



March 2012

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# Black History Month: A Celebration for All People

By Carl Stagner

Picture a room filled with spirited praise—hands lifted, voices raised in gospel accord—and you’ve got a sense of a typical worship service in congregations such as Martin Street Church of God in Atlanta, Georgia. Throw in choirs, guest speakers, skits, liturgical movement, and a community feast, and you’ve got a sense of the month of February in many of our Church of God congregations. During February—Black History Month—expect lively celebration, tender reflection, and joyful thanksgiving that only firsthand experience can truly describe.

Martin Street Church of God has a long history of commemorating the contribution of blacks to society. Bill Dennis, music director, explained that this year the church celebrated Black History Month by involving the children in a variety of skits that dramatically portray African American individuals who have had great success as inventors, scientists, sports icons, church leaders, and so on.

Gail Carter, minister at several Church of God congregations in Arizona over the years, recalls the Black History Month celebrations held at Central Phoenix Church of God. “We dressed in African American garb. There were special dinners and plenty of soul food, songs, and one family in the church brought African dance and songs to deliver.” Central Phoenix Church of God was composed of multiple cultures, so one year, as Gail recalls, the pastor organized “an international dinner during Black History Month to include everyone. Whatever background you were, you brought in dishes from your own heritage.”



Elica Jennings prepares food for the Black History Month celebration at Central Phoenix Church of God.

Worship services during the month of February at Central Phoenix Church of God were intentionally planned to highlight a specific period of black history. From spirituals to gospel praise, from the classic “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” to the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir’s “In the Name of Jesus,” the whole spectrum of African American music was covered.

Why is it so important that Black History Month be observed? Gail emphasizes the importance of remembering the facts of the past, such as the Jewish holocaust, to prevent history from repeating itself. “They say if you don’t remember it and warn people, it could happen again.” African Americans have made major contributions to the church and culture, yet history books and common knowledge often overlook this truth. For African Americans in the Church of God, observance of Black History Month is not just an opportunity for worship and celebration, but also for education.

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# From the Ball Field to the Field of Souls

By Carl Stagner

When life throws you a curve ball, what do you do? How do you respond? For Rev. Carlos Sanchez, it was the biggest curve ball of his life, but it was one he was overjoyed to receive. Once a baseball player in the minor leagues, this curve ball didn't strike him out—it struck him into the kingdom of God.

Sanchez grew up in the Dominican Republic, and like many youth from



Carlos Sanchez

the region, he set his eyes on a career in baseball. During his four-year stint with the San Francisco Giants' minor league team, he trained with

baseball icons such as Sammy Sosa. Sosa had played for Texas and trained with the Giants in the Dominican Republic in the late 1980s. But all the glitz and glamour that came with a career in baseball could not compare to what God had planned for young Sanchez.

In January 1992, Sanchez surrendered his life to Christ. Just two months later, he began to preach the gospel with unbridled passion. "So many things happened, and so many people came to Christ," Sanchez recalls. Still, he felt like God was calling him to do much more. He attended seminary in New York with the desire to not only learn more about God but also learn how to "keep the converts in the church." When his nose wasn't in the books, his "beautiful feet" (Is 52:7) were taking him to churches far and near with the good news about Christ. He evangelized openly on the streets, in the parks, and just about anywhere he could strike up a conversation.

After Sanchez moved to North Carolina, he started meeting with people

in a house-church setting. God blessed the group and it grew. Sanchez was later introduced to the Church of God and soon met Jim Johnman, director of evangelism and church planting for the Hispanic Council. Jim and Sanchez discussed the beliefs and doctrines of the Church of God at great length, and Sanchez was very happy with what he learned. Jim encouraged Sanchez many times to accept pastoral positions, but Sanchez cited his call to evangelism, not pastoring. Sanchez remembers thinking, "I don't think I want to work with pastoring right now. I like being an evangelist."

"One day," Sanchez continues, "I was driving a truck and Jim called me and said there's a door open in Chicago. Jim urged me to go with him to Chicago. 'We have to go to Chicago,' he said." Sanchez was unsure, but God revealed to him that he was to go. Then, as Sanchez puts it, "God planted my heart in Chicago."

Many organizations, including the Concilio and Illinois Ministries of the Church of God, assisted Sanchez's start in pastoral ministry in the Chicago area. "When we came here to Chicago, I came with no one. It was starting from the ground up, and it was not easy. It was scary, but I was so excited. Pastor Eric Livingston was an inspiration to me. He opened his heart to me, and every time I had a question, he was there."

Sanchez went to the Laundromats, the parks, the supermarkets, and the car wash, and talked to everybody he could about the new church. He and his ministry leaders took names and phone numbers of everyone they met on the street. On the day the church plant was launched, they had forty-three people. Today, Iglesia de Dios Northwest sees 275 people each weekend.

Recently, the church in which they



meet has decided to give the facility to Iglesia de Dios Northwest because they're so happy to see what God has done in Spanish-speaking ministry.

So, how does planting and leading a church compare to baseball? "Baseball players need to work very hard and follow instructions. You need to be in good condition to make it to the leagues. In ministry, you also need to follow instructions and be in very good spiritual condition. Thousands of people come to watch you play a baseball game, and the fans expect me to strike players out. As a preacher I need to depend on God to satisfy the needs of people who come to see. They know I am the preacher and I have something from God."

## CHOG Fast Fact

**E. W. Wimbish and other African American members of the Church of God held their first camp meeting at**



**West Middlesex, PA in 1917.**



# Black Heritage Inspires Unity for Church and Culture

By Carl Stagner

Each February, you can expect Cedar Avenue Church of God in Sharon, Pennsylvania to have a celebration unlike any other during the year. This congregation recognizes the importance of observing and celebrating Black History Month. From the music, to the cultural dress, to the teaching—February at Cedar Avenue was characterized by praising God for his grace given to people of all cultures.

As a part of the heritage of African American culture, the music ministry at Cedar Avenue led the congregation in at least one traditional song each week reflecting God's mercy and grace through generations of discrimination and struggle. "The singing of Negro spirituals and anthems is something that has been practiced over the years to remind the African American church of the sacrifices men and women have made to ensure we have the freedoms we enjoy today," Toia Huntley, research and development specialist at Cedar Avenue, explains. "These are songs of struggle, hope, pain, inspiration, but above all, faith in a God who has the power to deliver people from any situation, great or small."

Some of the songs that Cedar Avenue incorporates into Black History Month include spirituals like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," gospel favorites such as "We Shall Overcome," and classic arrangements such as "I Hear a Voice



A-Prayin'." Huntley reflects, "It is a blessing to participate in the singing of such life-enriching songs; they are a reminder of the loving and merciful God we serve."

Lest younger generations forget the lessons of history and the examples of God's work throughout the course of time, Cedar Avenue Church of God intentionally includes student leadership in their February worship services. Each Sunday in February, a student presented two important, but perhaps not well-known, black historical figures. A few of these lesser-known yet great contributors to society included abolitionist Frederick Douglas; Dr. Vivien Theodore Thomas, who developed, among other accomplishments, treatment for blue baby syndrome in the 1940s; and comedian Garret Morris.

"We believe it is necessary for young people to know where they've come from and the impact they've had, as well as to give them a source of inspiration," Huntley explains. She believes that these historical figures can be inspiration and perhaps a stepping stone from which young people can go on to accomplish great things as well.

Cedar Avenue Church of God believes that all churches, even those that are not historically black congregations, should recognize Black History Month. After

all, African Americans have made major contributions to American society. "Not because of disenfranchisement," Huntley explains. "Not because of affirmative action. African Americans who have made these significant marks in history should be celebrated because they have overcome the stigma that is attached to their race. It is a reminder that we are all members of one race—the human race—and they are all destined for greatness when we walk by faith and not by sight."

This year's celebration was powerful, but Huntley recalls some remarkably inspirational celebrations during years past: "Each year that we celebrate is a memorable one. However, last year's Black History Month brought something that enriched our worship service. Each month, our Creative Praise dance team presented either a liturgical dance or a mime. The presentation during February of 2011 was exceptionally well done. The children entered the sanctuary dressed in African garb and danced before God and his people in a mighty tribute to black history. It was an outstanding witness because it brought together generations of people and cancelled the assumption that today's young people have no connection to their black heritage. It was an awesome expression of both unity and worship."



The facilitators of the Black History Month celebration at Cedar Avenue: Pastor Charles W. Johnson and wife Crystal.

# My Experience at the North American Convention

By Twyla Webster

For many years, my parents took our family to the annual camp meeting in Anderson, Indiana. I always thought of it as our family vacation. We always camped near the old auditorium. Each time my husband and I go to the North American Convention, memories come flooding back to me. So many are funny family memories, but come time for evening service, everything got very serious.

When I walked on the camp grounds this year, as in every year, I sensed the Holy Spirit speaking: "I am here to pour out blessings for you this week, in this place, and for this time." Praying for the week's main speakers, session leaders, and all the workers behind the scene helped me to prepare for what God had in store for me.

Last year, for the very first time, I attended the Christian Women Connection breakfast. This event is planned for the women in the Church of God. Sharing with sisters in Christ is such an amazing time and is truly an event all ladies should never miss. God blessed me beyond anything I could have imagined and I will be there next year, Lord willing. Our plans are made for next year. Are yours?

Each evening worship service was spectacular. Each time, I said to my husband, "It just can't get any better." Each evening, God built on the evening before and manifested his glory more. Men and women of God were used to further his kingdom. If you were spoken to by the Holy Spirit, use what you heard and go forward.

The music was beyond belief. Every single evening there was an amazing worship leader, choir, singing, and instrumentalists. Heaven is going to be

outstanding. Wow!

During free time, people met with old and new acquaintances. As we sat under the shade trees talking and enjoying each other's company, God used friends to reach out and encourage, share, seek counsel, give advice, and pray for each other. Does this sound vaguely familiar?

Every session I attended was so well planned and used by God to minister his words to each of us individually. God spoke to me asking me to stretch out even more. Never had some of his urgings crossed my mind. Now he says for me to go, so I follow trusting him to guide and provide the way. Two years ago, his plan for my life was a secret goal. Not anymore! God has called me into his ministry. He wants to use "little ol' me." "Okay, Lord, I am ready, willing, and able with your guidance to go and do your will." Well, glory!

*Twyla Webster is the state president for Christian Women Connection in Alabama.*



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# Twice Thrown Away, Twice Retrieved

By Bernie Barton



*“He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.” (Psalm 40:2–3 NIV1984)*

Jesus is in the business of saving. When others grow weary, when others give up, when others lose hope, Jesus is there to lift us up out of the mire and set our feet on the rock. This is not only good news; it is the best news! The woman at the well, the Syro-Phoenician woman, blind Bartimaeus, Mary Magdalene, and so many others not only got a rough deal in life, but they were also judged and forsaken by those around them. Twice thrown away.

By the way, I have a new guitar. Well, it is not really *new*, but new to me. I got it out of the trash at school. Our business manager found three guitars in the neighborhood trash, picked them up, kept one for himself and threw the other two, which had parts broken and missing, into the school trash. Twice thrown away.

I found them, fixed them, gave one

to Tamagawa Church for the youth room, and kept one. Twice retrieved.

On January 30, Tamagawa Church of God once again visited the Kirigasaki Village temporary housing units in the mountains around Onagawa, a town swept away by the March 11 tsunami. I played my new guitar as we sang with these unreached folks: “In His time, in His time, He makes all things beautiful in His time...” Then I

gave a short talk from John 3:16, and told them about God’s love that continues to seek and to save the lost.

I told them how thrilled I was when I first heard music come once again from this twice-retrieved guitar—a guitar that had been thrown away two times but was now once again fulfilling the purpose for which it was made.

Then we prayed with them, that they might not lose hope and that they might learn to trust in the One who does not give up on us, the One who saves us and restores us to the purpose for which we have been made.

The next time I played my twice-retrieved guitar was at the national pastors meeting, held in early February. The theme for this year’s study was “Calling.” I was privileged to give a brief message for the opening worship.

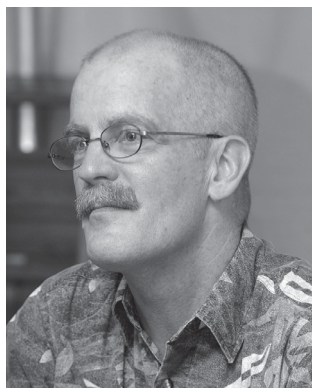
After sharing about my twice-retrieved guitar, and the visit to Onagawa, I reminded the pastors of a well-known Japanese poem

titled “The Canary That Lost Its Song.” While the early verses of the poem suggest throwing it away, burying it, or beating it, the final stanza exalts that “a ride on an ivory boat on the moonlit sea will help the canary remember its song.”

After a rich time of study and retreat—“a ride on the moonlit sea”—the pastors closed the three-day retreat by singing the canary poem together. Twice retrieved!

Please pray for the twenty-four ministers serving the Church of God in Japan as they fulfill the purposes for which they were called.

*Bernie Barton serves as your career missionary for Global Missions in Japan.*



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# 2011 NIYC: Equipping Youth for Evangelism

By Mary Baker Boudissa

From December 27 to 30, 2011, the National Inspirational Youth Convention took downtown Indianapolis by storm. The impact of two thousand youth engaged for Christ was evident from the Spirit-filled worship services, to the lobby of the Marriott, to the restaurants and shops in the city. What made their presence special was not the retail boost of young people from all over the United States; rather it was their unbridled enthusiasm for sharing God's word with anyone and everyone they encountered on the streets of Indianapolis. The food court at the Circle Center Mall was the site of conversations between NIYC delegates, inspired to share their faith, and shoppers who were willing to listen. The hotel lobby was the perfect evangelism training ground for delegates; working in groups of two or three, they approached guests to begin a conversation about salvation. The homeless that populate every downtown street corner received hats, gloves, and other gifts of love that brought warmth and were given along with a message of hope. These were items that delegates acquired by giving their own personal items in trade.

What inspired this evangelism blitz? The program for the 2011 NIYC, centered on the theme of "Evangelism through Diversity," was designed to challenge, inspire, and equip young Christians to answer the call to evangelize. "NIYC has always been a place of equipping," according to convention president Michael Thigpen. "We fellowship, we gather, we inspire; but it's an equipping place where young people are charged and ready to take hold of what God has given them: their voice." Throughout NIYC the diverse panel of workshop leaders and speakers emphasized the need for evangelism to cross cultural, racial, and social boundaries, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit and,



Dr. Rhonda Gibbs on the saxophone

as Thigpen characterized it, to "be the ambassadors God has called us to be."

Using the Great Commission as the foundation of his message, Mark Cahill kicked off the convention on Tuesday night with a challenge to the young people to share the good news with family and friends. "You have no biblical right to go to heaven by yourself," Cahill said. He implored the attentive young people to share their story now, because evangelizing is the one thing no one will be able to do in heaven. Cahill followed up the challenge with an evangelism boot camp on Wednesday morning, which helped participants approach witnessing as a conversation rather than as a presentation. He recounted anecdotes from his own encounters with famous as well as non-famous people on his evangelistic journey. Among them was a conversa-

tion on a golf course with Tiger Woods, where he posed this question to the champion golfer: "What do you think happens after you die?" The question opened the door for a discussion about God's commandments and the forgiveness offered through Christ Jesus, as it has many times in Cahill's travels. One crucial take-away from Cahill's message was this: the greatest weapon in the evangelist's arsenal is knowledge of the Bible, which allows you to counter misinformation and misdirection with truth.

The thousand plus NIYC delegates received more inspiration and wisdom for evangelism from Dr. Ronda Gibbs and Dr. Andy Stephenson. Dr. Rhonda opened Wednesday night by performing a song of praise on her saxophone, which

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# Church Restores Floor, Lives

By Chad Miller

**F**irst Church of God in Paragould, Arkansas, is getting a makeover with the help of volunteers who are getting makeovers of their own.

Pastor Kevin Edgar said the more than 100-year-old building that houses his church was in need of restoration, and when workers removed the carpet in one of the rooms, they discovered hardwood floor underneath. Edgar's wife, Danielle, said she and several parishioners, including several men from Shepherd's Fold Ministry and Grace Mission Bible Training Center rehabilitation centers, volunteered to restore the floor. Danielle said she had been directing the project to restore the floor for the past two weeks.

"They [volunteers] jokingly call me 'The General,'" Danielle said.

Kevin said the room was used as a sanctuary before the church "outgrew" it and moved to a bigger room. However, he said the old sanctuary looked "dreary" and needed to be "redone." Kevin said he originally planned to replace the carpet with linoleum or tile, but after seeing the hardwood floor underneath the carpet, he wanted to

restore it.

Danielle said the couple began the daunting process of scraping the glue off the floor with putty knives and realized they would need some help. She said she began asking for volunteers and got an immediate response.

"We had about four guys from Grace Mission Bible Training Center show up to help us pull the carpet up," Edgar said. "The next day, we had two more guys from Grace and seven guys from Shepherd's Fold."

Kevin said volunteers from The Sanctuary, another men's rehabilitation center, also helped work on the floor. He said the church's congregation included several people from area rehabilitation

centers such as The Agape House, Life-house Ministries, and The Center for Fathers and Families.

"We have a lot of recovering addicts attend our church," Kevin said. "Probably 70 percent of our church either is or has been addicted to something."

Richard Wall is one of the volunteers who worked on the floor. Wall is a former addict who now operates his own flooring business. He said volunteering his services was a way to thank the church for the positive influence it had on his life.

"It's all about how God has restored what the locusts have ate [in our lives]," Wall said. "If we stay faithful, the Lord will restore us. It's through the grace of God that my life is the way it is now."

Shepherd's Fold executive director Steve McCracken said the project to restore the floor was in line with the center's ultimate goal of restoring addicted men to being "productive members of society." He said it also followed the ministry's teachings of service to God.

"That's our home church," McCracken said. "We're all about being servants [of God] and giving back to the community. These men can relate to restoration because that's what is being done to them through the power of Jesus Christ. They're broken... kind of similar to an old floor. The floor gets battered and worn and has some rough spots on it. We naturally cover that up just like we might use carpet to cover an old floor. We use things like drugs and alcohol to cover up the ugliness in our lives. So these guys can definitely relate to restoration."

During the restoration project, Kevin said nearly 20 volunteers from the three rehabilitation centers worked on the floor. He said the carpet had been on the



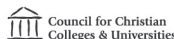
The finished product: a beautifully restored floor



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illustrated her message of using your God-given talents as a means of connecting to others. Of primary importance is having a right relationship with Christ and knowing that love for yourself, so it can be shared effectively with others. “When you’re doing evangelism,” Gibbs said, “you don’t have time for ‘sloppy agape!’” Gibbs went on to tell delegates to never depart from their love of Christ, and it would renew them for the work of evangelizing.

During Thursday’s morning service, Dr. Andy Stephenson told the story of King David as an example of how God uses even the most ordinary people to expand the kingdom. “God can use you, even with all of your scars,” Stephenson told the delegates. In a very personal and poignant message, he reminded delegates that God’s grace transforms our deepest wounds into something that helps us to empathize and connect in meaningful ways.

Stephenson and Gibbs also brought home the idea that was at the heart of the NIYC—that evangelism has to be done with the vision of one church in mind. Put simply, salvation is a message that Christ intended for everyone to hear, that all might be saved. Gibbs suggested that evangelism through diversity begins with an extended hand and the word “Hello.” Stephenson reminded delegates, “We are all family.”

Additional highlights of NIYC includ-



Participants were asked to Facebook their NIYC experience during Wednesday evening’s worship service.

ed workshops on prayer, worship, and maintaining sexual purity and modesty, with separate sessions for young men and young women. On Thursday night, several past NIYC presidents joined Michael Thigpen on stage and were recognized for creating a legacy of leadership. Special sessions for children (King’s Kidz) and daily choir rehearsals culminated in dramatic performances and a concert during the final service on Friday. All of the services at the NIYC were enhanced by the Holy Spirit-filled music of worship leader Freddy Rodriguez. For Thigpen, it was worship that was the true highlight: “All of us being together, in one place, worshipping

God—black, white, young, old—under one heaven. It was awesome!”

The end of 2011 also marked the final NIYC under the leadership of President Thigpen, who summarized the event in this way, “When I see young people going out and reaching the lost, reaching the homeless, telling their stories, serving those who need to be served—those things give me hope. As the body of Christ, all we have to do is get activated, and NIYC is an opportunity to be activated.”

*Mary Baker Boudissa is the chief of strategic communications at Church of God Ministries in Anderson, Indiana.*

## Restored Floor

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floor since the 1990s, and it took three days to remove the glue.

“They didn’t aim for [the carpet] to go anywhere,” Kevin said. “It [removing the glue] was hard work.”

The Edgars said the volunteers were eager to “give that floor a second chance” as the volunteers themselves get a second chance at life. Kevin said

the church recently celebrated its 100th birthday and the floor being restored was at least 70 years old.

“It [the floor] has got character flaws,” Danielle said. “That’s what makes it beautiful to me.”

McCracken said the men at Shepherd’s Fold “take pride in bringing out the beauty in things.”

“They can relate on the basic level of finding the good in anything,” he said. “Although it’s kind of hard to do that in society and the world...they take pride in doing that.”

*This article was originally published by The Paragould Daily Press on February 12, 2012. Republished by permission.*



# 5 Principle Training Equips Leaders

By Eric Reeder

The 5 Principle Training System was developed in conjunction with the SHAPE initiative of the Church Of God, using the five principles of Spirituality, Vision, Leadership, Knowledge/Culture, and Relational/Connectivity. We believe that these five principles are valued across cultures. In January 2008, the 5 Principle Training System was piloted with leaders in Africa. Our dream is for this system to be a

tool that local, state/provincial, regional, and national leaders around the world can use to train future leaders.

Since 2008 the national Youth Ministry Team and Youth Network Team have taken the 5 Principle Training system to Africa, South America, Europe and Asia, along with translated versions of the training, ready to pass it off to leaders in these regions so that they can continue to train leaders in their regions. Each training event has proven to be very effective, encouraging, and empowering for the people who have experienced it. God is at work and is using this tool to help equip leaders and emerging leaders around the world.

The power of God at work through the 5 Principle Training system is incredible. The kingdom is being expanded. While in Russia this past summer, we were amazed at how God used this tool to inspire and equip the students and leaders. One day, after we had done the training on leadership, two young leaders who were from the Church of God in Germany approached me. I had no idea



they were attending the training. It was a God-at-work moment. They were so inspired by the 5 Principle Training system that they wanted to know how they could take it with them back to Germany! We got them copies and information so that they could themselves take the training to Germany and use the it to invest in leaders.

It is exciting to see God's plan in action, expanding the kingdom and vision of the church and leadership around the world! The 5 Principle Training system is one tool that God is using to help raise up leaders who are better equipped to serve God and make a difference for God in their communities.

The 5 Principle Training system is available on our Church of God youth website, [www.chogy.org](http://www.chogy.org). This tool is a free download and resource that you can use to help train leaders in your church and ministry.

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## Black History Month

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What about predominantly white congregations? How might they honor the contribution of blacks to the church and culture? “Look up information about the contribution of blacks in America through history up until today,” Bill suggests. “Often we miss blacks’ contribution from many years ago. For example, a black man created the stop light system. Little things that we take for granted, blacks have had an important contribution in. Try researching black history and let that be a starting point.” Gail adds that churches can schedule guest African American speakers, choirs, and show tangible expressions of love to blacks in their community.

The Church of God at its ideal has purposed to see the walls of division between cultures crumble. Gail believes the message of the Church of God has been important to blacks. “The message of personal holiness, unity, and love should bind us together. It all boils down to the heart.”

When asked about the importance of the message of the Church of God to African Americans, Bill replies, “We don’t even look at it that way. The message of the Church of God is simply important to all mankind.”

*This article was originally published in February 2011.*



# Elevating Our Praise Standards

By Sam Collins

When some people talk about praising God, they seem to be describing something that requires leotards, sweatbands, a quadrupled pulse rate, and an attendant with a defibrillator on standby. In the spirit of “be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10 NIV), my praise responses are a bit more sedate. By outward appearances it’s sometimes difficult to tell whether I’ve been seized by the Spirit or hit by an elephant tranquilizer dart.

There are other folks who are convinced that doctrinal purity best honors the Almighty. At points in our history, elements of the Church of God reformation movement have taken that position and maintained that those who disagree with our estimate of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin are unworthy of a reservation at the kingdom banquet table. (Although, to be clear, our angels never dance—they form a circle on the head of the pin, join hands, and sing heritage hymns.)

Don’t misunderstand; I am not knocking praise accompanied by body English and a peppy beat. Nor do I intend to imply that doctrine is unimportant and that we can believe pretty much whatever we like so long as we flutter our eyelashes and feign utter sincerity. Nevertheless, the Bible indicates that there’s a bit more to praising and honoring the Lord than emotional intensity or jot-and-tittle adherence to a set of rigorous understandings, otherwise every church worship team would feature at least one priest of Baal (1 Kings 18:25–29)

and every board of elders would include a card-carrying Pharisee.

In the epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul points to an element of praising and honoring God that we can easily fail to grasp and neglect to practice: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom 15:7 NIV). I know; accepting other people sounds so passive and wimpishly accommodating. But, in reality, there are few things more demanding than turning ultimate judging responsibilities over to God and responding to others with the grace that Christ has shown to us.

Accepting others is not synonymous with condoning anything anyone deigns to do. But it does mean opening our arms wider than many of us are inclined to, which in some cases is barely wide enough to hug a single uncooked strand of spaghetti.

Paul’s rule of thumb is that we should accept one another as fully as God did when he covered the foulest of our sins with the blood of Christ. Unless we are willing to do that, it’s impossible for us to jump high enough or become doctrinally pure enough to offer God the praise and honor he desires.

*The views expressed in this column are not necessarily those of Church of God Ministries or, at points, even the writer, but are written with tongue firmly planted in cheek to hopefully provoke a leavening bit of laughter and a smidgen of thought.*



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