



THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY RUTHIE EDGERLY OBERG

Riots and civil unrest marked American cities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. When African-American Assemblies of God minister Thurman Faison addressed the 1971 meeting of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America, he spoke to the social turbulence that was on everyone's mind.

Faison's addressed the question, "How are we going to reach the blacks of our inner cities?"

At that time, the Assemblies of God had an estimated 25 black ministers and only a handful of churches in predominately black neighborhoods (*Pentecostal Evangel*, April 26, 1970).

While Faison was well aware of the concerns facing the African-American

population of the inner cities, many Pentecostals remained relatively quiet with regard to the sins of pride and prejudice. Faison made the point that "all unrighteousness is sin — be it prejudice or adultery — and that the righteous Lord loves righteousness."

Faison partnered with Illinois District Superintendent E. M. Clark and churches in the district to reach African-Americans in Chicago's South Side. The partnership proved to be powerful. Southside Tabernacle continues in its ministry to this day.

Read Faison's entire address, "What Are We Going to Do About Our Cities?" on pages 8-9 of the Jan. 9, 1972, issue of the *Pentecostal Evangel* online at s2.ag.org/jan91972. 



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AG HITS HISTORIC NEW CHURCH MARK

BY MARK FORRESTER

The U.S. Assemblies of God closed 2016 with the highest annual number of new churches in its history. The 406 new churches also brings the total number of U.S. churches to 13,023 — exceeding the 13,000 mark for the first time.

Since record keeping officially began in the AG in 1965, the only previous year to reach 400 new churches was 1982. By comparison, 326 churches opened in 2015.

“The impact of a new church to a community is really remarkable,” says George O. Wood, AG general superintendent. “These are churches who are passionate about sharing the gospel, showing compassion, and giving to support local and global missions. Churches play a vital role in bringing hope and compassion to hurting communities.”

Bringing hope to the hurting is what led J.J. Vasquez to launch the Orlando-based Journey Church in September. The church was named in honor of Vasquez’s infant son who lived a brief seven hours outside of the womb.

“When Journey died, everything

changed,” recalls Vasquez, 30. “[The church] is named for the journey we are all on, and that God can take the worst things, the ugliest things in our lives, and turn them into something great.”

Vasquez was the former district youth director for the AG’s Florida Multicultural District. He received training for the new church plant through the Church Multiplication Network (CMN), where Journey Church then became an AGTrust Matching Fund church.

CMN serves as the AG’s church planting arm and in the eight years since its inception, has contributed to a sharp rise in new churches. A staggering 17 percent of current AG churches were launched within this timeframe. And it seems the resourcing strategy is producing long-term results. More than 90 percent of churches started through CMN are still open five years later.

Church planter Elizabeth Rios launched CityReach Church Miramar Pines in September following a series of significant setbacks, including a non-AG church plant which failed to survive.

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

BY CHRIS MAXWELL

To the staff and members of The Tabernacle in Decatur, Georgia, true worship involves showing tangible Christian compassion to those in the community.

One way is by offering a free health clinic. Nonprofit and community based, the Hope Health Center Clinic provides high quality medical care and referral services to address the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the uninsured and underinsured.

The ministry began following a family’s personal heartbreak. As a new immigrant, founder and CEO Martin Bong and his wife, Pelagie, lost their baby during pregnancy because they had no insurance to cover medical costs.

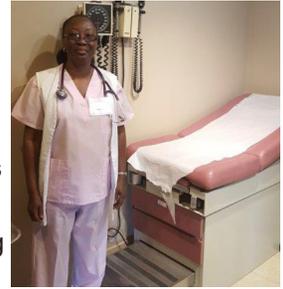
The loss affected Bong, who worked as a pastor and professor in his native Cameroon, so profoundly that in 2015 he started a clinic that gives uninsured patients access to free health care. He introduced the business plan for Hope Health Center to Mark Haston, lead pastor at The Tabernacle. That started the partnership between Hope Health

Center and the Tabernacle Church. The church provides the facilities, including paying for remodeling, and Hope Health Center covers the cost of managing the clinic and purchasing equipment.

Most of the staff are volunteers. Hope Health Center has two waiting rooms, three exam rooms, two doctors’ offices, a staff lounge, and laboratory. In addition, Hope Health Center has signed intern partnerships with Clayton State University, DeKalb Medical, and Medshare International.

Hope Health Center is funded solely by donations. With an annual budget of \$140,000, the medical outreach currently is open only Wednesdays.

“The Church needs to have a holistic approach by addressing the physical needs of the community as well as the spiritual,” Haston says. One strength of The Tabernacle is its diversity, with more than 50 nationalities represented. 



THE ABCs OF SALVATION

ACCEPT that you are a sinner, and God’s punishment for your sin is death and separation from God forever.

BELIEVE that Jesus paid God’s price for your sin when He died on the cross.

CONFESS “Jesus, I believe You are who the Bible and history declares You are – the Son of God. I humble myself and surrender to You. Forgive me. Make me spiritually whole. Change my life. Amen.”



THE WAGES OF DEBT

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

With Christmas spending over and credit card statements ready to be mailed, many Americans made New Year's resolutions to stop charging beyond their means.

While the practice of shopping now and paying later transcends generations, clearly borrowing is easier than ever before.

"Credit has never been so accessible," says Kyle Dana, senior vice president for AG Financial Solutions in Springfield, Missouri. "The mentality used to be spend down to zero and stop. Over time, the concept of going into the negative has been accepted, and that's where a lot of people live today."

Part of the problem is that the cost of certain goods and services — notably housing, college education, vehicles, and medical expenses — have outpaced income in the past generation. Subsequently, huge swatches of Americans have amassed credit card debt, student loans, or automobile financing. Wages haven't kept pace with

the cost of big-ticket items.

"Christians are not immune from deriving their self-worth from the things they own and the way we look," says Dana, 38. "In our image-driven society, we like to put on Facebook what we've got and what we've bought."

Dana, who has worked for AG Financial for 16 years, emphasizes that a bad credit rating can impede a person from securing an optimal career. Likewise, those with poor borrowing habits can end up paying much higher interest rates on car loans or mortgages.

Deborah Thorne, associate professor of sociology and anthropology at the University of Idaho in Moscow, believes people accrue unmanageable debt chiefly because of an unexpected job loss or medical bills.

Thorne, who has been studying debt for 20 years, notes that some people resort to using credit cards to pay off medical bills, and that various hospitals issue plastic at 19 to 24 percent annual interest. PE

SMALL AG CHURCH SUFFERS LOSS

BY DAN VAN VEEN

Less than 48 hours after Christmas services, the sanctuary and offices of Chapel of Praise Assembly of God in Falmouth, Kentucky, burned to the ground in what officials have deemed an electrical fire.

According to Pastor Kevin Clos, the fire was called in at 3 a.m. Dec. 27. As many as 20 firefighters worked for four hours to douse the blaze.

When services resume, Clos says the church's fellowship hall will be used. However, currently the hall has smoke and water damage and doesn't have any electricity or gas.

"I'm working on getting those things taken care of so we can resume



services on the first of February," Clos says.

The church was insured and the small congregation of 20 to 25 adherents plan on rebuilding, but for now, Clos is just trying to keep his head above water.

As a small-church minister, Clos wears many hats, including accountant and bookkeeper. "I have so many people I'm needing to meet with, sometimes I'm not sure if I'm coming or going," he says.

On top of all this, Clos is also the primary caretaker of his 83-year-old mother who recently suffered two strokes. "I'm feeling the stress," Clos admits. PE

TEEN GIRL MEETS FUNDRAISING GOAL

BY JENNIFER M. NELSON

Elizabeth Mills, 17, of Sycamore, Illinois, felt the Lord leading her to raise \$2,000 for Speed the Light. She planned to put all her summer job earnings toward the cause, as well as money that relatives gave for her birthday. Although an injury restricted some of her 2016 summer work, God honored Elizabeth's hard work and faithfulness. She ended up collecting \$2,600.

Initially, Elizabeth intended to drive a tractor for a local farmer. However, the job fell through after she suffered a concussion volunteering at a youth camp shortly before the job's start date.

After recovering, Elizabeth took as many side jobs as she could, including digging trenches and landscaping on a farm, baby-sitting, and washing windows. However, with the deadline to have pledges raised quickly approaching, she only had half of her goal met. That left Elizabeth feeling discouraged, said her father, Pastor William Mills of Bethel Assembly of God.

So Elizabeth organized a 40-mile bike ride with friends to raise more money. Still, she needed an additional \$500 to meet the commitment.

Then she ran into a family friend, and asked her if she'd like to help sponsor her. The friend donated \$500, unaware of the amount Elizabeth still needed to meet her God goal.

"She got to see the equation of faith, hard work, sacrifice, and God's provision all come together," Williams says. PE



RISING FROM THE ASHES

BY PATTI TOWNLEY-COVERT

When Brianna DiCristo's dad, Robert, drove his 18-year-old daughter from their home in Florida to the U.S. Missions Teen Challenge Beauty for Ashes Women and Children's Home in Fredericksburg, Virginia, he had reached his limit. Brianna DiCristo had wreaked havoc on her father's life and almost died from a heroin overdose in front of her 2-year-old son, James.

Not long after her parents divorced, when DiCristo was 12, she discovered that her mother was a drug addict. Bonding over drugs, they became best friends — first using opiates, then heroin. A high school dropout, DiCristo was pregnant at 15. Though her father wanted her to move in with him, she refused. By then, her 39-year-old mom was dying.

After her mom died, DiCristo says she had no choice but to live with her dad. But it didn't take long to burn every bridge with him.

"I wrecked my car twice and started using heroin with an aunt," she recalls. "I was tearing apart the whole family with one bad thing after another."

A few weeks before Christmas 2015, DiCristo says she overdosed in the middle of the night, collapsing on the floor unconscious. A week later, she entered the Teen Challenge 12-month program at Beauty for Ashes. As DiCristo started to adjust, she discovered she was pregnant, again.

By January 2016, DiCristo started attending church and participating in group Bible studies. Soon she surrendered her life to Christ, accepting Him as her Lord and Savior.

Through Beauty for Ashes, DiCristo, 19, has been learning how to be a mom to James, now 3½ years old, as well as her 3-month-old daughter, Mercy.

DiCristo finishes the standard program soon and has jump-started her six-month re-entry phase by attending classes to become a medical assistant.

Armed with the life skills and support system she needs plus a vibrant relationship with the Lord, DiCristo faces the future knowing she's headed in the right direction. 

With 122,000 residents, Miramar, Florida, was the largest U.S. city without an Assemblies of God church — a fact Rios was unfamiliar with while living in Miramar and praying about starting a new church.

"We've come back and have an appreciation for the Fellowship of the Assemblies of God," Rios says. "When you taste something that you haven't had in a while, you savor it."

While the AG continues to grow in churches, it also has seen 26 consecutive years of growth in adherents in the U.S. The Fellowship has become increasingly diverse with 43 percent of adherents being nonwhite ethnic minority. Over half (53 percent) of the AG is under the age of

35.

CMN Director Chris Railey sees the historic milestone as a starting point, rather than a finish line.

"There are 33,000 communities in America and 13,000 AG churches," says Railey. "The work is not done in America. Because of globalization, the world is coming to us. One of the best ways to reach the world is right here in America. We want to provide the training, resources, and network to see a healthy church in every community in America."

The growth of the U.S. Assemblies of God is also seen around the globe. There are nearly 68 million AG adherents in over 365,000 churches throughout the world. 

A BEE-UTIFUL MINISTRY

BY DAN VAN VEEN

Bruce Snavelly followed in his father's footsteps as a minister — and a beekeeper!

Snavelly's abilities in beekeeping led to him being elected the Missouri State Beekeeping Association's Southwest Region area director in 2014.

But three years ago, beekeeping moved from a "passionate hobby" to a "life-changing missions ministry" for Snavelly.

"I was asked to go to India by an AG minister, where I taught efficiencies in beekeeping to about 15 beekeepers there," he says. Snavelly also helped form a co-op that would buy the honey and then sell it in larger cities at a higher price. The proceeds from the co-

op then benefit an indigenous Indian church and a Christian school, both located in a slum.

"The co-op sold enough honey to add 10 additional students and one more teacher to the school," Snavelly says. "That means 10 more kids learning about Christ's love, 10 more kids receiving an education, 10 more kids with a future."

Then, early in October 2016, Snavelly accompanied another missions team to Guatemala to teach beekeeping to leaders at a Christian children's home. He believes that in a few years, the same kind of success the beekeepers in India have experienced will be replicated in Guatemala. 