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Being Sincere

by Paul Wasilkoff

The word “sincere” comes from the Latin word *sincerus*, meaning “clean” or “pure.” Over time it has also come to describe honesty, authenticity and genuineness of character. That is the sense of the word translated “sincere” in both Philippians 1:10 and 1 Peter 2:2. In these passages the emphasis is on purity without hidden fault, mixture or hypocrisy—something examined in the light and found to be sound.

This leads to an important and very personal question: How sincere are we? It is not a question meant to discourage us, nor one designed to foster unhealthy introspection. We should not dwell excessively on our deficiencies or rehearse our failures endlessly in our minds. We all have areas where we need to change and grow. At the same time, we need not feel compelled to indiscriminately broadcast our faults to other people in a way that draws attention to ourselves rather than to God’s work in us. Yet neither can we afford to dismiss our shortcomings, excuse them or pretend they do not exist.

Honest self-examination is an essential and ongoing part of spiritual growth. It requires courage to look inwardly and ask difficult questions. Ignoring our limitations might bring temporary comfort—or at least delay or limit discomfort. Avoidance can feel easier in the moment. However, such neglect ultimately hinders real and lasting character growth. What is left unexamined is rarely strength-

ened, and what is left uncorrected is rarely improved.

With God’s help, however, meaningful and enduring change is possible. Over time, steady and deliberate growth can mend the chips, cracks, blemishes and imperfections we all carry in our character. This refining process requires humility, patience and perseverance. It also calls for teachability—a willingness to accept correction, counsel and godly guidance without resentment or defensiveness. Growth does not happen overnight, nor does maturity appear instantly. Spiritual depth is formed gradually, often through repeated lessons and repeated effort. Yet consistent effort, combined with God’s transforming power, produces genuine, visible and lasting change that others can observe and that God fully knows.

A time of testing is coming for us all. Scripture reminds us that our work and our character will ultimately be revealed. The result will demonstrate whether our character is deficient or mature, superficial or sincere. In light of this coming reality, we should diligently seek God’s help now. We need His strength and guidance as we strive to grow, to change and to strengthen our personal character. We must also make measurable progress while the opportunity remains. Self-examination, repentance and renewal are not seasonal exercises alone. They are habits that shape a lifetime of faith and prepare us for future responsibility.

If we commit ourselves to this process today, then when that time of testing arrives, we will be better prepared to endure faithfully. We may face testing collectively as a body of believers. We may also be required to endure hardship individually in ways we do not presently foresee. Regardless of the circumstances, with God’s continued help, we will be able to withstand seasons of stress, pressure and turmoil without losing faith or integrity. Instead of weakening us, those challenges can confirm the sincerity of our faith, refine our motives, strengthen our character and deepen our reliance on God.

United News Canada strives to provide timely and seasonally appropriate articles to assist in that growth. This issue is a pre-Passover edition. As such, it contains articles designed to help us in our personal self-examination as we prepare for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Additional related articles and study materials can also be found online for further reflection and preparation. Please visit: www.ucg.ca/bible-study-tools/ 🌐

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Passover Preparation

by UNC

In order to worthily partake of the Passover we are to examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Although only baptized members may participate in the Passover Service (Exodus 12:43-48; Romans 2:28-29), everyone can benefit from this important exercise. Following is a spiritual inventory that can be used as a checklist.

1. Am I deeply repentant?

2 Corinthians 7:11—a lifelong process.

2. Is there fruit evident in my life?

Galatians 5:22-23—must be prevalent.

3. Do I deeply love God?

1 John 4:11-21—love means obedience.

4. Is my whole heart in the Work of God and the Church of God?

1 Corinthians 15:58—yearning to get the gospel to others.

5. Do I truly love the brethren?

Galatians 5:13—thus not judging.

6. Am I teachable?

Proverbs 29:1—learning from correction.

7. Do I understand God's Word?

Mark 4:10-12—thus not confused.

8. Do I respect God's ministers?

Hebrews 13:7, 17—the ministry is to help and serve the people of God.

9. Is the void in my life filled? Psalms 63:1, 5; Ecclesiastes 3:11; John 6; 7:37-39—the emptiness of life's meaning is filled.

10. Do I strive to obey and follow God?

Psalms 27:4, 8—obedience is a way of life including spirit and letter of the law.

11. Do I live by faith? 2 Corinthians 5:7—the Christian's eyesight is based on faith and this is our daily walk (Hebrews 10:38).

12. Do I have self-discipline?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27—a controlled life.

13. Am I setting a good example?

1 Peter 2:11-12—our best witness.

14. Are my eyes on the goal?

2 Peter 1:5-11 called to be part of a work and to have eternal life—a dual calling.

15. Are my prayers being answered?

1 John 3:22; 5:14-15—God does hear and answer our prayers even if negatively.

16. Am I close to God?

James 4:7-10—be certain to have contact.

17. Am I growing in spiritual love & Christian service? Matthew 20:25-28—Living faith = active obedience = spiritual love.

18. Am I putting sin out regularly?

1 Corinthians 5:1-8—keeping it out.

19. Am I putting Christ on regularly?

Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:5-17—we continuously put off the old man and put on Christ.

20. Is the mind of Christ growing in me? Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:23; Mark 4:26-29—a continual process.

21. Am I continually coming out of the world? 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Corinthians 7:31; John 17:14-16; Philippians 3:20—we must be monitoring ourselves.

22. Am I forgiving? Matthew 18:21-35—this is an important quality of God.

23. Am I growing in grace and knowledge? 2 Peter 3:18—required.

24. Am I humble? James 4:6, 10—God only able to deal with the humble.

25. Am I regularly praying, studying & meditating? Luke 18:1; 2 Timothy 2:15; Psalms 1:2—without our growth stagnates.

26. Do I daily put on the armour of God? Ephesians 6:10-20—I should be able to withstand evil.

27. Are the beatitudes becoming my attitudes? Matthew 5:3-12.

28. Do I accept my trials as opportunities for growth? Hebrews 5:8; James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6-7—these prepare us for sonship.

29. Where have I focused my heart and desire? Colossians 3:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18—be sure they are where they should be.

30. How are my relationships with others? Ephesians 4:29-32; Matthew 22:36-40—constantly growing with one another.

31. How do I treat my spouse? Ephesians 5: 25, 33; Colossians 3:18-19—Do I love my wife just as Christ loved the church? Do I respect my husband? Do we model wholesome marital harmony for our children? 🌍

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The Story of Job & Self Examination

by Dan Dowd

We are quickly approaching Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. God has us come before Him each year on His Holy Days, and every year we add to our understanding of His plan of Salvation, of His love for mankind and gain a deeper appreciation of what to do better in our lives as His *Ekklesia*.

With Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, a big theme is, of course, overcoming sin—and in connection with considering the impact of sin in our life, we are told in Scripture to examine ourselves. Self-examination is rarely a pleasant endeavour. We know ourselves better than anyone else—the false pretenses, the white lies, the public posturing and so forth all whither under self-examination. We are left with the reality of who and what we really are. Most people never go through this type of examination because it can be crippling if there is no plan of action after the self-examination.

What Exactly is “Examination”?

In 1 Corinthians 11:26-29, the Apostle Paul discussed examining ourselves. In verse 28 the Greek word used for “examine” (*dokimazo* [dok-im-ad’-zo]) can mean to test, to approve or prove, to discern, to try. Too many look at this admonition as a once a year personal spiritual inventory.

The definition of “examine” shows us there is much to consider in examining ourselves, but we must be sure to keep the right balance. “Examine” can also mean “to test . . . in order to determine progress.” One



God let Satan lead Job through a series of trials—each worse than the previous—to show Satan that he didn’t really know Job at all. God had confidence in Job, but He also used Satan to help make Job understand and obey Him on a much deeper level (Job 1:8).

of the big things we can miss in our spiritual examination is that God does not want us to become overwhelmed by the sin we see, but instead to realize what we need to change in order to make progress.

Job’s Trial of Examination

The book of Job is an interesting book on many levels, perhaps primarily because of the self-examination Job goes through. No other book God has preserved for us has such a detailed recounting of one man’s thoughts

and conversations as God works with him.

At the start of the book, Job’s life is good—he serves God, he is blessed with physical wealth, he has healthy children who enjoy each other’s company, and much more. Unbeknownst to Job, God and Satan have an ongoing conversation about Job. We know from Scripture that even though Satan is constrained by God, he is currently allowed to rule over the earth (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12, 2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan, however is an adversarial ruler (1 Peter 5:8)—he rules to hurt us not help us. God is simply asking if Satan, in his adversarial role, was considering Job. Why would God draw such attention to Job? A simple summary of the book of Job is that God was using Satan to help Job in his self-examination. Job’s story is a wonderful reminder to read prior to Passover.

Satan had considered Job, but Satan knew that God had given protection to Job. Satan then went on to challenge God to take that protection away from Job, saying that Job would then curse God. Our self-examination is important to be able to more completely take on the mind of Christ and to continue to overcome sin. While this is our responsibility, God will help us with it if we do our part.

God let Satan lead Job through a series of trials—each worse than the previous—to show Satan that he didn’t really know Job at all. God had confidence in Job, but He also used Satan to help make Job understand and obey Him on a much deeper level (Job 1:8). Job was being sifted. Job was being refined. God was setting Job off on an intense exercise of self-

The Story of Job & Self Examination (continued)

examination. When we face situations similar to what Job went through, we need to remember not to “despise the chastening of the Lord” (Proverbs 3:11-12).

What we can often miss in the midst of a trial, is that God is looking for us to succeed (rather than looking for us to fail) because from His perspective as long as we are in the “fight” we have already become part of His family (Romans 4:17). We learn to trust and obey God through the trials we face (Hebrews 5:8).

“Examination” from others

Much of the book of Job recounts the advice and examination Job was receiving from his supposed friends—supposed friends because they hurt Job more than they helped him. While they were correct in some areas, they assumed sinful actions by Job and they presumed to speak for God way too much. They even seemed delighted in some of Job’s suffering. While it is hard to hear correction from others, it is extremely important to consider if there is anything of value in what they say. Even if our friends are wrong, oftentimes there is still an element of truth or a point of growth that we can use to become a better son or daughter of God. God is looking for a return on the “investment” of His Holy Spirit (Isaiah 55:11), and in order for us to determine if we are being a profitable servant, we must examine what has been accomplished in us.

Overcoming is part of examining

In John 16:33, Christ said that He overcame the world. How would Christ have known He overcame

unless He examined himself? He was telling His disciples, and by extension us, that because He overcame so could we.

Self-examination is seldom pleasant or comfortable—but it is a necessary part of our calling so God can bless our latter days.

Examining ourselves can also mean examining how we function within the bigger body. Are we serving others, are we supporting others, are we hurting others, are we a benefit to the spiritual body? Examination involves an element of listening. God allowed Job to be sifted by Satan so that he would grow in the grace and knowledge of God and have a deeper understanding and application of God’s ways. Even though we can be blind to our shortcomings—just as Job was initially—God seeks to lead us out of that blindness, never forsaking us (Isaiah 42:16). Like Job, God will not allow a trial be more than we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). God is leading each and every one of us through this refining process to produce something more precious than gold.

We must be careful not to think that God wants us to examine ourselves so He can punish us. God is faithful to forgive our sins when we repent (1 John 1:9). After God forgives our sin, He separates Himself and us as far from that sin as is possible (Psalm 103:12).

It is worth asking a few questions in considering self-examination:

- How did we grow this past year? Perhaps we had a number of trials we struggled through, but if we consider that trials are for our edification then we need to make sure we learned the right lesson(s). Are we a better son or daughter of God now compared to a year ago? Do we have more understanding of His law, His plan of salvation and our role in His coming Kingdom?

- How did God bless us spiritually this past year? Where have we seen God’s hand in our life?

- What do we now see more clearly that we want God to help us address in our life in the coming year? Could we stand before Christ today and say we have done everything in our power to prepare to be a son or daughter in His Kingdom? If not, what should we be doing?

After Job’s friends were done telling Job all that he had done wrong, Job defended himself. At the end of that book, when Job was done defending himself, God stepped into the conversation, and Job comes to some hard realizations. Job finally saw what God wanted him to see and said, “...now my eye sees You...” (Job 42:5-6). Because Job examined himself, God blessed Job’s latter days.

Self-examination is seldom pleasant or comfortable—but it is a necessary part of our calling so God can bless our latter days. As we approach Passover, and indeed as we rehearse God’s plan of salvation anew in the coming year, let us remember to examine ourselves so we can be useful to God in His Kingdom. 🍁

The Fruit of Kindness

by David Palmer

In the book of Proverbs is the account of a “virtuous woman.” Notice how Scripture describes a wonderful quality of this woman “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is *the law of kindness*” (Proverbs 31:26).

Kindness is a character attribute missing in many segments of society today. Yet it is a basic principle the Bible refers to as one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. The concept of kindness is magnified throughout Scripture. Kindness appears over 240 times in the Old Testament and is most often translated as mercy but it is also translated in various places as “kindness,” and “loving kindness.” It is used in describing God’s faithful love toward those who keep His commandments, and is used to describe God’s slowness to wrath and quickness to mercy. *Holman’s Bible Dictionary* defines kindness as “the steadfast love that maintains relationships through gracious aid in times of need.”

In the list of nine fruits of the Spirit, the word “gentleness,” in the King James Bible is the Greek word *chrestotes*, and is better translated “kindness. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (*kindness*), self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

One of the fruits that needs to be growing in our lives is the fruit of kindness. God looks at the humble and contrite heart (Isaiah 66:2). He does not delight in the destruction of the wicked. God can be touched by our words, by our attitude, and God can change His mind based on



Photo by Brett Jordan on Unsplash

Kindness is a character attribute missing in many segments of society today. Yet it is a basic principle the Bible refers to as one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit.

how we change our actions and attitudes. “Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him” (Joel 2:14).

God’s mercy and kindness is boundless toward those who love Him. He has shown kindness toward us by giving His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Lord and Saviour, the one to take our place, as our sacrifice for sin. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His *kindness* toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4, 7).

We see how God expresses wonderful kindness toward those whom He has called out of this world, and as we look toward a new spring Holy Day season with another Passover on the horizon we need to consider, not only the kindness of God through the sacrifice of Jesus, but our kindness toward each other. Kindness is a virtue God wants us to learn, kindness and respect even toward our enemies.

Recall what Jesus admonished “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).

God encourages and exhorts us to practice being kind, to have kindness in our lives. “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, *kindness*, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Colossians 3:12-15).

As we gradually begin to prepare our hearts and minds for the rich meaningful observance of another Passover, let us continue to grow in the fruit of the spirit including *kindness*, which knows no bounds, no limits. Kindness is not a sign of weakness, rather kindness is one of the many keys that unlocks the door to the Kingdom of God. 🍁

Finding Leaven

from the UCGia website

Leavening Agents

Leaven is any agent that produces fermentation and causes dough to rise, by causing the formation of carbon dioxide gas to bubble into and spread throughout the dough. This is accomplished either chemically (as with baking soda) or biologically (as with yeast).

- **Baking Soda:** a crystalline alkaline salt that gives off gas when an acid is added. The following are different types of baking soda:

- **Sodium bicarbonate**, also known as “Saleratus.”

- **Potassium bicarbonate**, or **potash**.

- **Ammonium carbonate**, or “**baker’s ammonia**.”

- **Ammonium bicarbonate**, also known as “**hartshorn**.”

- **Baking Powder** (baking soda + acid-forming ingredients + starch filler).

- **Sourdough starter** (a wild yeast colony that is maintained with flour and moisture).

- **Yeast** (a single-celled fungi, used to leaven).

Not Leaven

- **Autolyzed yeast:** A yeast that has ‘self-destructed’ and is sterile—incapable of leavening.

- **Brewers Yeast:** A dead form of yeast that cannot leaven bread; a ‘nutritional’ yeast.

- **Torula Yeast:** A dead yeast that



cannot leaven bread, considered a ‘nutritional’ yeast. Also, hickory smoked torula yeast. Used as a savory seasoning that imparts a smoky aroma to foods.

- **Yeast extract(s):** Derivatives of yeast, which are sterile and cannot leaven bread.

- **Cream of Tartar:** Tartaric acid—potassium bitartrate or potassium hydrogen tartrate. This is an acid used to combine with baking soda. By itself, this is not leavening.

- **Tartrate powder:** Phosphate powder or sulfate powder—usually added with cream of tartar. By itself, this is not leavening.

- **Alum:** A metallic double salt, usually added with cream of tartar. The most common are sodium aluminum sulfate (SAS or sulfate powder), and potassium aluminum sulfate (or potash alum). By itself this is not leavening.

- **Sorbitan monostearate:** A flavor and texture enhancer. Not leaven of itself.

- **Sodium Caseinate:** A milk protein, not a leaven

- **Sodium Silicoaluminate:** A fine powder that is used to keep cocoa, salt and other products dry, not a leaven

- **Polysorbate 60:** A preservative; not a leaven.

- **Egg whites:** Not a leavening agent. While beaten egg whites can be stirred into dough, it does not spread through the dough as leavening does and is not leavening.

- **Steam or air** (such as in popovers or angel food cake). The same principle as egg whites (above) applies; there is no leavening agent mixed through the dough.

Non-food Leaven

Should I remove non-food products that contain leavening from my home during the Days of Unleavened Bread?

The Bible tells us that during the Days of Unleavened Bread we remove leaven and leavened products from our homes (Exodus 12:15; Exodus 12:19; Exodus 13:7). Leaven is a food additive which causes bread or bread products to rise. Symbolically, this represents removing visible and hidden sins out of our lives. Since leaven puffs up dough, we’re given an object lesson about hypocrisy and pride.

Leavening agents are also found in many items other than breads. Toothpaste, carpet deodorizer, beer, body powders, antacids, dog and cat food, and some medicines to name a few. Even class C fire extinguishers contain forms of leavening agents! Must all of these items be removed during Unleavened Bread? No, these need not be discarded.

(Continues on page 7)

Sourdough

by Linda Wasilkoff

In recent times, it seems that society has once again “discovered” sourdough. It is thought to be easier to digest than other forms of bread. What is interesting is that sourdough bread is probably one of the earliest types of bread. It is believed to have been discovered in Egypt around 4000 BC. Interestingly, one of the Hebrew words translated in the Old Testament as “leaven” is “she-ohd.” That word literally means “sourdough.” So, when the Israelites were told to put away all leaven, they were putting away their sourdough starters!

There are differences between our experience and the experiences of our forefathers. We can purchase ready-made matzos and/or other unleavened products. We have access to many tried and tested recipes—many that can be found at: www.ucg.org/members/recipes/unleavened-recipes. After the Last Day of Unleavened Bread concludes, we can go to the nearest grocery store at will to purchase leavened products. Not so in ancient days. They had to wait for the starter to become ready, which would take a few days.

When I am in the middle of getting rid of all leavening from the house, I sometimes wonder how much easier

it would have been for the Israelites. After all, they just had a tent and its contents to clean. We have a house/apartment/workplace and perhaps a car or two. Some have to be concerned with cottages, boats, mobile homes or perhaps storage units. All of our modern conveniences (stoves, freezers, refrigerators, toasters) have in some ways made life more complicated.

Even the unleavened products that we purchase can also complicate our lives. There are products that we may have purchased for many years that were unleavened, but now have leavening. And, you can't just depend on how it looks—just because it is flat doesn't mean it is unleavened! This time of year requires careful reading of ingredients.

So, what is the lesson we are supposed to learn? Should we be envious of the ancient days when you could pick up a tent and move it rather than vacuuming multiple rooms? Or, should we be thankful that we don't have to wait several days before we have a sourdough starter to leaven our dough?

I recently looked at the Hebrew word for “unleavened bread” in Exodus 12:15. It seems to indicate “greedily”

eating because of its sweetness (absence of a sour taste perhaps). That gives a different slant to the whole experience. Previously the connection I had to unleavened bread was that it was “the bread of affliction.” And it is called that as well because the Israelites had to hurry out of the land of Egypt. Probably, each time they ate the unleavened bread, they remembered the considerable stress and anxiety that was associated with their journey—especially when the Egyptians were pursuing them!

Perhaps I will never get to the point of eating unleavened bread “greedily”, but over the years I have learned to appreciate and enjoy it. There is a special joy in being able to create various delicious items that are unleavened.

The lesson I see is that each generation has the opportunity to learn significant lessons from this spring festival though we have different realities with which to deal. I hope we all eat our unleavened bread this year with the right kind of gusto—as it represents a sweet way of life. I also hope that all who have to get rid of a wonderful sourdough starter are able to get an even better batch started after the Feast! 🍞

“Finding Leaven” from pg 6.

We are commanded to celebrate the Days of Unleavened “Bread.” This helps us realize it refers to items such as bread, crackers, cookies, cake, cereals, and pies that contain leavening that are to be put out. Whatever foods that contain a biological leavening

agent that produces fermentation or a chemical leavening agent such as baking powder, sodium bicarbonate, and potassium bicarbonate must be removed.

When leaven is found in non-food products, even though they need not be discarded, it becomes a matter

of personal conscience between the individual and God whether the product should be removed. If having these types of products in your home during the Days of Unleavened Bread defiles your conscience, then it is better to dispose of them during the Festival (Romans 14:23). 🍞

Food Handling Safety

by UNC

As the Spring Holy Days approach, many church congregations will be having potlucks, and some will be pooling their resources to observe the Night to Be Much Observed in a private home or in a rented hall. Whenever a group of people get together and share food, it is important to take extra care to safely prepare, store, re-heat and serve that food.

One outbreak of food poisoning would not only be physically dangerous to many of our dear brethren, but could also potentially have other repercussions for the church. None of us would want to be responsible for that. If we all work together, we can greatly reduce the possibility of having an outbreak of food poisoning at any of our social gatherings.

Guidelines are listed on many different websites (such as www.canada.ca/en/services/health/food-safety.html and www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/safe-food-handling-tips.html), which give helpful advice for preventing foodborne illnesses. This article cannot cover all aspects of food safety, but will touch on the fundamentals.

At Home

Most foodborne illnesses are the result of how the food is handled at home. Bacteria can thrive in food that has been improperly handled and stored. Here are some tips:

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water before and after handling food and when you switch from one food to another.

- Be sure your kitchen countertops and utensils are clean and sanitized. Don't forget other areas that come into contact with your hands or food (dish cloths, faucet handles, sink, refrigerator handles, appliances, etc.)

- Have separate cutting boards for raw meats and sanitize after each use.

- Wash lids of canned foods just before opening to prevent contamination from getting into the food.

- Air dry dishes and utensils if possible or dry them with clean kitchen towels.

- Thoroughly sanitize and wash anything that comes into contact with raw food *before* re-using.

- Store raw meat and poultry in containers on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator or freezer to prevent raw juices from dripping onto or touching other food.

- Remember that the danger zone for bacteria to grow is between 4 and 60 degrees Celcius (40 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit). Do not keep food in the danger zone for longer than two hours. This would include the time needed to transport (unless kept cold) and the time left out waiting to be served. Be very cautious about taking food home to consume after a potluck when it has set out for an extended time.

- Thaw food in the refrigerator to be sure it stays at a safe, constant temperature.

- Promptly cool and refrigerate foods to be taken to a potluck after they are cooked. Very hot items can be cooled at room temperature until steaming

stops. Leave the lid off until the food is cooled to refrigeration temperature.

At Church

Since food for potlucks is, for the most part, prepared in advanced and potentially warmed at church, specific precautions need to be taken.

- All kitchen help should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water before and after handling food and when switching from one food to another. Or, use disposable gloves.

- Be sure all countertops and utensils are clean.

- Keep all cold foods cold and all hot foods **hot!**

- Reheat food to a safe internal temperature of 74 degrees Celcius (165 degrees Fahrenheit).

- Bring all gravies, soups and sauces to a full, rolling boil stirring during the process.

- Discard uneaten leftovers after they have been reheated.

- When heating in a microwave, stop the microwave midway through reheating and stir the food so that the heat is evenly distributed. If the microwave does not have a rotating tray, rotate the container several times during cooking.

Our congregations are well known for serving delicious potlucks. Let us all be sure to diligently do our part so that everyone can continue to enjoy the meals without any unintended side effects. 🍁

The Night To Be Much Observed

by UNC

render this expression: “night of watching,” and “to keep vigil.” We celebrate the evening in commemoration of these events from long ago as described in the pages of the Bible. We also recognize the symbolism

that our sins may be removed from us.

The Night to be Much Observed begins the first Holy Day of the spring. It is a joyous occasion that we celebrate in worship of the great God. If you plan to celebrate this special evening in a restaurant or other public place, we recommend that you make plans in advance to have a private room or some location where you may be able to truly enjoy the fellowship of your brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The first Night to Be Much Observed took place at the beginning of the Exodus out of Egypt when the Israelites were ready to move on and go to the land promised to their fathers after spending 430 years in Egypt. They had come through Passover—a night of great vigilance. Now they had to leave in a hurry. But it was with much gladness and rejoicing as they began their journey to a new life of freedom from slavery. We can also eat our meal with gladness since we have a new improved life ahead of us. 🌍



Photo provided by Claudia Salomaa

The United Church of God has a policy statement regarding the Night to be Much Observed. It explains our history and policy on this special evening. It reads:

“The evening at the beginning of the First Day of Unleavened Bread is a very special evening in the Church of God. On this evening most members invite other members to their homes to enjoy a meal and fellowship. Others may choose to gather in a restaurant or similar location to celebrate the evening. There was a time in the Church of God when all members gathered together as congregations to celebrate the Night to be Much Observed. Currently, most members gather in small groups in homes or other locations.

In the United Church of God it is our desire to continue this very special observance. We find mention of this evening in Exodus 12:42 (KJV) “It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.” Other translations

for a Christian today. As the Israelites departed from Egypt, so must we repent of sin. As we remove leavening from our homes, we symbolize our repentance of sin and our acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice as our Passover. It is only through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ



Photo provided by J. Stopyn

December 2025 National Council Meeting

by Edwin van Pelt

The National Council met via video-conference on Thursday, December 18, 2025. Several items of business were discussed during this important meeting.

After an opening prayer and opening comments by the National Council Chairman, Lloyd Teetaert, the minutes from September 14 regular meeting and executive meeting were adopted.

Jim Lucas, Chair of the Governance and Ethics Committee read the National Council Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics is traditionally read during the December National Council meeting as a reminder of the duties and responsibilities of the members of the National Council.

The two newest members of the National Council, William Moulton and Ellsworth Stanley, gave brief icebreakers. Mr. Stanley served on the National Council in the past as a laymember and is now serving as an elder.

Paul Wasilkoff, Director of Operations, gave an update on what has transpired over the past several months. The death of Rainer Salomaa has impacted the United Church of God—Canada in various ways, including pastoral duties and the Ministerial Services Team. The National Office is in the process of negotiating a new lease for the office space for another five years. Several members of the National Office attended the annual Charity and Not-for-Profit Law Seminar webinar



Photo generated by Google Gemini

hosted by Carters and Associates, a law firm specializing in church, charity and not-for-profit law. The webinar helps keep churches, charities and not-for-profits updated on current and potential provincial and federal legislation that can or will impact operations and helps to ensure that the United Church of God – Canada is following the latest regulations and that our policies are up to date.

Anthony Wasilkoff presented the Ministerial Services Team update. A portion of the moving tribute given at Mr. Salomaa's funeral was shown. Some details of the plans for the Feast of Tabernacles plans in 2026 and 2027 were shared. A number of congregations have already or will be noting their 30th anniversaries as part of the United Church of God—Canada. New people are beginning to attend Sabbath services who have no affiliation with any current or previous Church of God group.

Paul Wasilkoff shared an update on the Media Team's efforts and on the most recent Council of Elders meet-

ings. The Media Team continues to update the websites of the United Church of God—Canada. Results from the latest Subscriber Development Letter were shared as well results from the *Beyond Today* television program.

Treasurer Bill Dimovski then gave an update. Overall donation income is slightly higher than budgeted while expenses are lower than budgeted. Mr. Dimovski noted that more and more members and donors are donating on-line.

Director of Operations, Paul Wasilkoff, went through some of the highlights of the 2026-2027 Operations Plan. He noted that the Strategic Plan (approved during the September meeting of the National Council) drives the Operations Plan, which then drives the Budget. The National Council unanimously approved the 2026-2027 Operations Plan to be forwarded to the National Conference for their ratification.

Bill Dimovski then presented the 2026-2027 Budget. The Council had some time to consider the Budget beforehand. The 2026-2027 Budget was also approved unanimously to be forwarded to the National Conference for approval.

The last item of business related to the June 2026 meetings of the National Council. Details will be made available to the National Council when finalized.

The meeting lasted just over two hours. 🍁

Church/Corporate Members

On June 23, 2013, the National Conference ratified a revised set of bylaws enabling the United Church of God—Canada to apply to Industry Canada for continuance as a registered charity. This is required for all charities as spelled out by the June 23, 2009, updated Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (CNCA). The deadline for a continuation application was October 17, 2014. The application for continuance along with our revised bylaws were sent by the Director of Operations from the National Office. These were received and processed and we are now under the Act. The church received a Certificate of Continuance effective July 7, 2013.

This was necessary in order to allow the church to issue donation receipts for income tax purposes and to operate under the laws that regulate charities. It is advantageous for a charity to be incorporated. In a blog entitled *Why Every Charity Should Consider Incorporation*, Alexandra Tzannidakis wrote, “A corporation is a much more durable structure; it is its own ‘person’, independent of its members, and therefore will survive any amount of personnel turnover. It is certainly the more likely structure for dealing with a large or dispersed membership.”

As an incorporated registered charity (incorporation was originally granted on June 12, 1997), UCG-Canada is required to have a governing structure. That structure is the National Conference, which includes all ordained elders in Canada, plus two laymembers. (We have chosen to use this spelling to show their corporate position in the church.) The

members of the National Conference select nine National Council members to act as the governing board of the church. That board selects a Director of Operations (at this time Paul Wasilkoff) to be in the role of chief executive officer to oversee the day-to-day operation of the church.

To clarify between the corporate structure and the spiritual body of the church, one of our bylaws states:

“The United Church of God—Canada has two functions: that of a Corporation and that of a church. The Corporation is established to operate the business of the charity, being compliant to applicable laws and legal requirements and ensuring that the donations received are properly accounted for and properly disbursed. The Corporation is composed of the members of the National Conference. The Church is the spiritual entity which teaches, nourishes and guides people in the Christian faith and in Christian living. While those who are baptized as a result of the Church’s spiritual work are called members of the Church, they are not members of the Corporation unless they are serving as a member of the National Council. The Corporation does not set doctrine but may determine how it is applied. The Corporation does not ordain ministers, but does participate in the decision making process of who will be ordained as ministers. The Corporation does not determine who may be baptized, who will be appointed as pastors or other spiritual matters. Likewise, even though input may be sought from members of the spiritual Church or congregations, they are not considered to be members of the Corporation” (Bylaw 5.1.19

United Church of God—Canada).

What this means is that when our Bylaws speak of “members” it is speaking of the members of the corporation—the National Conference members. When we speak of church members we refer to those who are baptized and have filled in a form giving the church the right to consider them members—something that is necessary because of Canada’s privacy legislation. We encourage all who have not yet done so to consider becoming members. Membership means that a person is automatically on member mailing lists and may ballot for local candidates for the National Council. It also enables the church have a more accurate count of attendees who consider themselves to be members of the church.

1 Corinthians 14:40 instructs that all things may be done in decency and in order. While 1 Corinthians 14:33 states that God is not the author of confusion.

On the other hand, trends in society are on the path to maximize individualism so much so that a growing number of people are reluctant to be part of what they call “organized religion”, making it seem on a par with organized crime. Some see the word “organized” as a hint of menace and control. Some people just do not want to make a commitment.

The spiritual body of Christ is not meant to be disorganized. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Paul writes: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we

(Continues on page 15)

News From Across Canada

Calgary Project

The Calgary congregation donated some new, gently used and some lovely handmade blankets to a local women's shelter. Encouraging Bible verses on leather tags were sewn into all 27 blankets that were donated. The women's shelter was very appreciative of these lovely and thoughtful donations.

Tonya Erickson



Calgary blankets
Photo by Chelsey Meierhofer

Chili Cook-Off Social

On Sabbath, December 13, the Hamilton congregation hosted their annual chili cook-off social. Combining with the Toronto congregation and some from the Kitchener and Barrie congregations, it made for a joyous time for everyone in attendance.

Those who wanted to take part in the friendly competition were asked to bring their best chili for everyone to try and ultimately vote for the best chili in town (and in Southwestern

Ontario!). The call for the competition was made, and the response was enthusiastic to say the least. Over 20 different chilis, ranging from beef to chicken and vegetarian options, were entered into the competition.

With delicious toppings and tasty sides, everyone had the opportunity to try the array of chili all numbered for anonymity. In order to taste the various options, brethren were given miniature tasting cups. It wasn't long before long some needed a cold drink after realizing that certain chilis were a bit spicier than others! After tasting all the variety of options, everyone voted for their favourite chili until the Chili Champion was crowned. Prizes were handed out to the top three competitors; although the real winners were everyone who had a full belly by the end of the meal.

Following tasty desserts including a delicious birthday cake, games were brought out for people of all ages. Some tried their hand at cards, a jigsaw puzzle and even an indoor plastic hatchet throwing game. Having brethren all together during the winter months is an exciting and encouraging occasion. While the outdoor temperatures were cold, everyone inside

was warm with the joy of fellowship and bellies full of chili!

The Hamilton Chili Committee

Surrey Special Sabbath

The Surrey congregation had a delightful visit from our pastor Wayne Ward on Sabbath, January 10. We also had guests from as far away as New York City and Cincinnati! Having guests always gives a boost to the spirit of fellowship.

Mr. Ward provided us with an inspiring message. This was followed by a delicious potluck and a game of Pictionary. Games are a great way to build up unity and camaraderie in the body of Christ, and are a lot of fun. Bible knowledge was tested in a friendly competition. Teams even helped each other with answers!

Winter days are shorter and sometimes a little gloomy. Having special activities brightens things up. Thanks to all who attended. We plan to have more fun activities as we move through winter. Before we know it, Passover and the Spring Holy Days will be here!

Dale Craniford



Hamilton Chili Cookoff
Photo by Paul Wasilkoff

Winter Outdoor Social and Wild Meat Barbeque

Darwell, Alberta — December 27 - 28, 2025

by Susan Davis



Sledding
Photo by Katie Davis

It has been an annual tradition for many years for the Edmonton congregation to get together in December for a barbeque and outdoor winter fun social at the Davis family farm. Those who travelled far began to arrive on Saturday afternoon to stay overnight. Brethren came from all parts of Alberta, including six individuals from the Calgary congregation, as well as some from Prince George, British Columbia.

Sunday began with a big pancake breakfast. Although temperatures still hovered around -10 and snow was falling, the children and teens headed out to the big hill for sledding fun. After a hot chili lunch, many headed down to the lake located at the back of the property for ice skating and hockey. A few adventurous boys took the snowmobiles out to enjoy



Edmonton Wild Meat
Photo by Kevin Spahich

the deep snow drifts that had accumulated throughout the week. Others gathered indoors to play games and to fellowship. Meanwhile, the barbeque crew was busy grilling delicious meat selections for dinner—moose, venison, elk and lamb.

As the sun went down, the skaters and snowmobilers returned and dinner was served. Everyone contrib-

uted a wide variety of potluck dishes, salads and desserts. Such a feast!

After dinner, people had a chance to relax and fellowship with one another. The children and teens gathered in the family room to play air hockey, group games, Mario Kart and have Just Dance competitions. After the tables were cleaned up in the garage, a spontaneous dance was put on for the young people.

This year, 73 people attended. A wonderful turnout despite the unstable weather conditions! Thank you for everyone's help with set up and clean up, preparing the ice rink and contributing delicious food and wild meat!



Snowboarding
Photo by Katie Davis

It was wonderful to be able to fellowship and enjoy some fun in the winter season! Please plan to join us again next year! 🍁

Obituary: Honoring Maureen DeLong

Maureen Francis Wynn DeLong

February 16, 1957 – December 30, 2025

Following a tragic accident, Maureen DeLong breathed her last on December 30, 2025, in the Knoxville University Hospital in Tennessee, with her loving family by her side. She was 68.

Maureen was born on February 16, 1957, in Victoria, British Columbia. The family moved to Prince George when she was young to take over the family ranch. She loved the ranch and the outdoors, and spent hours on horseback tending to the cattle.

God called her when she was 17. However, her walk as a teen was not easy and as a result, in desperation she moved to Lethbridge to live with her cousin.

Despite this Maureen remained faithful to the truth and her story proves that God was in her life then and had guided her to Lethbridge to further her walk with God. It was in Lethbridge, 50 years ago that Maureen met Larry at church and the rest is history as the saying goes.

Through the very early years of her calling and time in the church, Satan threw many trials at her, but she faced them head on. This included the turmoil of the church collapse in 1995, which she handled with determination and a clear vision, never wavering. Each and every time situations and circumstances appeared questionable or shaky, she soldiered on with Jesus Christ at her side and a clear vision of the promises God had given her.

She never, in her 49 years of marriage, lost the hope that Jesus Christ



Maureen Francis Wynn DeLong

Photo by Larry DeLong

had given her. Those who knew her well will recognize that this is why she was often fierce about “staying true,” “hugging the trunk of the tree” and calling out the “itchy ears.”

Along with God, her life centred around her family. She loved and served them with all the love she could muster. She loved her children and was so proud of them. Then there were her grandchildren! Just the mention of their names (Brogan and Emmett) lit up her life.

God also generously gave Maureen gifts and talents. She had unbelievable patience with those who were less fortunate than herself. She worked for years in the school system signing for deaf students and teaching mentally handicapped students life skills.

It seemed that there was never a time when she was not looking in on and taking care of disadvantaged senior citizens—some she barely knew, but when introduced soon

she became their soul mates.

Maureen was very artistic. She painted in oil and water colours, and drew with ink and pencil. She loved creating with stained glass and cross stitch. She apprenticed for automotive upholstery, working on many cars and hot rods, but her favourite was sewing as a seamstress, making her own clothes, rugs, bed spreads and purses of every imaginable design. It was the creative aspect of sewing that drew her.

Beyond that, she was a certified mountain bike mechanic, working, planning and supporting the annual church bike trip through the Rocky Mountains as well as the UCG church summer camp in Crowsnest Pass, Alberta.

After UCG began, she started singing special music for Sabbath services. For the last eight years, she sang special music three to five times a month as she travelled with her husband on their church circuit.

Maureen thrived on planning—making lists and schedules. She was the first one to jump in to start the planning for the Feast of Tabernacles or summer camp or other events. She did it because her love for the brethren gave her the insatiable desire to serve them.

And then there was her yard! She loved working in her yard and garden, creating a small paradise of her own.

In addition to balancing all of these

Obituary: Honoring Maureen DeLong

things, she also did the daily book keeping for two businesses. She was one busy lady, but being busy was what made her happy.

Obviously, she loved her Papa God in Heaven and Jesus Christ, but what gave her the energy to keep on going was her all-encompassing love for her family, especially her grandchildren, children and her husband.

Gary Antion's advice to Larry after Maureen's death was not to forget Maureen. She may not be with us anymore but, he said, to keep the memories alive. The response from church members and the community will help to keep those memories alive. We have no idea what kind of impact we have on those whose paths we cross paths. We are all ambassadors for Christ.

Once Larry returned from Tennessee and the word got out that Maureen had died, he discovered some of the impact Maureen had had on the neighbourhood. A next-door neighbour came over crying her eyes out with grief. Other neighbours rang the door bell to give him hugs. There were people all over town, like the bank tellers standing in shock at the news, and all of them saying that "she was a classy lady, such a great role model and a perfect example to everyone."

The Apostle Paul would say, "you have run the race" and Jesus is saying "well done good and faithful servant."

Maureen leaves behind: Larry, her husband of 49 years; their two sons Neil (Amber) and Eric (Angela); and

grandsons Brogan and Emmett, who were her pride and joy. She is also survived by: her father, Jim Harris; siblings Pack (Dianne) Harris, Darlene McLeod, Shaun (Doug) Wayland, and Denise (Norbert) Bohnert; many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and nephews; and a mother-in-law, Trudy DeLong. Maureen was predeceased by her mother, Betty Harris; her sister, Janene Harris; her brother-in-law, Rod McLeod; and her father-in-law, George DeLong.

Maureen's love of God and Jesus Christ and for serving the brethren was utmost in her life. She will be sadly missed by many. A memorial service in her honour was held in North Battleford, Saskatchewan on January 31 and another in Coaldale, Alberta May 15, 2026. 🍁

"Church/Corporate Members" from pg 11.

were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." Paul goes on to show that God sets us in His body as it pleases Him (verse 18) and that all are necessary (verse 22). He also shows that spiritual gifts are given to the church for the good of the entire body.

Among the gifts are "helps" and "administrations" (verse 28). *Barnes Notes on the New Testament* says that the word *helps* "means, in general, those who in any way aided or rendered assistance in the church, and may refer to the temporal affairs of the church, to the care of the poor, the distribution of charity and alms, or to the instruction of the ignorant, or to aid rendered directly to the apostles." *Barnes Notes* about

the word *administrations* says, "This word is derived from κυβερναω, *to govern*; and is usually applied to the government or steering of a ship. The word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament...distinct offices may not be here referred to, but that the same persons may be denoted in these expressions as being distinguished in various ways; that is, that the same persons were called 'helpers' in reference to their skill in aiding those who were in distress, and 'governments' in regard to their talent for doing business, and their ability in presiding in councils for deliberation, and in directing the affairs of the church. There is no reason to think that the terms here used referred to permanent and established ranks and orders in the ministry and in the church; or in permanent offices

which were to continue to all times as an essential part of its organization. All that is clear is, that there were those who administered government in the church. But the passage does not determine the form, or manner; nor does it *prove*-whatever may be true-that such an office was to be permanent in the church."

From its inception, the United Church of God—Canada has been blessed to have had 33 different people serve on the governing board. Each has brought unique talents and insights. For them, it has been and continues to be a labour of love to help direct the work of preaching the gospel and preparing a people in an organized manner to the glory of our great God!

Rainer Salomaa

Upcoming Events

Women's Enrichment Weekend

April 17-19, 2026

Hosted by UCG Canada
Alberta & Prince George Congregations

Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, BC

Guest Speakers: Aaron and Michelle Dean

Come join your spiritual sisters for an enriching weekend of fellowship, learning, and fun remembering the importance of what God has done and strengthening of our faith.

<https://www.ucg.org/womens-enrichment-weekend-fairmont-hot-springs-british-columbia>



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CAMP WILDROSE 2026

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD-CANADA
SUMMER YOUTH CAMP



July 8-12, 2026
Darwell, Alberta

Registration will
be open in March
online at
www.ucgedmonton.org

For more information:
contact Camp Director, Susan Davis at campwildrose@gmail.com