



An Awesome Time of Renewal

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are beyond compare! Like most of you, I used to observe another occasion commonly associated with this time of year. It has its accoutrements and attractions to be sure. My ethnic identity is known for creating intricate decorations on small elongated orbs. There are special dishes and foods associated with this occasion as well. However, none of this compares with the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The spring festival season is a time of remarkable renewal. This is especially evident the more we read and study the Holy Bible and the more times we observe the spring festivals year by year.

We might ask ourselves why observing the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread doesn't get old, routine or common place. Our Creator has spaced His festivals in such a way that they seem new as each season rolls around. But more

than that, we see and experience a very real and pressing need to observe these special biblical Holy Days.



photo by Constantin Popp on Unsplash

After we observe the annual Passover Service, we travel home feeling sobered but also inspired and reassured. Usually we see the radiant full moon overhead and are reminded of the sacred calendar. We remember that it is the middle of the first month even as the opening night of the Feast of Tabernacles occurs in the middle of the seventh month. We will have renewed our covenant with God by personally partaking of the symbols of

Christ's suffering and death. The next evening we meet with fellow believers to share a meal during the Night To Be Much Observed. The two occasions are related but have a very different purpose and impact.

Thereafter, we embark on observing seven consecutive Days of Unleavened Bread. Significantly we have a commanded assembly on the first day and also on the seventh day. This year we have the special experience of a double Sabbath on the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

What a joy it is to spend so much time together with fellow Christians observing the festivals which so poignantly teach us about God's remarkable plan of salvation. This awesome plan would have no basis without the sacrificial death of the Son of God and then the requirement for us to live transformed lives after accepting that priceless sacrifice on our behalf.

Do let the spring festival season in 2019 be a time of wonderful and wondrous renewal in your spiritual journey. We have so much to look forward to. We have so much to be thankful for. May the articles in this issue of *United News Canada* help you along the way.

Anthony Wasilkoff

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Condemnation

Condemn and condemnation are words that bring negative thoughts to our minds. They mean to pronounce guilt and (pass) sentence (according to *Chamber's Concise Dictionary*). In the spiritual realm, the word "condemn" has meaning for eternity. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* explains that the Greek word *krima* denotes the sentence pronounced, a verdict, a condemnation, and the decision resulting from an investigation. It can also be the process leading to a decision. Another Greek word, *krisis* denotes the process of investigation and the act of distinguishing and separating, hence a judging, a passing of judgment upon a person or thing. *Krisis* can sometimes have the meaning of 'condemnation' and is virtually equivalent to *krima*.

When Peter wrote that judgment has begun at the house of God, he used the Greek word *krima* (1 Peter 4:17). Jesus spoke of judgment and used the word *krisis* to convey His meaning (Matthew 23:33). He was speaking to the scribes and Pharisees and warned about the "condemnation of hell."

The words condemn and condemnation occur about 65 times

in the Bible. Words like judge and judgment occur hundreds of times. Jesus spoke about judging and condemnation in the book of John. He stated: "and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

In the King James Bible, "damnation" is used while the New King James uses "condemnation" and some translations use the more neutral word "judgment" in this verse. It is sobering to read these words and they ought to give a person a strong reason for self-examination.

Some in the modern Christian world have decided that there is no condemnation or damnation at all. The teaching is that the death and sacrifice made by the Father in sending His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to die for mankind has removed any guilt or reason for judgment no matter what a person does in their life.

One evangelist spoke strongly about the account of a woman being caught in adultery and being brought before Jesus to be stoned. The scribes and Phari-

sees specifically brought the woman to Jesus to see what He would say about the sentence of Moses of death by stoning. In this beautiful account, Jesus knowing exactly what they were thinking seemed at first to ignore them and finally simply said: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." There was something very special about Jesus, because humans have a great ability to shut their eyes to their own sin, but in this case, slowly, one by one the accusers left. Then Jesus turned to the woman to ask if anyone had condemned her and she said "no one" whereupon Jesus said: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:3-11). The evangelist joyfully used this account to state that no matter what we do, we cannot be condemned.

At times, God responded with great anger and fury against the sins people committed. Finally, He sent Jesus "not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16, 17). There is a great error in understanding to think that God no longer condemns a person for their sins.

When Peter wrote about the

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judgment that had already begun in the body of Christ he also cautioned strongly that if the righteous are “scarcely saved” then the ungodly and sinners have no chance (1 Peter 4:18). Also in the account of the woman, the admonition to her was to “go and sin no more.” Clearly one’s actions were to be carefully examined in light of the forgiveness God offers.

When Jesus was sent to save this world, God did not offer an ironclad promise of eternal life to everyone even if they are evil and sinful. He sent Christ so that the possibility of salvation would be given. “That the world through him might be saved” clearly shows it is a possibility and not a certainty. The woman was forgiven because she was repentant, and Jesus gave her instruction to go and sin no more. That is the same instruction that is given to Christians.

Paul wrote in a clear and powerful way that Christ was sent as a gift from God resulting in justification, not condemnation, and that grace abounded (Romans 5:16, 20). He went on to say that since grace has been offered, we should not live in sin any longer (Romans 6:1-40).

Repentance involves the grateful receiving of the wonderful gift of forgiveness God offers. Then, knowing the great cost to God, we struggle with all our might to avoid sinning again. It is the same message

given by the disciples of Jesus Christ at Pentecost after Jesus left them. Peter said to those who were cut to the heart by the knowledge that they were responsible for the death of Christ that they were to repent—meaning to acknowledge sin and go the opposite way—and be baptized in Jesus’ name for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:36-42). They then continued steadfast in the doctrines taught by the disciples. These people were Jews who knew the law of God thoroughly, and recognized the need for a Redeemer and Saviour.

Paul most certainly did not believe that “once saved, always saved” or that no matter what a person did, God understood and washed it away with Jesus’ blood. Paul warned converted people, teaching them that once they had accepted the forgiveness of God in Christ and then fell away without repentance, it would be impossible for them to be renewed (Hebrews 6:4-8). His lesson was that if the result or product of conversion brought bad fruit it would be rejected and burned.

Jesus later inspired John to write words of caution to the seven churches which were in Asia (Revelation 2 and 3). These were baptized members who had begun to “go and sin no more” when they had been forgiven. They were clearly in danger if they lost their zeal and fell back into sexual sin or idolatry or any other form of sin. The danger was death

in the lake of fire (Revelation 2:11).

Condemnation is real and does exist. The gift of forgiveness was costly to God and must be treasured by all who accept that gift. It does not give us the right to simply live as we please because God “understands” our many needs and weaknesses and so will not judge and condemn us because Jesus’ death has supposedly cancelled the commandments of God that define sin.

The reality is that God truly does understand us. God knows that we humans will take the wide and easy road given the chance (Matthew 7:13-17). He knows that Satan is our enemy, and God demands that we resist Satan and anything that is evil (1 Peter 5:6-10). At our resistance, Satan must leave. Our resistance to sin as defined by God is what allows His nature to grow within (2 Peter 1:1-4). The nature of God is to hate sin and evil. Peter was always concerned that people would be led away with the error of the wicked (2 Peter 3:17).

Judgment is a process that could lead to condemnation. God wants everyone to be saved. He knows that all who refuse and turn away will have to be condemned to death for all eternity (Revelation 20:13-15). Never let Satan lead you against God as he did Adam and Eve, saying “you shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Satan is a liar.

Online Donations

Any and all donations to the United Church of God-Canada (UCG-Canada) are greatly appreciated. They allow us to fulfill our mission and goals.

For almost three years we have been accepting online donations. Interest in using this tool has increased steadily. Last year's rotating strikes at Canada Post created even more interest in donating online. Nevertheless, even in this age of technology, we still accept traditional donations by cheque, money order and cash.

Please be aware, however, that cash donations sent through the mail are highly discouraged. All carriers of mail or packages state they are not responsible for any losses. Put another way, if someone sends us cash and it does not arrive at our office, the carrier will not cover the loss. On the other hand a cheque or money order can be cancelled if the donation is not deposited and recorded in a timely manner.

What alternatives are available for donating to the United Church of God-Canada? We currently have two methods in place and are looking into others

that will work well for both the donor and for the UCG-Canada.

One method to donate online is to go to our website: <https://www.ucg.ca>. At the top of the page, on the very right, is a "Donate" button. Click on the button and follow the instructions.

A second method is to send an e-transfer. This is a transfer of funds from the bank account of your choice directly to the UCG-Canada bank account. To use this method please be aware of the following requirements:

For the payee e-mail address please specify online_donations@ucg.ca. In the notes or message box, please include your index number (C followed by 10 digits), your name, and the fund to which you are donating; i.e. First tithe/

offering (1T/O), Festival Fund (FF), Assistance Fund (AF), or Holy Day Offering (specifying the Holy Day by name). If you are not in our database and would like to be receipted for your donation we will also require your complete address.

One very important step in using the e-transfer method: be sure to let us know the answer to your question. The answer should be sent via a separate email to online_donations@ucg.ca. Completing this step makes the donation much easier and more accurate. It also means we won't have to contact you requesting the needed information.

These are the two methods currently available for donating online. We are exploring more options and will keep our members, co-workers and donors apprised of any new developments.

Again, all donations are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about donating online please contact our office by phone (800-338-7779) or by email at: online_donations@ucg.ca.

Edwin van Pelt



Coming Soon!

Once again this summer, each church member of each official congregation will have the opportunity to help choose someone from the congregation to be considered for selection to the National Council. Why do we

do that?

When the United Church of God-Canada was first incorporated, it was recognized that there had to be a board created for the charity. Those meeting

to begin the process consisted of individuals from across the country who were instrumental in starting the congregations that then existed. As a group they decide that there should be representatives from across

Canada – some elders and some laymembers.

This process was written into the Bylaws of UCG-Canada. Because of having laymembers serve on the board, there also had to be a definition of laymembers. The definition reads: “The term ‘laymember’ as used in these Bylaws is a person whose baptism has been recognized by the United Church of God – Canada as valid, who is in good standing as defined by the Church, who is enrolled on the corporate books as a member of the United Church of God – Canada and who has not been ordained as an Elder.”

In addition to the need for this definition for the balloting process, the privacy laws in Canada rate someone’s religious preference as being high on the privacy list. Thus, we have to be careful not to call someone a “member” without express permission to do so.

As a result, a Membership

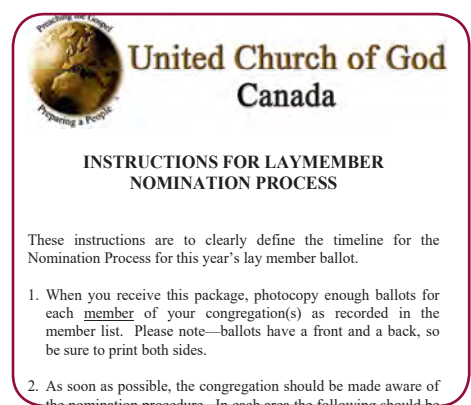
Form was created. If you have not submitted a membership form, then UCG-Canada cannot state that you are a member even though you have been baptized. On the other hand, filling in the form does not come with any strings attached. It merely gives the church permission to change your status from “associate” to “member” while giving you the right to take part in the laymember selection process if you so choose. If you are not a member but would like to be, contact your pastor who can assist you with this.

Soon there should be a list of all official members of your

congregation posted in your congregation. These are those who will be eligible to take part in the balloting to select a representative from your congregation (from that same list). It will also show who in the congregation is eligible to be selected. Each congregation will have the opportunity to put forward a name to be put on the ballot for National Council. From that ballot, one of the laymembers put forth will be chosen by the National Conference to serve a three-year term on the National Council.

There have been many good candidates put forward by congregations through the years. Not all have had the opportunity to serve a term, but their participation in the process is greatly appreciated. Those who have served have come from across Canada and from both large and small congregations giving a wide variety of experience and valuable input.

UNC



provided by United Church of God-Canada

Council Update

The last National Council meeting of 2018 was held by WebEx on December 17. As usual, the meeting began by adopting the minutes of the previous meeting.

This was followed by reading the Council Code of Ethics by Jim Lucas, the Chairman of the Governance Committee. Thereafter, the newest member of the

National Council, Paul Wasilkoff, gave an ice-breaker.

The main items of business during each December meeting are to approve an Operations Plan and the Budget to present to the National Conference for their ratification. The 2019-2020 Operations Plan and 2019-2020 Budget were adopted and will be presented to the

National Conference for their approval in March 2019.

The next meeting of the National Council will be held on March 11, 2019, again by WebEx. A face-to-face meeting will be held in Toronto in June. This will be followed by an all-Canada Ministerial Conference.

Council Secretary

Spring Holy Days

God created man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27) from the dust of the ground with the great purpose of making him part of His Kingdom as spirit beings. Man was in harmony with God until Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered into the world. All have sinned (Romans 5:12). As we know, the penalty of sin is death and every human would be doomed to die without God's intervention.

How can man be saved from this sure death? This is what we know as God's plan of salvation. Jesus Christ started His ministry with the message "repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand" opening the door to His kingdom and thus offering it to more people than ever before.

Further instruction was given by Peter to repent, be baptized and receive God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). These steps are related to spring festivals (Passover, Days of Unleavened bread and Pentecost) which show the conversion process of man from physical to spiritual beings. These three festivals describe God's plan of salvation. They show that any human, with God's calling and help, can become converted and then become spirit beings in God's Kingdom.

Passover

John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God is

not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). In this plan, Jesus paid the death penalty for all mankind with His own blood. He died as the sacrifice to reconcile man to God.

Days of Unleavened Bread

God's payment for the death penalty does not happen automatically. Every human should avail themselves of it by repentance, baptism and receiving God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

The Days of Unleavened Bread describe our part in God's plan of salvation. Here we are instructed to remove leavening from our homes and to eat unleavened bread for seven days (Exodus 12:15). During that time, leaven represents sin and therefore we are instructed to remove sin out of our life. This is done through repentance and baptism for the remission of our sins. The instruction to not eat leavened bread represents overcoming sins. Then the instruction to eat unleavened bread during the seven days shows that we must grow in God's grace and knowledge. In other words it means replacing our sinful life with God's way of sinless life.

Pentecost

Jesus Christ died to pay for the death penalty that results from man's sins. But His help did not stop there; it continues with the Feast known as Pentecost.

We need His Spirit in order

to understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:11). In addition, God also knows that we are helpless against our enemies (Satan, our carnal nature and the world) because we are missing one of the main ingredients that will help us follow and obey God – His Holy Spirit.

We believe that all who truly repent of their sins are willing to obey God, and who, by faith, accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour can have their sins forgiven by an act of divine grace. Such individuals are justified, pardoned from the penalty of sin and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which literally abides within them and supplies the divine love that alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness. They are baptized into the body of Christ, which is the true Church of God. We believe in a true change in life and attitude. Only those who have the indwelling presence of and are being led by the Holy Spirit are Christ's (Romans 8:9). Pentecost also describes the first harvest for those whom God called to be part of the first resurrection.

The spring festivals (Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost) portray God's plan of salvation. They show that Jesus paid the penalty for mankind. They also show the need for forgiveness of sins, the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the need to continue overcoming and living God's way of life.

Sixto Yap

Member Profile: Marjorie Aitken

The world was quite a different place when Calgary United Church of God member, Marjorie McConnell, was born at Clover Bar, Alberta, east of Edmonton, on December 4, 1918, to James and Matilda McConnell.

The average life expectancy for men was 47 years. Fuel for cars was sold in drug stores only. Only 14 percent of the homes had a bathtub. Only eight percent of homes had a telephone. The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 miles per hour. The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.

Marjorie would go on to live through the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II. These were by far the most tumultuous years of the twentieth century.

Marjorie's father, James, was a hunter and the family owned a farm. She had nine siblings: two brothers, six sisters and one who died in infancy. James at some point became a member of the Seventh Day Adventist church.

During the Great Depression, Marjorie managed to find work as a furrier at Shillington Furs in Edmonton. By 1941 she had met and married Louis Aitken, the son of English immigrants, and they had a daughter named Marilyn. Louis served with the Canadian Army in Europe for five years before thankfully returning safely and in one piece. His brother, George, flew Spitfire fighters in the Royal Canadian Air Force and was shot down three times.

The first time was over the English Channel. Fortunately, the German pilot who downed him circled at a low enough altitude that Royal Navy rescue launches could find him and fish him out of the water. Two more times George would have his Spitfire shot out from under him, but he managed to escape with his life and make it back to England each time—an adventure not many of us would care to repeat!



provided by Rainer Salomaa

Marjorie also related that another person she knew during the war had been shot down in his fighter plane and been taken prisoner by the Germans. He told her they treated him well enough but he almost starved to death in the POW camp because they did not supply the prisoners with enough to eat.

Following the war Marjorie's husband worked for Palm Dairies in Edmonton. They then retired to Creston, British Columbia, and were able to spend their winters in warm and sunny Arizona. Eventually they returned to Edmonton and finally to Calgary where Marjorie lives to this day.

Marjorie attended the United Church of Canada with her husband until 1999 when he passed away. Then in 2005, she met a member of the United Church of God who told her about the command to keep the seventh day Sabbath. Interested, Marjorie began attending the Calgary UCG congregation and was eventually baptized, becoming a well-loved and regular attendee who enjoyed a satisfying meal out and glass or two of wine well into her nineties!

Marjorie has one daughter, six grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren!

On turning 100 years of age, Marjorie received congratulatory letters from Alberta Lieutenant Governor Lois E. Mitchell, Alberta Premier Rachel Notley, Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Queen Elizabeth II.

These days Marjorie is restricted to a nursing home due to health concerns but UCG and other church of God members in Calgary visit her on a regular basis, and she is a joy for anyone who visits her. She loves to talk about the God and the Bible and though inhibited by the effects of a recent stroke, she is a lively person to talk with and especially loves to visit with members in the home's indoor gardens with its large variety of exotic plants, as well have a McDonald's McChicken sandwich every Tuesday courtesy of Anne Poffenroth.

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"Father" from page 16

Jesus Christ taught the way of compassion, kindness and forgiveness. He told His disciples to "turn the other cheek," "let them take your coat," "go the extra mile" and not to pass by on the other side when an enemy is in trouble but stop and help him. Peter probably found the idea of forgiving the other fellow seven times seventy times a tad difficult, but how often does God forgive us in our lifetimes?

Our Lord, even when He was subjected to a "kangaroo" court, found guilty on trumped-up charges, flogged and then nailed to the cross, asked His Father to please forgive them! But His Father was suffering terribly at that same time: imagine His tremendous personal pain as He witnessed what they were doing to His beloved Son, yet held back His fierce anger in keeping with the pact that He and His Son had made in the beginning. It is impossible for us to imagine what might have happened had God given vent to His wrath! He did not, and so that astounding day of Passover in A.D. 31 will resonate throughout eternity to the everlasting glory of the victorious Jesus Christ.

Jesus died the most miserable excruciating death even as He prayed for those hate-filled priests, the jeering mob and the indifferent soldiers gambling for His clothes. The crowd taunted Him to come down from the cross if indeed He was the Son of God. He could have done it! But rather, exercis-

ing superhuman self-control, He pleaded that they might be forgiven! So He gained mercy for them, for all of us and for all people of all the ages. Redeemed from eternal death, we may be joined to Him in everlasting joyful life.

Jesus Christ knew, long before time began for mankind, that injustice would be a major issue. Satan would be allowed to continue his subtle, tempting ways whilst mankind was given freedom of choice. Jesus remained well aware of the Plan of God, which mere humans hardly suspect. But whether men understand it or not, when they harbour grudges and unforgiving attitudes, they harm only themselves. Inability to forgive blinds us to the real needs of others, especially those who have wronged us. A wise maxim of indigenous people is, "Walk a mile in the other man's moccasins" before judging him. Good advice and you don't need to borrow his shoes to do it!

Imagine how baffling it must have been for people gathered around Jesus on the Mount almost 2,000 years ago when He said: "...bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..." (Matthew 5:44-45). This is where we need to ask God for the Holy Spirit to give us minds to enable us to think as He does and to forgive. Don't feel bad if you still feel offended. It isn't as if a warm glow of satisfaction will envelop you immediately, but we must learn not to hate or bear grudges. God is the judge, and He will settle

things with everyone in His own good time. If God dealt with offences right away, it might make things nice and easy, but would we be learning to love our enemies, praying for them and hoping that they might be blessed? In fact, would we ourselves even survive?

God has allowed us the choice between good and evil, letting Satan in to the Garden of Eden when He could so easily have kept him out. But it is vital that we learn to choose rightly now. Our Father will not allow Satan or his followers into the New Heaven which He planned long ago. That glowing universe will be populated by beautiful spirits, not by a bunch of rebellious kids! That is why Christians are well advised to, "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). It is not a matter of being "nicey-nice", but of living by the law on a spiritual plane. Unforgiving attitudes belong to this world, and are promoted by the god of this world who will not be in the world to come, the magnificent New Earth at the centre of immaculate New Heaven.

At the the end of this age, planet Earth will be shaken out of place. The mountains will crumble, seas will roar over the land and millions will die. Meanwhile, we are reasonably comfortable, not suffering the daily oppression experienced by others. We go to church regularly and support the church. And was that perhaps how it was for folks in the time of Noah?

News From Across Canada

Toronto Post-Feast

The Toronto congregation has an annual post-Feast social. This year it was held on October 20. Prior to the Feast, members were encouraged to bring mementos from the Feast site they attended to give away during the social.

Following services, while the food was being prepared, members were treated to a slide show of photos from the different Feast sites that Toronto members attended. This allowed us to attend many different sites vicariously.



provided by Amy van Zant

Then it was time for our potluck. The tables were nicely decorated with an autumn theme and there was ample food for all with seconds for those who wanted them! Some individuals shared some of their special moments from the Feast. Then the “gifts” brought from the various sites were given out.

It was a wonderful reminder of the inspiring time that was had at the 2018 Feast of Tabernacles no matter which site was attended.

UNC

Kitchener Dance

On November 17, the Kitchener, Ontario, congregations of both United Church of God and Church of God International came together to host a Sabbath service followed by a dinner and dance.

A split-sermon format featured an opening message given by Adam Dubler, a CGI member. He spoke on the perils of pride using the biblical examples of Haman and Mordecai.

Special music was performed by Pat Ellis. Then Paul Waskoff, the pastor of the UCG-Canada Hamilton and Kitchener congregations, gave the second message speaking on the importance of leaving a good name as an inheritance to your children and grandchildren.



provided by Jim Lucas

Once services concluded, the congregations were treated to a wonderful potluck meal – the kind of meal that God’s church is famous for.

A fun twist to the dessert portion of the meal was a baking competition with prizes for the most creative and, of course, the

most delicious offering.

Adam Dubler provided the music for the dance where everyone had fun. Those who wished to participated in the limbo, line dances and the ever popular musical chairs. People, from the oldest to the youngest, spent time on the dance floor.

Special thanks go to Sue and Wally Loescher as well as Allison Dubler for the fun and beautiful balloon decorations throughout the hall.

Psalm 133:1 says “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” That spirit was definitely present throughout the day as people renewed old friendships and forged some new ones as well!

Everyone went home well fed (both spiritually and physically) and already look forward to the next time we can come together again in a spirit of Godly unity.

Jim & Almeda Lucas

Calgary Ordination

On the Sabbath of December 8, 2018, Warren Poffenroth was ordained into the ministry by Rainer Salomaa and Robert Berendt. There were 70 in attendance at that service, including Warren’s parents and his brother, Rob, who was visiting from Texas.

Warren was born in Decem-

ber 1965, and his family was called into the Church in 1970 when he was four years old. He has effectively spent his entire life in the Church. He was active in the Church's youth program and Y.O.U. Thanks to the many opportunities these provided, he was able to participate in many road trips all over Canada and the northern U.S.A., including seven trips to the Canadian national track and field events.

He grew up with a passion for sports and music and begged his parents to put him into piano lessons, which they could ill afford. When he was around 14 years old, he found himself in trouble with his pastor and figured that his best way out of the "doghouse" was to volunteer to play the piano for hymns and joined the rotation. At that time, the combined attendance in Calgary was about 600. In hindsight this was very much a turning point in his life, because he was asked by many people to accompany them for special music.

Warren says, "I was very shy at the time, and if it wasn't for serving, I would not have developed so many wonderful relationships, including the one where I ultimately found my soul mate and love of my life, Heidi.

"Like many young people growing up in the church, I wondered about whether I was truly called, and was terrified by the prospect of baptism. I re-

fused to graduate from Spokesman Club, for example, because I wasn't baptized, and I felt that the Number 12 (heart to heart) speech was inappropriate for an unbaptized member. It wasn't until I was 30 years old, when I was engaged for another lifetime commitment—marriage, that I knew I needed to show God that I was committed to keep the faith. I was baptized on July 13, 1996, and was married three weeks later on August 4." Warren and Heidi and have four boys aged 20, 18, 13 and 9.



provided by Rainer Salomaa

Warren goes on to say, "Being in a church congregation of less than a hundred people back in 1970, witnessing it grow to six hundred, only to have it nearly fall apart—our first UCG congregation in 1995 was less than one hundred—to see it dwindle to less than fifteen, has given me a profound appreciation and love for God's people. I have an intense, burning desire to see our scattered brethren united again. Although I realize this may not happen before the return of Jesus Christ, I have dedicated my being into using whatever influence I have to bridge gaps that the believers

have, organizationally or otherwise. We might need each other before the end."

Rainer Salomaa

Wild Game Social

On December 23, 2018, the annual tradition in Edmonton to gather at the Davis farm to celebrate the bounty of the hunting season, unite in fellowship and have fun. Many arrived before lunch, and the kids headed out to the big toboggan hill to go sledding. After a lunch of chili, kids and hockey lovers headed down to the pond for some skating fun. Those who preferred the comfort of the indoors played cribbage, chess and board games. An "Apples to Apples" game became a bit rowdy with much laughter and good natured teasing! The teens and two grandpas played a spirited game of "Telestrations" and a few older ladies organized a game of



provided by Charlie Ellison

dice. Tracey Jongerius provided beautiful background music with her harp.



Supper began at 5:00 with 66 people in attendance. The wild meat (deer, moose and elk) was roasted, barbequed and rotisseries. Potluck side dishes, potatoes, salads and desserts rounded out the meal.

It was an event enjoyed by all ages and certainly a tradition worth continuing!

Susan Davis

North Battleford Anniversary

On January 12, the North Battleford congregation presented Richard and Sharon Schempp with a cake, card and a small gift in honour of their 50th wedding anniversary.



provided by Adeline Sanoy

Richard and Sharon were married on January 11, 1969. They were blessed with three children, two sons and a daughter.

Richard and Sharon live in Neilburg, Saskatchewan. Before their retirement Richard was a carpenter as well as making bowls and other items. Sharon was the Neilburg librarian.

Richard and Sharon have been members of God's Church since the 1970's.

Adeline Sanoy

Prince George Outreach

Sarah Erickson from the Prince George congregation led a community outreach initiative to help clothe the needy.



provided by Tonya Erickson

The Prince George congregation donated quite a lot of clothing and household items. The collected items were donated to the local Elizabeth Fry Society and the Salvation Army.

Tonya Erickson

Edmonton Winter Social

January 12 was the Edmonton Winter Social celebrating the 23rd anniversary of the beginning of the United Church of God-Canada in Edmonton, Alberta. The first service was held on January 13, 1996, with 14 people in attendance. We have met in the same hall ever since. God has blessed us with remarkable continuity.

Our spiritual food began with a sermonette titled, "Confusion to Confidence" and presented by Jim Harrison who reminded us that God is not the author of confusion and gave us points on how to obtain the confidence God offers us.

The sermon entitled "Old Pharisees Die Hard" was provided by the pastor of the congregation, Michael Erickson. He referred to bad habits and old attitudes, leaving us with the admonition to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

After services, we were treated with a wonderful array of scrumptious food to nourish and give us energy for the variety show that followed our meal. There were 86 guests for dinner. While we ate our dinner, beautiful dinner music was played on the piano by several of our talented musicians.



provided by Wayne Ward

The variety show was emceed by two gentlemen from the congregation who kept things rolling along. The show included 13 acts and one impromptu singer. Participants ranged from five-years-old to 90-years-young, who performed songs, musi-

cal works, skits, stories, poems and even two hunters showing us how much effort is put into hunting these days.

We had a wonderful surprise for the day - a family of four who attended the first service with us and later moved away. They came to the social all the way from Florida. This meant that 13 of the 14 people at the first service attended the 23rd anniversary. We were so happy to see them.

It was an enjoyable evening for everyone. God has blessed us abundantly!

Lynne Broschak

Hamilton Fellowship

On February 2 the Hamilton congregation enjoyed a new type of social after services: Speed Fellowship.

After services, and before our customary refreshments, brethren gathered in the fellowship hall around one long table. The organizers, Mary Ann and Peter Halcrow, had a sheet of questions for each participant to act as a prompt or guide for the conversations to follow. The questions were geared to help us get to know one another on a deeper level.

We were allotted just a few minutes to have a question-and-answer session with our partner across the table. When our hosts stopwatch timer went off it was time to shift seats.

Upon the conclusion of the social, which lasted about half and hour we enjoyed our coffee and goodies. We plan to have follow-up socials in the near future so that we can have an opportunity to connect with everyone in the congregation.

Paul Wasilkoff

Kitchener "Snowcial"

Brethren in Kitchener enjoyed a special day of fellowship on February 23.

After services we congregated at the Ridi home for hot soup, chili and salads. After sunset the original plan included visiting a local ice skating rink. However, with warmer weather, this particular Sabbath, much of the ice was in poor condition. As a result our venue changed to a sledding hill located near by.



provided by Deb Cober

While the youthful among us enjoyed sledding, tubing and tobogganing, the rest of the attendees enjoyed conversations and snacks.

Leavening Agents

Each year, in preparation for the spring Holy Days, members of the Church of God engage in physical and spiritual inspection and clearing.

The items below are considered leavening agents and should be either used up or removed from our homes prior to the beginning of Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread:

- baking powder
- baking soda (sodium bicarbonate)
- monocalcium phosphate
- sodium aluminum phosphate (SALP)
- sodium acid pyrophosphate (SAPP)
- other phosphates
- ammonium bicarbonate (bakers ammonia)
- potassium bicarbonate (potash)
- sourdough
- yeast

The following are not leavening agents: brewer's yeast, yeast extract (a flavoring), corn starch and cream of tartar. Cream of tartar acts as a neutralizer when used with baking soda but does not, by itself, cause dough to rise and thus is not a leavening agent.

UNC

UNC

Our Appetites

A little while ago my family bought some new pets: a pair of budgies. We noticed that they really seemed to enjoy eating millet and tended to avoid the rest of their mixed pellet food. When we purchased stalks of millet and offered the clusters of millet to them they seemed to forget their distrust and/or hostility towards us and happily hopped onto our hand to eat to their fill.

Their appetite for millet led to change in their behaviour. There is a lesson here for us all regarding our appetites. One of the Beatitudes is “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

God granted us an awareness of our needs. When we are hungry or thirsty we feel weak, light-headed and even hear gurgling sounds emanating from behind our navel. Proverbs 16:26 summarizes our general existence: we work to be paid in order to buy more food. Our appetite drives that cycle. However, this does not mean that being hungry is bad! We just have to take care we are feeding ourselves what is good for us.

After Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and nights, He was tempted to turn stones into bread. His response was, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Christ didn’t forbid us the necessity of eating; He did highlight our need to have a steady spiritual diet from the Bible.

What about thirst? When Jesus spoke during the Feast in John 7 He declared, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” The living water He referred to is the Holy Spirit. When we attempt to find any substitute for living water we become like ancient Israel who abandoned their Creator and carved broken cisterns incapable of holding any water (Jeremiah 2:13). Only the Holy Spirit can provide a true quenching of our spiritual thirst.

Back to the beatitude, we are to hunger and thirst after righteousness. But whose definition of righteousness are we to use as the standard?

Isaiah 64:6 describes our inherent righteousness as rags; filthy rags, at that. We are grateful to have our unrighteousness cleansed when we repent. Clearly we are incapable of determining righteousness on our own.

Thankfully, God’s word defines righteousness as something simple, but not easy: “Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us” (Deuteronomy 6:25).

It is striking that Jesus admonished His follower to hunger and thirst *after* righteousness, not *about* righteousness. We are instructed in James 1:25 that our Christianity must have action. Revelation 19:8 echoes this assertion that our knowledge, our faith must be accompanied by action.

What should we then expect as a result of hungering and thirsting after Godly righteousness? When we ask Him and when we have demonstrated our commitment to Him how does God supply our needs? For an example of the opposite let me share a frustration I have when shopping. Why is it that when we purchase a bag of snacks (chips, popcorn, pretzels, for example) we receive half a bag of snacks and half a bag of air? Plastic condiment jars now have a substantial dimple in the base reducing the amount of goods in the jar. Cereal boxes have the same height and width, but now have a shallower depth. Yet the price remains the same, meaning we pay more per unit than we used to.

Not so with God: “For they shall be *filled*!” Our Heavenly Father is generous and is displeased by stinginess as seen in Proverbs 11:24-26. Furthermore, Jesus taught that when God gives He gives “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.”

Each year at the Passover we partake of two symbols: unleavened bread and wine. Do we hunger and thirst for the attributes symbolized by the bread and wine? Are we carefully monitoring our appetites and behaviours? Are we similarly monitoring what we spiritually eat and drink? As we hunger and thirst after righteousness our Father will be sure to fill us accordingly.

Paul Wasilkoff

Spring Cleaning

Cleaning prior to Unleavened Bread can be a chore to dread or a wonderful way to augment our preparation for Passover. Personally, I usually find that the amount of time and effort I spend in the physical cleaning aspect of my Passover preparation mirrors my spiritual preparation. But, after so many years of going through the motions, it is easy to either over-do or under-do the physical cleaning or, perhaps let it become mundane and meaningless.

Recently I came across an article online by Elizabeth Scott entitled “The Ways Cleaning Alleviates Stress.” It’s about how spring cleaning can help you de-stress. That sounded intriguing! Two points in her article got my attention and are applicable to cleaning for Unleavened Bread.

She suggests that cleaning can provide an opportunity to be thankful for everything you touch. For us, this goes deeper – being thankful to God for all He has given to us including such meaningful Holy Days. It is easy to mirror the attitude of the Israelites who were brought out of slavery but complained about all they didn’t have. This year I plan to take more time as I clean to be thankful for the Holy Days as well as the physical things that I have been given – even though I have to clean them.

Another point made in the article is that the actual work of cleaning can be a form of medi-

tation. While the article was speaking about a stress management technique, our meditation as we clean for Unleavened Bread can be more to the point of examining ourselves and using the physical cleaning as a type of spiritual cleansing. It lends itself to many spiritual lessons when we just take the time to meditate while we are cleaning.



photo by rawpixel on Unsplash

At one time, I cleaned every corner of my house, every coat pocket and cuffs on trousers. I even washed down the walls. It felt really good to have my house spotless by the time the spring Feast arrived, but I was overly stressed and exhausted. These days, I realize that I have to prioritize. I begin my cleaning early so that I can tackle some areas of the house that I would like to deep clean. Then, as the Feast draws nearer, I concentrate on the areas where leavened products are most likely to be found. I try to work logically so that I can begin to

isolate the leavening to a small area that can be easily cleaned at the last minute.

Each year I learn a lesson as a direct result of de-leavening. A few years ago, during the Night to Be Much Observed, we had a question asked about an embarrassing moment having to do with what was forgotten in cleaning. That night I was pretty confident that my cleaning was all done as I related one occasion years earlier when we were hosting the evening in our home. As everyone was preparing to leave after dinner, I opened the refrigerator to find a bag of hot dog buns staring at me! I don’t even know why they were there. Ladies had been helping me put food away after dinner, but nobody said anything about bread in the refrigerator. I was mortified when I saw it, and my husband had to make a quick trip to the nearest trash can! Well, everyone had a good laugh at that story.

Little did I know that history was about to repeat itself. When we arrived home that evening I discovered a bag of bread sitting on my counter that I had intended to throw away on my way out that evening. The lesson I learned is that it doesn’t pay to become too confident about being sin free.

I hope you have a physically and spiritually stress-alleviating cleaning experience this year.

Father Forgive Them

The basic message of the Bible is contained in two commandments: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. Jesus Christ said that these essentially summarize the entire Law of God. He fulfilled those commandments to the utmost degree in His truly marvellous life as a man.

It is relatively easy to agree that we should love God, but the love your neighbour part is not so easy—especially when your “neighbour” (your fellow man) is perhaps not the most lovable or may be a detestable human being if not a downright enemy!

It takes a good deal of maturity. We start as babes with “the milk of the Word” (Acts 20:27) but soon find the meat much harder to digest. It becomes a question of realizing who we are and where we are going. We need a solid grasp of human origins, the story of sin, the fall of man and the need of redemption if we are to go on into the Kingdom of God. All of this can be properly understood only through Jesus Christ who came to reveal the Father, set us free from sin and lead the way into everlasting life.

Many people are becoming concerned about the coming end of this age as the apostles were in their day. They asked Jesus what would be the sign of the end and of His return (Matthew 24:3). He warned that when it comes, conditions will be so awful that, “Many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will

arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold, but he who endures to the end will be saved” (verses 10 – 13).

We are now in an age leading to the return of Jesus Christ. News from around the world is disturbing and will get worse. In the middle of all the troubles we must beware of becoming cold-hearted. We naturally hate murder, rape, human trafficking and terrorism. They are repulsive to any right thinking human being, as is animosity toward people guilty of such despicable acts. Even so, let’s beware of an unforgiving mindset. Jesus knew the danger full well and wanted to make sure His followers would come to fully understand it. The lack of caring for others plays into the hands of the Devil, and he uses it to cause more hatred, murder, mayhem, violence and destruction. This is what the Lord was speaking about when He referred to conditions in the Last Days.

The daily news is often awful, but how much do we care? Ac-

cording to the wisest man who ever lived, the one who set the supreme example, Jesus Christ, we should be guided first of all by the love of God, which will safeguard us from satanic influence, and then by loving others as ourselves, which will save us from cold-hearted indifference to the fate of fellow human beings.

For example: think how very difficult it must have been for people who knew Saul of Tarsus in what may be called his “Gestapo” days. His vitriolic opposition to the followers of Jesus Christ knew no bounds. He charged around the country like an enraged bull, throwing Christians into prison and demanding their execution. He did not understand what he was doing, but he thought he did since he was a highly educated, devoted, God-fearing man -- not an ignorant lout who delighted in mob rule. But even he was changed as we too need to be changed if we are ever to enter the Kingdom of God.

But we are churchgoing, Bible-reading, peace-loving followers of Christ, are we not? Do we still harbour grudges, resentment and desire for revenge? In truth now, do we become improperly judgmental, suspicious, detached or unforgiving except toward trusted friends, or those whom we regard as righteous? If so we are simply not following the example of our Saviour. We may well want salvation for all our own, yet in our hearts be ready to dance on the graves of evil-doers! That simply is not the Way!



photo by Thomas Charters on Unsplash

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