nana was an attendee of the midweek Bible class in a Durban area township, named Clermont. She was an eager student and had a winning personality. She also was HIV-positive. As the months wore on into 2014 her health worsened and she stopped coming to class. We would visit her home as often as possible and I constantly kept updated on her health via two of her friends who also came to the class. I once arranged for a local brother who is also HIV-positive to

visit her when I saw she did not look well. She told me she was not eating because she had no appetite. I thought this brother would be helpful, because he knew what she was going through and could give her some good advice on how to care for herself and what type of food to eat. Their meeting went well. Unfortunately, her condition rapidly worsened. I got the sense from talking with her that she was resigned to dying and had just given up the fight. I got word on a Tuesday in late June that she insisted on being taken back to her family home south of Durban where she could go to die. She passed away on Friday of the same week. I miss my friend.

Despite the sadness of the story, I take heart in it because: (1) I got to know her, (2) it showed me the power preaching work can have and the lasting effects it has on a person. It is also worth noting that Nana's two friends who came with her to the Bible class were both baptized.

Doing preaching work is a highly rewarding experience, one that I recommend without reservation. It is not one to enter into lightly. Do your research; learn as much as you can about the place where you will be going. Talk to people who have done it, as well as people in your destination country if possible. If you go into the mission field with the right mindset you will come out of it with memories that will last a lifetime.

*Matt Bilello
(Ann Arbor, MI)*



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A PARADIGM SHIFT IN SOUTHEASTERN AFRICA

Maybe you, like me, think about the Truth somewhat incrementally.

Over time, we have seen outreach baptisms which are generally measured by the handful, not by the bushel! But this may be due to our own faulty thinking and limited experience, rather than how we should properly see the hand of God working in the world. The ground-breaking conversions associated with Pentecost in Acts 2 leave us all wondering if anything remotely close to this could happen during our lifetimes.

Let me share with you a few numbers that may challenge the way you look at what is possible in present days. In North America, including Canada and the US, we believe that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 baptized brothers and sisters. That number really hasn't changed

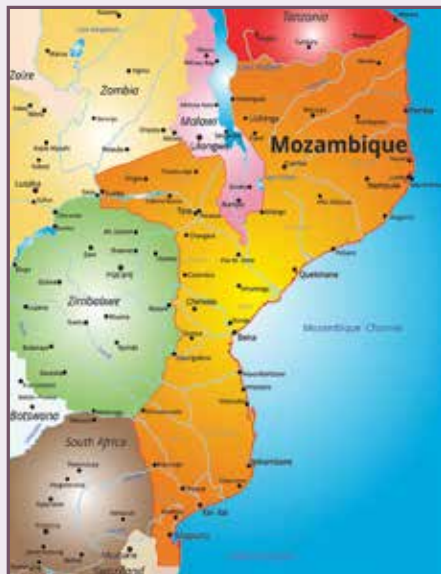
much in my lifetime. Ecclesias grow and downsize, depending on a variety of factors. What if I were to tell you that the Christadelphian Bible Mission (CBM) reports that since beginning their work in Mozambique in 1996, the number of brothers and sisters in this country of 29 million is 13,000, with 404 ecclesias? This Portuguese-speaking country, which is hardly familiar to most of us, now has more Christadelphians than any country in the world! Additionally, there are about 9,500 Sunday School members across Mozambique. In 2018, there were 1,000 baptisms in Mozambique. The country is predominantly Roman Catholic but its support has been waning for many years. Growth has taken place in a whole host of minor Christian denominations.

Mozambique's next-door neighbor is Malawi. This was where much of the

CBM's focus had initially started in the region. Malawi itself has over 7,000 brothers and sisters and 166 ecclesias. Combining the total population of Malawi and Mozambique, they have a population of about 40 million. Of that, 20,000 are Christadelphian brothers and sisters! Are you surprised? I know I was.

The CBM Link Brother for Mozambique is Bro. Trevor Radbourne. He described the development of the Truth in Mozambique as being initially somewhat of a surprise. Initial work was done by the CBM South Africa and Bro. Paul and Sis. Leone Verster, who began with correspondence courses and travel to the country. The CBM first became involved in Mozambique in 1996 when it became apparent that there were Christadelphians in the area surrounding Malawi. They became aware of this when a number of refugees from the Mozambique Civil War, who fled to Malawi for safety, learned the Truth. When the war ended and they returned home, they started preaching in their local areas. Brethren from Malawi travelled across the border to preach, as did Tanzanian brethren. The Tanzanian brethren, who were fishermen, converted other fishermen on the border of northern Mozambique. In 1996 a Bible School was held where over 300 brothers and sisters from Mozambique attended. It was further established that there were at least 670 members in the country at that time. In 1997 CBM agreed to establish a Linkman for the country and to fund further preaching activity in the country.

As one might expect, there are many obstacles to address. Because of poor



education in Mozambique, there are few Mozambique brethren who can speak English and act as translators. Similarly, there are few Mozambiquans who can speak Portuguese effectively. The situation becomes even more difficult in tribal areas. Education in Mozambique has not been a priority in those areas far from Maputo, the capital city. Few sisters can read, and only about half the older brethren can read. Primary education is free, but as there are no jobs in the countryside, many parents use children to look after animals or help in the home, so many do not benefit from education.

Because most locations are in areas where our brethren are subsistence farmers and very poor, they cannot afford to finance ecclesial halls themselves. Typically, the land is donated by the village chief, while the brethren make the bricks and build the walls. In town and city areas, however, land usually must be purchased. Because grass roofs are

both expensive for them to provide and have only a two- year life on average before being blown away by storms, the CBM finances the provision of tin sheets, treated timbers, roofing nails and wire attachments. CBM also finances a concrete floor, doors and window frames and finally benches, table and chairs through Project Aid. Where ecclesias are on main roads or in villages, signs advertising their presence have been financed, otherwise a painted sign on the ecclesial hall walls has been sufficient to advertise. Some ecclesial halls have been built on land donated by a local brother. Unfortunately, many halls are built of hand-made brick and mud and suffer consequently in bad weather.

In view of the size of the country, the CBM is progressing with plans to split the country into three areas. There are now 29 Councillors, elders, who are responsible for looking after ecclesias in their areas. They support the CBM Secretary and Treasurer by attending quarterly Councils and reporting on progress and problems.

As the Truth grows it is spreading out into different tribal areas, requiring the CBM to translate and print hymn books, study notes and Sunday School teacher's notes into local languages. Similarly, they are buying Bibles in tribal languages, such as Lomwe, Makua, Lolo, Sena, Shona, Chichewe, as well as Portuguese.

One might ask what is delaying the Lord's return? If we look at this issue globally, perhaps we find an answer. Paul wrote (*Rom 11:25*), "*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should*

be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." Our merciful God is giving all men and women, in all nations, the opportunity to respond to His call. There are yet many who have hearts that are open and willing. While we pray daily for the Lord's soon return, we must acknowledge His wisdom and love of each one of us. Each week, more men and women are being baptized into Christ and forming an ever-increasing diverse global fellowship. Thanks be to God for this.

As Christadelphians living in North America, let's never conclude that the Scriptures are viewed by the world as outdated and unappealing. This may be our experience in our local communities today as we often see minor interest in our outreach attempts. But a day could soon come when our own communities may experience such a shaking that they too will have a thirst for the Word of Truth. Progressively, the demographics of our fellowship will change at a rate not seen before. "First world" citizenship is no longer representative of most Christadelphians. Those that read and write in English are no longer the majority. The gap in income between brothers and sisters in different countries will be broadened. Where will this all lead? I believe we can have confidence that, while not of our doing, the Lord will help us to flourish as a global lampstand in these Last Days. May we all elect to glorify Him in our own communities.

Dave Jennings
(Verdugo Hills, CA)



CARIBBEAN & PANAMA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

We propose to analyze this subject under five inter-woven heads: (a) economy, (b) immaturity, (c) manpower paucity, (d) humility, and, (e) hospitality.

We quote first from *Parables* by Bro. John Bilello with his permission already granted:

“The Truth has grown in some remarkable places that worldly wisdom and foresight would not have imagined. It grew among the poor industrial working classes of the Midlands and Yorkshire dales of England in the last century, in the poor immigrant communities in North America in the early twentieth century and today is prospering in many third-world countries in spite of barriers of war, poverty and lack of education. Ecclesias and individuals ought to bear this in mind when planning

preaching efforts; sometimes in the least desirable, ill-spoken places people exist who are the most willing to accept the word of God.” (p. 80).

Some of these developing countries include the Caribbean: Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Panama, which are the subjects of the present consideration. There are no barriers of war or lack of education, but there is poverty. This general, common condition in the territories under reference presents an interesting opportunity for CBMC to evangelize.

Guyana

Perhaps a poor economy in these countries better generates a warm interest in the Father’s provision for all nations. The Truth Corps’ experience in Guyana, on two occasions in the last decade, emphasized the unique

hospitality shown to “strangers” bearing the Gospel. Each one of the Truth Corps team members, chaperoned by Sister Myra Lucke, reported how the contacts were willing to invite the campaigning pairs and eagerly listened to their presentations.

The Truth was revived in Guyana in the wake of opportunities for mission work grasped by CBM U.K., in the mid-fifties, as Bre. Harry Whittaker, A.D. Norris and Will Watkins did public addresses in the capital city of Georgetown. They attracted packed audiences for many evenings. An ecclesia soon formed. An important point must be mentioned at this stage, for prospective laborers in this divine field: we do NOT venture out to establish an ecclesia! If humility is our primary character trait, we will do as Jesus commanded, *“Go ye into all the world and preach...”* (Mark 16:16) and let God do the rest! Too often, we hear of outreach in virgin territory and presumptuously conclude that a new ecclesia is in the making even when there are other, established ecclesias in



Sunday School at New Amsterdam

the vicinity.

On the flip side to planning outreach, the question is often asked about follow-up, in view of the paucity of local workers, something that plagues these ecclesias in the wake of North American immigration. Sadly, the exodus of brothers and sisters to other countries has robbed the home ecclesias of many experienced workers, resulting in the other concern of immaturity in leadership and management.

The opportunity is there in all these countries. CBMC has been doing an outstanding service in channeling funds to: (a) alleviate welfare needs, (b) maintain full-time field workers, and (c) run fraternalis, Bible Schools, Youth Gatherings and Camps. Channeling these funds is sometimes met with an unexpected pothole where the local membership displays mistrust for the appointees disbursing the overseas help! Prospective volunteers need



*The New Amsterdam Ecclesial Hall
in Guyana*

to be aware of this situation and plan to handle it so discreetly that new converts are not side-tracked by non-edifying issues!

The fact that the local populace is ever willing to listen to the gospel tips the scale in favor of seizing the opportunities against being overwhelmed by the challenges. Door-to-door campaigners are hardly ever given the cold shoulder response typical of the North American attitude; thus, any planned outreach can allay this fear. Coupled with the hospitality of the general public, the homes of Christadelphian families are open to visiting missionaries in most of the Caribbean and Panama. Additionally, CBMC local organizations may own an apartment to cater for long-term volunteers, such as in New Amsterdam, Guyana, where the ecclesial hall has occupied the lower portion of a fully equipped mission apartment since 1964. This became the home for a succession of missionaries, (e.g., the Greens, Simpsons, Sleepers and Parsons.)

We have generalized these countries in five interwoven factors: economy, immaturity, hospitality, manpower, paucity and humility. All of these countries have often been visited by the present author and other members from the Brooklyn, NY Ecclesia. However, we make no reference to Antigua, Bahamas and St. Lucia, where we are less familiar. A final suggestion for the new laborers to a field: Work with local CBMC representatives and other devoted members in every established ecclesia.

The current number of ecclesias in the Caribbean and their membership are listed in the table to the right.

Panama

There are two ecclesias in Panama. The Colon Ecclesia, on the Caribbean side of the Isthmus, was formed in the 1950s due to the efforts of British and North American brethren. In the formative years, the response to preaching efforts was very encouraging — up to 100 or more would attend some campaigns. This ecclesia grew rapidly and eventually preaching work began in the capital of Panama City, which is on the Pacific Ocean side of the Isthmus. An ecclesia was established in the capital in the 1960s. The Colon Ecclesia has always rented, while Panama City has its own ecclesial hall. There have been around 100 baptisms over the years. Sadly, for various reasons, both ecclesias have dwindled in numbers. This is largely due to economic struggles where some have emigrated to other countries. The attractions of the world, or other churches, have pulled some members and youth away from the Truth, and others have fallen asleep in the Lord. At present, the Colon Ecclesia numbers about 14 active members and the Panama City Ecclesia approximately ten active members. Between the two meetings there are about ten teens and younger children. The responsibility of platform duties rests on the shoulders of seven brothers! Both ecclesias appreciate the regular support of visiting brothers and sisters from other countries several times a year. It should be noted that most members

Country	# of Ecclesias	Members
Guyana	6	> 100
Jamaica	6	> 100
Trinidad & Tobago	4	> 70
Barbados	2	> 30
Panama	2	> 25

speak Spanish and English, so English-speaking visitors are welcome, since translation into Spanish can be arranged, when required. There is a real and urgent need for short-term and long-term assistance for the survival and growth of both ecclesias. All members are very welcoming and short-term accommodation can be arranged. Long-term support would be much

appreciated and with the backing of the Christadelphian Bible Mission of the Americas (CBMA). For more information, we urge you to contact Brother Ian Neblett (Colon, Panama) at ianneblett@hotmail.com or Brother Don Luff at luffs@sympatico.ca, who is the CBMA Panama linkman.

Jamaica

The Truth in Jamaica goes back to the 19th century, when Brother John Blenman, who was baptized in North London, UK, sailed to the Caribbean. He was instrumental in the beginnings of ecclesias in the Caribbean, notably Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica. An ecclesia was established in Jamaica in 1894. In the mid-1950s British brethren supported renewed efforts on the Island. The CBMUK, and later brethren from North America assisted this effort. Over the years, there have



The Round Hill Ecclesia in Jamaica

been upwards of 15 ecclesias in different locations across the island. In the mid-2000s, there were about 12 active ecclesias of various sizes. There are six ecclesias that hold weekly Sunday Remembrance Services, numbering approximately 100 members altogether. For about 20 years now, the two North American Bible Missions (CBMA/CBMC) have provided physical and financial support to the Caribbean area, including Jamaica. The membership is stable at present, however about 20 brothers fulfill the platform duties for all six meetings. There is an average of one baptism per year. One of the dilemmas is in retaining the youth. As in all countries, the pull of the world, the hazards of the Internet and materialism are some of the things that draw members and youth away. The love of the brotherhood in Jamaica is infectious and life changing! You will

never regret serving in Jamaica. There are a number of visits to Jamaica by overseas brothers and sister every year. Truth Corps has travelled to Jamaica in recent years, helping with various events. The CBMC sponsored a missionary couple during 2018 and 2019, a big boost for ecclesial activities. However, more short-term and long-term support is needed to strengthen and build the ecclesias.

We just returned from Jamaica where we were able to visit four of the ecclesias and spent a few days at Round Hill where the mission apartment there can easily accommodate six. There is also a full kitchen complete with stove, refrigerator, microwave and utensils. There are also activities every night, except for Saturday, which is cleaning night. Getting there is easier than in other areas, although a 4x4 would handle the “roads” better than a small

car. The view is spectacular looking down on Treasure Beach and most of the members live within walking distance. For more information, we urge you to contact Brother Keith Kinlocke, CBMJ chairman at kkinlocke@yahoo.com, or Brother Nathan Giordano at nate.giordano@gmail.com, who is the CBMC Jamaica linkman.

Trinidad and Tobago

The history of the truth in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) dates back to the 1950s when the first ecclesia was established in Tobago with the help of the CBM in the UK. There are approximately 72 members in the four T&T ecclesias and about 60 Sunday School members including 25 CYC members.

Clive Drepaul (Brooklyn, NY)



The Argyle Mountain Ecclesia in Jamaica has only three sisters and no brothers. This photo was taken in February 2020 from a visit by the current missionaries Bro. David and Sis. Cassie Giordano.



WHEN AFRICAN REFUGEES COME TO NORTH AMERICA

Many of our African brothers and sisters have seen unimaginable hardships and horrors.

Five million people were killed during the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between 1997 and 2003. The Western news media have largely ignored that brutal conflict. Moreover, as the violence continues, over two million were forced to flee their homes in DRC in 2017 alone.

As displaced people, they spend years in refugee camps or as asylum seekers in host countries that provide temporary sanctuary on the basis that they must eventually move on. Unless they have a sponsor, most have little control over where they end up. Canada and the U.S. are seen as lands of opportunity. To receive permanent status in a safe, prosperous country comes as a blessing

from God, a fulfillment of earnest prayers.

Refugees who learn the Truth in Africa become members of small, active ecclesias nurtured by the CBM and other local ecclesias. Despite day-to-day hardships, living in such an environment fosters day-to-day fellowship. In African society, it's important to spend time with each other, to enjoy close personal relationships, to give support in times of need. For some, life as a refugee is the only life they can remember.

Life in a New Culture

These African Christadelphians often arrive with families large by North American standards. Although multilingual, they may not be able to communicate well (if at all) in English. For those who arrive with refugee status, the government decides where they go, and may settle them far

from an ecclesia. Challenges include finding housing, covering the needs of daily life, learning the language and generally figuring out how things work. Transportation is also an issue. After years with no permanent status, they are at last legally allowed to hold paid jobs and need to find work. Accustomed to a close-knit community, they may feel isolated and alone and they seek companionship among other immigrants of their ethnic background.

On top of adapting to a totally new society, how can they maintain and grow their faith? They're accustomed to a form of worship that is far from stuffy, perhaps including lively music, clapping and swaying. They come with a strong personal faith but may not own a Bible, at least not one in English. They have difficulty understanding speakers and finding Bible passages. To them, fine points of doctrine considered essential to many North American Christadelphians are irrelevant.

Members of long-established ecclesias in Canada and the United States tend to be "busy." Busy with work, school, family commitments, various interests and priorities. Busy, perhaps, with ecclesial responsibilities and committees. Too busy, in some cases, to attend ecclesial activities (even on a Sunday), to develop close personal relationships within the ecclesia, or to help those struggling with challenges. Unwittingly, complacency can set in, and the focus may be more on detailed Bible exposition and less on applying Christ's message in day-to-day living.

Consider these comments from North American brothers and sisters who have been working with African immigrant families:

"Something is lacking in our ecclesias. We think we're just fine, like the Laodiceans. We study the Bible, but how can we apply it? Our ecclesia needed the opportunity to sacrifice, share, give at whatever cost."



AS WE HAVE
OPPORTUNITY,
LET US DO
GOOD TO
EVERYONE

Galatians 6:10

“Our ecclesia seemed to be dwindling — and then the Africans came. God sent them to us. Now we have opportunities to put our faith into action. We have an active CYC. They’ve helped build up the ecclesia.”

“It has been a huge challenge for me and one that I have come to love and appreciate as a gift from God.”

Challenges and Opportunities

How can an ecclesia help these newcomers? To a Congolese sister who spent ten years at a refugee camp in Malawi before settling in Canada, the answer boils down to one word: love. It’s not the financial help, the tangible donations, or providing transportation. Although all of these are necessary, what’s really important is to show you care. Visit with the newcomers. Be a friend and mentor. Keep in touch.

Positive outcomes require an investment of significant resources, personal as well as material. Even with a lot of caring effort, there are disappointments. Often the jobs available to new immigrants demand long or inconvenient hours or working on Sundays. Sometimes, to make ends meet, they take on two or three jobs. The ecclesia may not realize that is why they are hard to reach and do not attend meetings. Their natural desire to associate with others of similar culture and language can draw them away from those of similar faith.

One ecclesia provided four vehicles (with drivers of course) to pick up members of a large African family living a distance away. That ecclesia now has a keen Sunday School class of teenagers eager to learn about

the Bible message. In another small ecclesia, members do not have extra cars and drivers; one couple can drive the two baptized family members to the memorial service on Sunday, but ecclesial members simply do not have the resources to provide transportation for the rest of the family, including three teenaged children, nor is it possible to meet with them at another time of the week.

In a region where a few African families settled in the early 2000s, a retired brother was able to drive long distances to pick people up, and even ran a mid-week Bible class. Sadly, when he fell asleep in Christ, no one could take his place, and the ecclesia has weakened. More recently, a Canadian sister who is in isolation has been working with a family of six children. The mother was baptized in Africa but no longer has an interest. No ecclesia is nearby and with their refugee status, the family is not allowed to cross the border to a nearby U.S. ecclesia, so this sister not only teaches the children but also leads a Sunday service and is a constant resource for the family. In 2019, one of the teen boys was baptized. Her attitude is that all we can do is plant the seed, and let God give the increase. Truly a work of love and dedication.

What to do?

Doing something is better than doing nothing; just do your best. Put yourself in their shoes — how would you be if you landed in their homeland? Listen, identify their needs and wants, then ask people to help out. Ideally, one person should take charge to determine what is required and coordinate action to fill the needs. Our community is generous!

Nurturing the younger generation is important: not only Sunday School, but also bringing them into contact with other Christadelphian young people. Often, the distances involved demand a major commitment. Some brothers and sisters have made it a priority to bring the boys and girls to CYC activities, gatherings and Bible Schools, and even to relocate families or individuals to an area where there is an active ecclesia.

Brother Benoit Mukendi, who now resides in Toronto, is the CBM linkman for DRC East-South, Burundi and Rwanda. Originally from DRC, he learned the Truth while in a Tanzanian refugee camp. Benoit would like to encourage brothers and sisters arriving from Africa to contact him (e-mail benoitmukendi@yahoo.com; tel. 647 909-7063).

Recognizing it can be hard to track down newly arrived refugees, he sometimes has the feeling he's the only person contacting them. "Communication is very important. Just making a phone call shows you care. More people should do this. Why don't they?"

Benoit would very much like to see a domestic missionary effort. The aim would be to visit and support brothers and sisters who come from Africa as refugees, to help them settle and maintain their faith, and to work with the children and youth. There is a Swahili-only ecclesia in Des Moines, Iowa, with

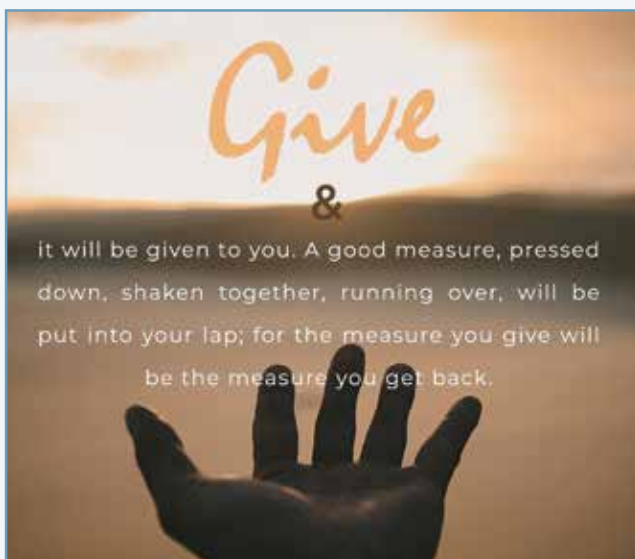
16 brothers and sisters as well as quite a few children. But they need support — maybe a domestic missionary who could stay for a month at a time. Often those who settle in Quebec speak French and Canadian school children learn French starting in Kindergarten. Perhaps doing domestic missionary work is an untapped opportunity to put their second language to work.

The Bottom Line

Every refugee has unique needs, and these may vary depending on their home country. Whether newly arrived refugees learned the Truth in Africa, Iran, Pakistan or another country, they may underestimate the challenges they will face. On the other hand, local brothers and sisters may underestimate the opportunities they bring.

The challenges on both sides can seem daunting — but they are often opportunities in disguise.

*Ethel Archard
(Ottawa, ON)*





BIBLE SEMINARS

I had the honor of being part of one of the two Truth Corps teams in 1975. It was a life-changing experience as it opened my mind to the importance of me and my ecclesia being actively involved in regular outreach. Bro. Roberts wrote in the *Ecclesial Guide* that there are two purposes for an ecclesia: edification of the members and outreach to those outside the community. When there is a balance of edification and outreach, the ecclesia often seems to reach a healthy state that can be lost when one dimension gives way to the other.

When I returned from Truth Corps that summer, I was excited to get involved and support the outreach work of my ecclesia in Pomona, CA. Generally, in the 70s and 80s, this took the form of a public lecture. We would diligently handbill in adjacent neighborhoods, advertise as best we could, and invite the public to come to an address, often given in a public setting. If you measure success by the number of visitors, it was almost always discouraging. I found myself taking empty comfort in what some would say about the current generation. People just aren't

interested in the Bible. We live in a dark and degenerate age and the best we can do is be witnesses to the world around us. Deep down, however, many of us wondered if the “lecture” format just wasn't relevant for external outreach, though undeniably it had value for our own young people who were learning the Truth. Maybe the ineffectiveness was about us, not the gospel?

In 1993, the Reseda, CA Ecclesia held a meeting for all Southern California ecclesias to hear about the Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar that had been developed by Bre. Randy Coy and Dave Noble in Ohio. It seemed like a novel idea and we were all excited to give it a try. This was during the days of overhead transparencies, so we all got working on the creation of our presentation materials. It was also highly recommended that the advertising spend be significant. In 1994, during our first seminar in the Pomona, CA Ecclesia, we spent nearly \$3,500 on six half-page ads in the local, mid-level circulation paper. We scouted out locations and selected the Montclair Community Center, which held 70 people. We thought this would

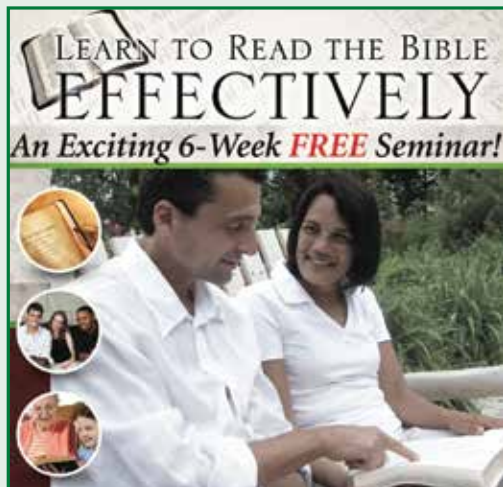
possibly be way too big, but we hoped to have ecclesial members attend also. Our expectations were high — anticipating ten visitors or more. The responses started coming in and it was remarkable. For our first seminar, we received 325 registrations! We had to quickly secure a second and third room and a new set of presenters to handle the overflow. To borrow a story from the gospels, our “net broke.”

I cannot adequately describe the awesome emotional experience this was for us. The room was full of people who wanted to learn about the Bible. They were eager to come back each week and learn more. Progressively, many would stay after class to talk. The follow-up classes were on Genesis and it really seemed to help the students apply many of the skills they had learned in the seminar. Further, this seemed to be where the real learning and bonding occurred. Now, some 25 years later, I am personally aware of more than 20 baptisms that resulted from seminars we’ve been involved with. I count this one of the richest blessings in my life. We wonder where we might be without

the fellowship of those who accepted the Truth over these many years as a result of these seminars.

The success of the seminars was not a one-time phenomenon, nor was it unique to the ecclesia I was then attending. Since 1994, I am aware of many innovations in the seminar approach. For instance, it was delivered as a weekend seminar to accommodate a remote location. It was given by sisters for women-only in the mid-morning. The materials were adapted to improve the application of the skills with in-class exercises. It was given as an online webinar. It was incorporated into a multi-level series of progressive classes. Eventually, new seminars have been introduced. After the 9/11 attacks, a seminar called, “Understanding Bible Prophecy,” was built on the premise that almost all prophecy is established on the Promises in the Garden and to Abraham and David. Furthermore, the Promises rest on the foundation of God’s Master Plan to fill the earth with His glory. In many ways, this seminar presents some of our most unique and important first principle teachings,

while satisfying the desire of participants to understand many of the popular prophecies. The Understanding Bible Prophecy seminar presentation slides and instructor notes are all now available on www.tidings.org/preaching. This seminar has had similar results to the Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar, though it seems to attract a different kind of student — often those with some basic Bible knowledge. There have been other seminars created on



Genesis, the Kingdom, and God's Master Plan. Recently, a class has been completed called "Walking with Jesus Christ." This demonstrates how the Bible is an effective textbook for Interpersonal Relationships: The Use of Money, Marriage and Family, Stress and Anxiety, Being Good Citizens in the World and finally, How to Have a Future Focus. We are excited to see how well this new seminar attracts the public. We hope to have it available in coming months on www.tidings.org.

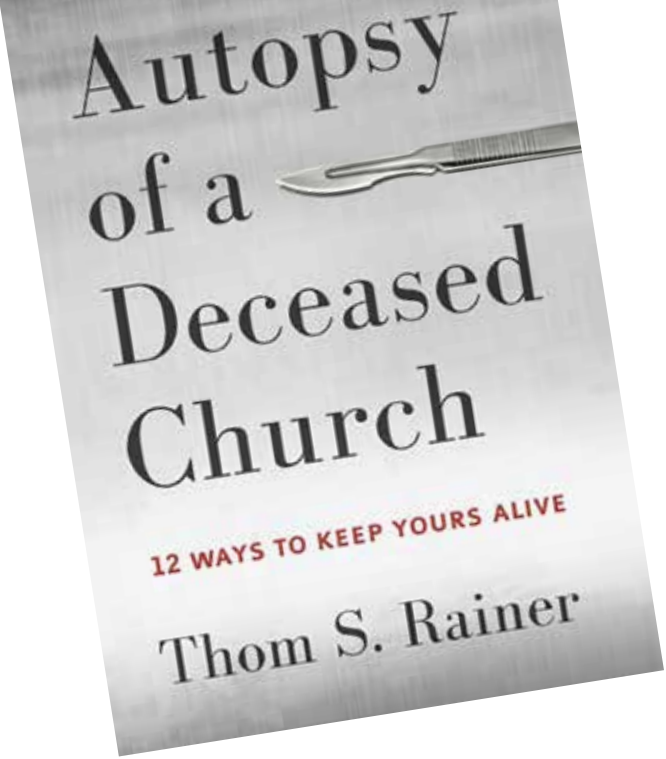
However, it seems the seminar's attractiveness to the public has waned over recent years. The triple-digit registrations often now are a dozen or less in many cases. Even the ecclesias with the seminar as an ongoing part of their normal activities have noticed a drop. There are, of course, many possible reasons for this change. Today, the amount of Biblical education available online is staggering. Many may choose to watch a podcast or video series in their pajamas rather than come out for six or more weeks during the evening, as it is easy and accessible at any time. Interestingly, I have recently heard similar comments by brethren about the seminars that I remember hearing about public lectures back in the 70s and 80s. "The seminars are passé." "No one is really interested in the Bible anymore in our communities." Some even have ventured to say that we have "saturated" our communities with the seminars and that's why interest is declining. This last view can hardly be substantiated when we consider the enormity of the communities we live in.

When some say we might want to jettison the seminars, as they are no

longer effective, I generally ask them, "What do we have now that we can do that is more effective?" If someone could answer that, I think we would all gladly change. To my knowledge, the seminars remain an effective way for us to reach our community. The number of registrations may be down, but we are still getting students and baptisms. Bible seminars should not be the only thing an ecclesia does, but they remain an effective tool for connecting with the communities where we live and work. We ought to challenge ourselves to create new materials, new seminars, new advertising, new methods of delivery. The future may not be live public Bible seminars. We ought to enlist all ages and genders in our constituency when we brainstorm new methods to teach the Truth. We can learn from the example of the Apostle Paul about flexibility in our teaching methods, so we might appeal to new people, with different needs in unique ways.

At the end of the day, there is a huge benefit to individuals and ecclesias involved in the public seminars. They sharpen our message, build faith and accelerate spiritual growth. They help us avoid isolation from the public, a grave danger to ecclesias. Perhaps one of the greatest gifts is one to ourselves. They remind us just how beautiful and inspiring the Truth is and how remarkably it is revealed in Scripture. This joy also can be seen in the faces of men and women who attend the classes. By God's grace, we pray the Lord will lead us to more!

*Dave Jennings
(Verdugo Hills, CA)*



Autopsy of a Deceased Church

12 WAYS TO KEEP YOURS ALIVE

Thom S. Rainer

BOOK REVIEW

Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive

By Thom Rainer¹

It's just a little book — only 96 small pages. You can read it in one sitting. But it has an extra-large message. Churches in America are dying, losing members and closing their doors. Why? Is there a set of common characteristics of these dying institutions? This question intrigued Thom Rainer and he set out to research it. To write the book, he spent several years interviewing people formerly associated with churches that had died. He found some predictable patterns.

Dying, death, autopsy. These are not uplifting words that we choose to dwell on willingly. Medical science employs autopsies to determine why something died, with an eye toward preventing future deaths. Should we do the same to prevent our ecclesias from suffering similar fates? Is it possible that parallels can be drawn between the churches of other denominations and Christadelphians? Is it time for us to sit up and notice the health of our ecclesias? Perhaps.

One of the author's most disquieting observations is that many of the dying churches did not think they had a problem. Maybe they just hadn't taken the time and effort to assess the wellbeing of their organizations. But if they didn't know they were sick, no one could prescribe medication. Without a checkup, a treatment plan couldn't be formulated.

Not all situations discussed in the book are relevant to Christadelphians, but there are enough intersections to cause us to ponder. We could also extend the applicability of the book's findings beyond just the single ecclesial level. The same principles are just as applicable to groups in our community at large: a Bible School board, a reunion committee or even a magazine publishing association. What follows are the take-aways from the book we found most useful.

Dying or dead churches resist change. Rather than merely respecting the past, they revere it. They respond to forces that attempt to implement change (even in small matters) with fear and determination to maintain the status quo. Sure, there are plenty of memories of good times appropriate to recollect. And, particularly for Christadelphians, there are doctrines and First Principles that must be left unchanged. But what about worship rituals, dress codes, fixed dates and times, music selections, who does what jobs, or even non-essential Biblical interpretations? Many a new idea has been squashed by the we've-always-done-it-this-way committee (AKA the "wet-blanket faction"). In these situations, we should consider what happens to the morale of the folks

making the suggestions.

Deceased churches often put the comfort needs of their members first. They looked inwardly rather than outwardly. A suggestion to "follow the money" sheds light on a group's first priority. "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" (Matt 6:21 NASB). When the bulk of the budget concerns provision for the physical ease of the congregation, it's an indication of a sick or dying church. Comfy pew cushions, state of the art audio-visual equipment, elevators, fancy kitchens — these are all lovely fixtures to have, but not at the expense of other activities.

This brings us to a third point. Providing for the comfort of church members often crowds out other works, such as concern for the surrounding community or implementing the Great Commission: "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*" (Mark 16:15 NASB). Is there no money left over for assistance to the neighbors? Or for preaching efforts? Have we gotten our name out to the people of the community? Some of the subject churches actually made themselves like a fortress against the outside community. They projected a very unwelcoming image. Can the philosophy of "Be not of the world" be carried to the extent that we no longer care for our fellow man?

The final relevant (and again, surprising) issue the book uncovered concerned the prayer life of the church. Prayers in the dead churches had become perfunctory and clichéd. We hope that the public prayers we give are always powerful and intentional. Do we

ever have communal prayers? A Prayer Day? Do we pray for the health of our ecclesia? What about the community we live in or our political leaders? Are our prayers specific to the needs of an individual member? Are there prayers for membership growth in our community? Do we passionately praise God for all the blessings he extends to us? *“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” (Jas 5:16 NASB)*. Or do we say ritualistic words in habitual situations?

It’s been five years since Thom Rainer published his little book. He writes in his blog (ThomRainer.com) that he was “stunned” at the response to his work. In time, with so many comments from readers, he drew an additional conclusion. Far from being

a depressing analysis of church demise, his book became a challenge to readers to keep their churches alive. A church (ecclesia, Bible School, reunion effort) doesn’t have to die.

Change is hard for institutions. It’s not easy to move the fixed habits and ideas of a group. But change happens, whether we like it or not. We can choose to stick with the evolutionary type of change, the one universally associated with decline. Or we can control the change and deliberately implement strategic plans to benefit our spiritual health. As we sing in our beloved Hymn 405, “We make the answer now.”

Melinda and Kevin Flatley,
(Pittsburgh, PA)

Notes:

¹ Thom Rainer is the founder and CEO of Church Answers, an online community and resource for church leaders. Prior to founding Church Answers, Rainer served as president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. Among LifeWay’s products is WordSearch, a Bible study software program we have used for years.



Garden of Gethsemane - Israel



LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

“And the gospel must first be published among all nations.”

(Mark 13:10)

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”

(1 Cor 3:6-7)

Learning from the stories

Most of this special issue tells inspirational stories of the impressive growth of our community around the world. A few of the articles discuss preaching methods that have run their course and need to be updated or replaced. Another article reviews common reasons churches die and emphasizes how critical adapting to change is to stay alive. These latter kinds of stories act as warnings, primarily to those of us in the longstanding areas of our community. In his article Bro. Matthew Blewett explains how the brothers and sisters in South Africa needed to make changes to re-invigorate their preaching efforts; we must all do the same.

To this end, the present article looks at some of the obstacles that have limited growth of the gospel in North America and other places.¹ The focus is on issues associated with our depiction and living of the gospel, which can influence how others perceive it. That is, this article identifies ways in which we create hurdles that discourage people from accepting or abiding in the gospel.

This article will not be the last word on the subject. Rather, it is intended to start a dialog. What are we doing as a community that is causing people to struggle with their faith, perhaps even causing them to leave us all together? What are we doing that turns people off? And, how can we improve?

In other words, this article lists problems we all face to some extent. These issues can inhibit the growth of the gospel. It is important we identify them so we can address them. We must “confront the brutal facts (yet never lose faith).”² In addition to identifying the problems, we offer practical ways we can put into practice lessons learned from the stories.

Identifying the issues

Here we summarize some of the issues identified by two Christadelphian surveys and three much larger non-Christadelphian surveys. These results are relevant input even if we will not be able to address all the issues raised.

Lively Stones Collective (LSC) Survey:³

Five years ago, a group of brothers and sisters were concerned with what they were seeing and they conducted an online survey to try to understand the situation better. They state in the introduction to their report: “We have been deeply concerned by the number of people who are struggling in — or leaving — our community. In early July 2015, we conducted a survey... to understand why people lose faith and leave, and how they feel about their relationship with our community... The survey was conducted online... all in all, just over 230 people responded.” Three categories of issues surfaced from the responses to the survey:

- Sexual abuse, racism, and class-consciousness.
- Internal conflict, divisions, and inappropriate attitudes.
- Diminishing Biblical awareness; anti-scholarship; speakers and teachers are unprepared.

The first of these categories is perhaps more prevalent than many of us perceive; these issues seem to lurk below the surface and are hard to talk about. That said, it is clear issues of sexual abuse, racism, and class-consciousness need to be addressed proactively, especially as we hear and see these same issues in society.

The second category continues to be a thorn in the side in many of our longstanding communities. We need to focus on essentials and refuse to tolerate any politics of division. The damage being done is irreparable. We must heed Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians, who faced similar problems:

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose.” (1 Cor 1:10 NET).

May God bless the current efforts so we can overcome the last hurdles and cross the finish line on unity.

The third of these categories is a serious issue. With easy access to information and better all-around education, not to mention those in our midst with advanced degrees, it is essential speakers know what they are talking about. They must be trustworthy. If they are not qualified to talk on a subject, they should pick a different subject or we should get a different speaker. Of course, our human inability to accurately judge our own competence makes this difficult for all of us.⁴ The New Testament is clear. Teachers will be held accountable for their teaching. This should be warning enough.

Sisters are too often treated like second-class citizens. They are not allowed to participate fully in worship, Bible classes, Bible schools, or the administration of ecclesias or Bible schools.

Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) Survey:⁵

In September, 2019 the WCF distributed a survey to learn about the North American Christadelphian community's attitudes and concerns regarding issues of faith. Here we review the results of Question 5: ***My faith is weakened by these past or present challenges*** (Select all that apply). Answered: 600; Skipped: 17. Here are the top ten responses by percentage:

1. Legalism in the Community (383/600 = 64%)
2. Apathy in the Community (340/600 = 57%)
3. Lack of Unity in the Christadelphian Community (329/600 = 55%)
4. Boring ecclesial services or activities (196/600 = 33%)
5. Competing demands on my time (188/600 = 31%)
6. Materialism (174/600 = 29%)
7. Lack of good Bible study (153/600 = 26%)
8. Women's roles in the ecclesia (148/600 = 25%)
9. Boring music (145/600 = 24%)
10. Inability to pray effectively (144/600 = 24%)

The top three of these responses all have to do with the Christadelphian community — legalism, apathy, and

lack of unity — and are related to the second category in the LSC results above. Response 7 is similar to the third category in the LSC results. Responses 4 and 9 reflect the fact that for the most part our worship services and music are still based on the way things were done in the last half of the nineteenth century. There is nothing wrong with them per se, except that they can cause a huge obstacle to anyone born since 1980. At the very least, we need to allow more variety. Diversity in unity, not uniformity, is a key element of the gospel (Rom 14; 1 Cor 12-14). Results 5 and 6 are common first-world problems and arise from where we put our priorities. It is easy to criticize others, but we are all likely guilty of these to some extent.

Response 8 is a much bigger issue than many of us want to admit. Sisters are too often treated like second-class citizens. They are not allowed to participate fully in worship, Bible classes, Bible schools, or the administration of ecclesias and Bible schools. In some areas, it is common for girls to be told they shouldn't pursue an education or a job, but should plan to stay at home, in the kitchen, raising children. Sadly, they may even be discouraged from studying the Bible. One young, unmarried sister was told by an older sister, "Oh, I guess you getting a college degree might be useful as a fallback in case your husband loses his job."

Another sister summarized what she'd been taught, "My priority is taking care of the kid, not studying the Bible. That's not my role. It's my husband's responsibility." This perspective pushes women away, whether they are raised Christadelphian or come into contact with us from the outside our community. It also causes the one body to be somewhat dysfunctional, with less than half of our members growing spiritually and contributing their God-given talents to the benefit of the whole. Although it will be difficult to address this issue in general, it is essential it not be ignored. At a minimum, reinforcing, allowing, or even failing to recognize misogynistic attitudes is seriously counterproductive to the gospel and we must be vigilant to put an end to them.

Interestingly, response 10 is the only one in the top ten to deal with an individual believer's feeling of ineptness at one of the basic spiritual disciplines, in this case, prayer. It is likely that if we discussed these fundamentals more often, then we would see this and other disciplines higher on the list. This is a wake-up call revealing we are not attending to our flocks appropriately. Perhaps it is because of all the distractions higher on the list.

Many of these issues coincide with what has been found in broader studies of Christians leaving their churches.

***This is a wake-up call
revealing that we are not
attending to our flocks
appropriately.***

Here are summaries of three non-Christadelphian studies that identify issues facing Christianity in general. There are reasons to think we are facing many of these same concerns.

A Recipe for Disaster:⁶

Based on interviews of those who had left Christianity, John Marriott identifies four overlapping ways churches and parents prepare people to lose their faith.

- **Tyranny of the Necessary (Over-Prepared)** — Christians are often required to accept a long list of particular interpretations of the Bible, many of which are based on weak evidence at best. This is especially true when it comes to interpretations felt to be essential to combat perceived challenges from other disciplines (e.g., science, archeology, history, medicine).
- **Spiritual Culture Shock (Under-Prepared)** — Christians are unable to deal with today's secular culture. Growing up in isolation makes them powerless to adapt when the time comes for them to interact with that culture.
- **Half-Baked (Ill-Prepared)** — Christians are often taught inadequate conceptions of God and the Bible. These conceptions are often unscriptural and quickly become a house of cards when the Christian starts to study the Bible seriously for themselves. Discovering a single example that contradicts what they have been taught can cause their entire faith to come crashing down.
- **Friendly Fire (Painfully Prepared)** — The reaction of the

church and family to opinions or behavior that are considered unacceptable can create deep wounds and long-lasting resentment that drives people away, never to return.

Why 18-29-year-old Christians are Leaving the Church:⁷

Between 2007 and 2011, the Barna Group conducted a series of nationwide opinion polls to study why passionate Christian teens often become Missing-In-Action 20-somethings. They focused on 18-to-29-year old “Mosaics,” that is, those born between 1984 and 2002, who are often referred to as Millennials and Gen-Y.

David Kinnaman identifies the following six major concerns this age group has with Christian attitudes. These are summarized on pages 92-93 in the book:

- **Overprotective** — discouraging creativity.
- **Shallow** — boring, proof-texting platitudes.
- **Anti-Science** — must choose faith or science.
- **Repressive** — religious rules, especially concerning sexual mores, feel stifling.
- **Exclusive** — lack of open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance.
- **Doubtless** — no safe place to express doubts.

What 16-29-year-old Outsiders Think About Christians:⁸

In contrast to the four studies above which deal with why **insiders** struggle and leave the faith, this last study deals

with the opinions young **outsiders** shared about Christians:

- **Hypocritical** — They say one thing and do another.
- **Get Saved!** — They are too focused on getting converts; they seem insincere.
- **Anti-homosexual** — They are bigoted and contemptuous.
- **Sheltered** — They are old-fashioned, boring, out of touch with reality, and unintelligent.
- **Too Political** — They have a political agenda and promote right-wing politics.
- **Judgmental** — It isn’t clear whether Christians really love people. Instead, they are prideful and quick to find faults in others.

Here we see many of the same problems identified above, with a couple of new ones. Many of the things about Christianity that offend outsiders are the same things that offend insiders.

Putting into practice the lessons learned

To note the obvious, none of these problems will be easy to rectify. That said, here are some simple, back-to-basic, ideas to get us started in the right direction.

Focusing on the gospel.

Our preaching needs to be centered on the first principles of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.⁹ This good news appeals to those who have ears to hear. They see that life eternal comes from knowing the only true God and His son (John 17:3). The gospel was the heart of the message Jesus and the apostles preached (Mark

1:14-15; Acts 8:12; Acts 28:30-31). It needs to be the core of our preaching too.

We need to avoid becoming sidetracked with disputed views of secondary, often esoteric theories about science, prophecy, history, atonement, sisters' roles, and even the Bible itself. Our speakers need to avoid topics they are not qualified to discuss. Doing so turns people off, both outside and inside our community, and can give the gospel a bad name.

Instead, our message needs to be about God, Jesus, faith, love, and the coming kingdom. These form the foundation of our hope. The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son so that believers might have eternal life. He sent His son not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Jesus. Christ is the Word made flesh, the brightness of God's glory, the express image of the Father. He is our Lord. He is our savior. He showed his love for us in his willingness to lay down his life for us. He is our example. We must abide in him. As fellow heirs of the promises, we are called to love God, to love Christ, to love our brothers and sisters, to love our neighbors, even to love our enemies. By such behavior, all people will be able to tell that we are God's children and Christ's disciples.

Balancing external and internal needs.

Our preaching must address both external and internal audiences. We need to meet people where they are, to preach to them on their terms, in their

vernacular, adapting our methods to each of their needs. This is what Jesus and the apostles did (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 11:1; Acts 16:13; 17:17; 1 Cor 9:19-23). This has also been the hallmark of successful preaching efforts throughout our history, as illustrated by the stories in this special issue.

We must make sure our preaching doesn't become too internally focused, caring for our own but ignoring our duties to others. We must reach out. We must avoid becoming insular, preaching only to ourselves, preaching only on our terms, in our parochial jargon.

When our approaches lose their effectiveness, we need to make changes. We need to adapt to our audiences, tailoring the gospel message to them. We need to preach to everyone. On the other hand, we must also avoid becoming so obsessed with outsiders that we ignore our own flocks. Both are required. Balance is critical.

Changing lives.

Our preaching needs to be life-changing, both for those we are preaching to and also for us as the preachers. Outsiders should be able to tell the difference between our outlook of hope and the despair of themselves and others. They should witness the changes the gospel makes in our lives and in their own lives. Seeing us living by Christ's lifestyle of love will command their attention.

On the other hand, we need to avoid pretending to live the Truth within a purely secular lifestyle that is indistinguishable from those around us. People need to be able to see a difference in us. We need to reflect the gospel in our everyday lives. Failure

to do so can undermine the gospel message. It can also cause our own members to lose confidence in the gospel. Instead, people need to be able to see our faith in our daily works:

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 5:14-16).

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10).

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do

all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life.” (Phil 2:12-16).

In short, we need to stick to the first principles, the gospel of the Scriptures, with complete freedom to disagree on other matters. Moreover, we must acknowledge it is not the principles as mere abstract propositions that we must accept or reject, but rather it is the truth, the reality, those propositions reveal about the Kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God and His son that are imperative, our relationships to them, and how these affect who we are and how we interact with everyone in our lives.

Joe Hill
(Austin, Leander, TX)

Notes:

- 1 See Bro. Jeff Gelineau’s article, “The Shape of Things to Come,” in this *Tidings’* Special Issue.
- 2 Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, Chapter 4.
- 3 The full LSC Survey Report is available at http://living-faith.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LSC_Survey_Report.pdf.
- 4 This is known as the Dunning-Kruger effect; for a summary, discussion, and links to original documents, see the Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect.
- 5 Complete results for the WCF Survey are available at <https://www.wcfoundation.org/surveys>.
- 6 John Marriott, *A Recipe for Disaster: Four Ways Churches and Parents Prepare Individuals to Lose Their Faith and How They Can Instill a Faith that Endures*, 2018, Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon.
- 7 David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church ... And Rethinking Faith*, 2011, The Barna Group. See Bro. Ben Drepaup’s book review, *Tidings*, May, 2020, pp. 233-235.
- 8 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity ... And Why It Matters*, 2007, The Barna Group.
- 9 See Bro. George Booker’s booklet, *What Are the First Principles?*, available online at http://www.christadelphianbooks.org/booker/what_are_1st_princ/index.html.

RESOURCES FOR RETIREES

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