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the NEXT WAVE

Magazine



Southen Baptist Convention
Bishop Bernie L Wade

Planting More Than a Church
Pastor Wali Hannington

From Uganda to Denver
Pastor Robert Kayanja

The Inner Critic
Dr. Joesph B Howell

7 Reasons Why
Bishop Joseph Mattera

Next Wave Magazine - June 2026

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Focused on the prayer that Jesus prayed for His Church (Jn. 17:21) International Circle of Faith is a Christian World Network representing some 40,000 ministers with an estimated 25 million constituents. These lead tens of thousands of churches, ministries, colleges, universities, orphanages & feeding programs, humanitarian aid organizations, chaplaincies. other charities, Christ centered companies and business interests.

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The Cover Story

This month's cover captures a beautiful truth: not every wave begins in the ocean. Some waves begin in the hearts of people awakened by faith, lifted by joy, and united in praise. With hands raised and faces turned upward, this image reminds us that worship is not only heard. Sometimes, it is seen.

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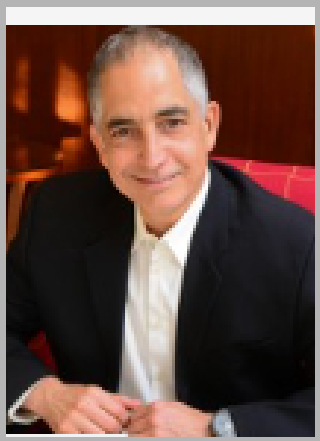
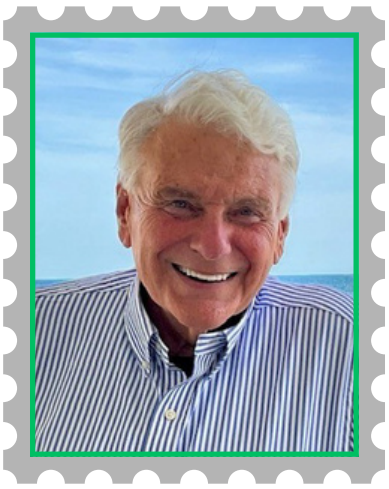


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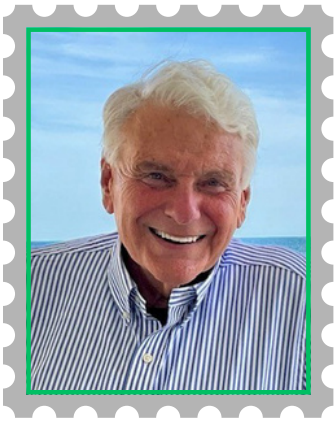


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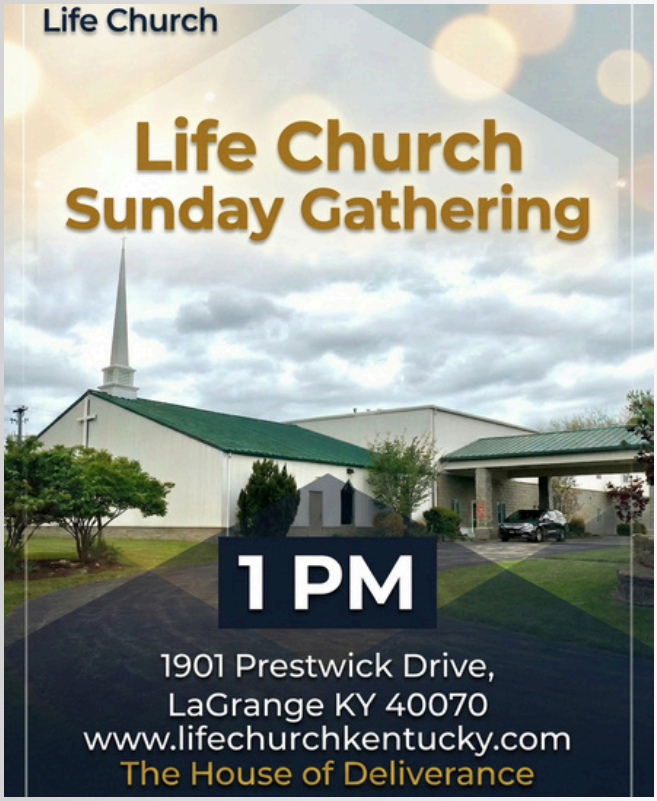
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From the Chief Editor

Dear Beloved Readers,



Pentecost Has Come

As we come to another amazing issue of the Next Wave Magazine, in May we celebrated Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost is a Jewish feast that has been celebrated since the Old Testament, being called the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks in Jewish tradition. It is mentioned in five places in the first five books: **Exodus 23, Exodus 24**, **Leviticus 16**, **Numbers 28**, and **Deuteronomy 16**. "Pentecost," the Greek name of this event, is also used to refer to the events in **Acts 2** when the Holy Spirit intervened following Jesus' ascension to heaven.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in his own native language?

*Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." **(Acts 2:1-13)***

While Scripture gives us all the evidence that followers of Jesus Christ need, by the time of the 1800s, the idea that God would still fill someone with His Spirit, evidenced by speaking in an unknown tongue, was relatively unheard. None of the mainline denominations believed such an opportunity existed for believers.

In Topeka, Kansas, leaders of a nascent Bible School, Charles and Sarah Parham, wanted to better understand how someone could know for certain that they had been filled with the Holy Ghost.

The Parhams represented what many, especially in the Methodist movement, were asking. Denominations taught that the experience that the Apostles and about 100 others (about 120 total) experienced on the rooftop in Jerusalem was expected to be a one-time occurrence. Yet, Scripture records that it happened in a like manner multiple times in Scripture. Further, Scripture presents that all believers should expect to receive the Holy Ghost in like manner.

The Parhams, who were leaders of a movement they called Apostolic Faith, because of their desire to be more like the Apostles of Jesus Christ. They challenged their students at Bethel Bible College to study and determine the evidence of the Holy Spirit. Spirit baptism was destined to become the crown jewel of the Apostolic Faith Movement.

The result was that the students received what Methodists like Henry Clay Morrison and others called their Pentecost. Pentecost refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in the New Testament Book of Acts. It is unclear who coined the concept of *'seeking a personal Pentecost,'* but John Wesley spoke of the Holy Ghost in such terms. Adam Clarke, Francis Asbury, William Arthur, Charles Finney, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody, and a long list of others expected that the Holy Spirit comes by faith, and all expected to receive the Holy Spirit in great measure."

The result was stunning. God poured out His Spirit in a manner just like on the day of Pentecost. The Denominations were stunned that they were not only wrong, but God was proving that He alone sets the course of the Universe. His will is Supreme, and His gifts do not cease. The wave that followed has produced hundreds of millions of people who understand that Bible evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is not swears, feeling good, babbling, etc. Rather, when the Holy Spirit becomes part of your life, you will speak in a new tongue as the Spirit gives you utterance.

In His Grace,

Bernie L Wade

Bishop Bernie L. Wade, PhD

President – International Circle of Faith

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The Cover Story



This month's cover feels like a moment of praise captured from heaven's point of view. A crowd of happy people looks upward, faces bright with joy, hands raised high above their heads, waving as though the whole gathering has become one living song of praise and glory.

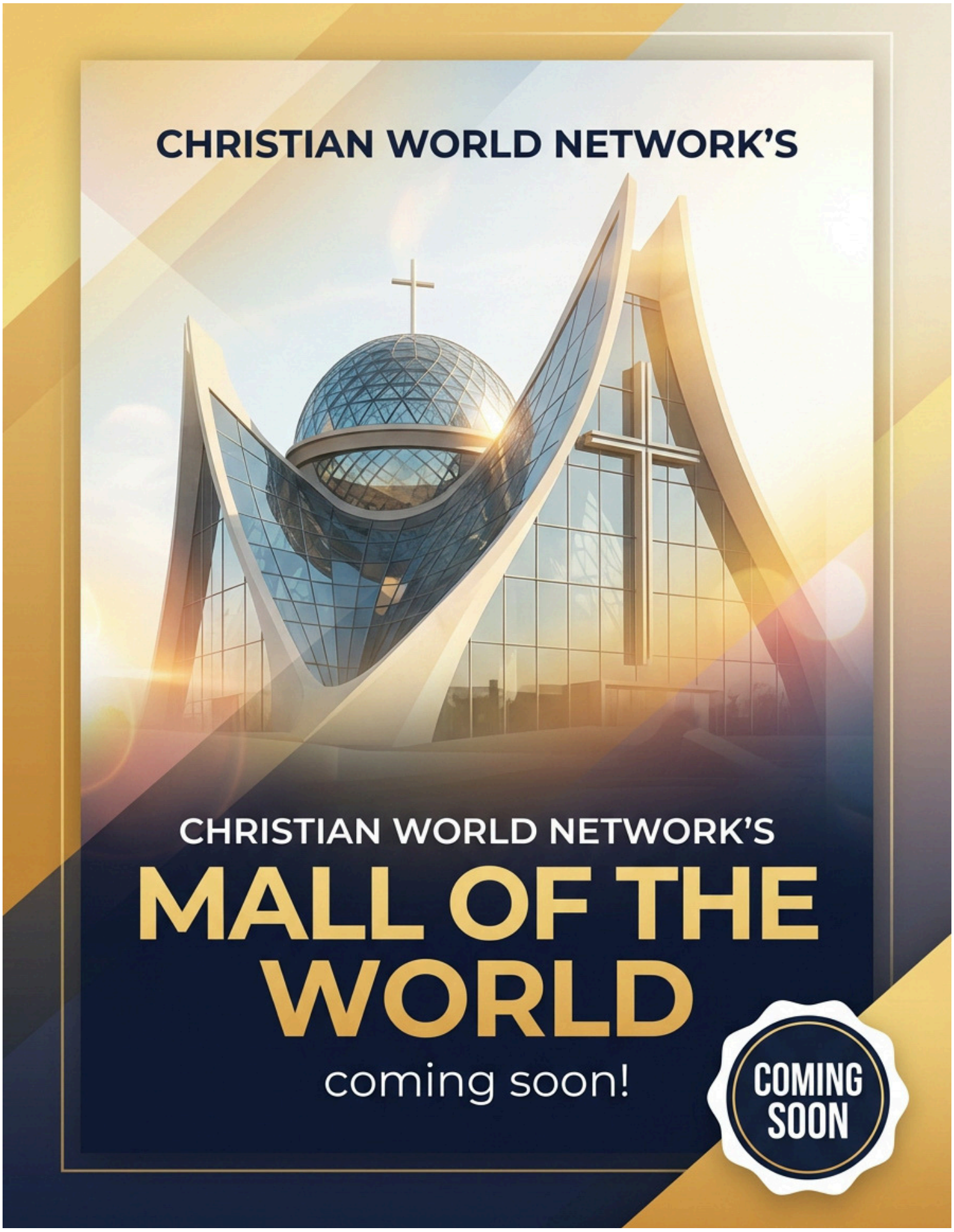
It is easy to imagine the sound behind the image: voices lifted, songs of praise rising, joy mingling with worship, and hearts opening before God in gratitude. These hands are not simply waving in the air. They are responding to something holy, beautiful, and greater than themselves. Glory and praise to our God.

Together, their raised hands become a living banner of praise, a human flag moving in the wind of the Spirit. This is the meaning of the June cover. The next wave is not only a movement of faith, leadership, or change. It is a movement of worship.

In this image, faith has a face. Hope has a sound. Gratitude has hands.

And the wave begins in the heart.

Praise Jesus.


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COMING SOON

Southern Baptist Convention: Bastian of Mass Discrimination

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was founded in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia, as a spli from Northern Baptists over slavery, and has since grown into the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

by Bishop Bernie L. Wade Ph.D.

SHOWCASING



'These Methodists sang their way to victory. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord… His truth is marhing on.'

The more things change, the more they remain the same. As President Harry Truman noted, *"There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know."* The uninitiated were surprised to read headlines that paint the Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant denomination, in an unfavorable light concerning recognizing the place of women. This, of course, is not surprising to those who have watched the continual demise of America's large denomination.

During the Civil War, America's two largest denominations, Baptists and Methodists, were generally divided on the current issue – the enslavement of their fellow man. Methodists led the charge against slavery by denouncing the practice, giving their constituents the choice of freeing their slaves or leaving their denomination.

Methodist pastors like Colonel Werter Davis joined the Union Army to participate in the freeing of slaves. Methodists envisioned Abraham Lincoln ushering in a new wave of revival! These Methodists sang their way to victory. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord… His troops are marching on!

Baptists, on the other hand, are divided along political lines. Baptists in the South decided to break from their northern alliances and start their own religious system where white men could continue to enslave others. Thus, they created their own Frankenstein. They named the creation the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). To defend their

structure, they adopted a policy established 20 years earlier in Oldham County, Kentucky. The Kentucky General Association of Baptists adopted a charter in the early 1800s. They endorsed the doctrine of two-seeds championed by one of their key leaders, Daniel Parker. Daniel taught that there were two groups of people.

1. The good white folks that were the seed of God.
2. The native Americans (Indians) who were the spawn of Satan. It worked well, giving white settlers a good excuse to rob, steal, and kill their Indian neighbors. It remains a key position today, generally explained as once saved, always saved or absolute predestination.

Twenty years later, the SBC adopted the same ideology of their Kentucky constituents as well as their methodology. To the Kentucky version, the SBC added slaves, especially black ones, to their second tier. After the American Civil War, while the Methodists struggled to define what the freedom of the slaves meant to their denomination, the SBC powered forward, working with the local governments in the South to enact Jim Crow laws in their interpretation of the 'Separate but Equal Jesus.'

Fast forward to the 2000s. For the past 25 years, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has taken a stance against women pastors. This is not because women are not capable of being pastors. Rather, this is because of long-standing challenges levied by the white male leadership of their group. This leadership is quite willing to use the gifts and talents of women, but not willing to let them have the title or role of a pastor. Despite this prohibition, many of their congregations have allowed women on their church staff.

The Southern Baptist Convention officially limits the office of pastor to men, but debates and inconsistencies continue over women serving in pastoral roles.

Official Policy

The SBC's Baptist Faith and Message 2000 states that *"while both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."* This complementarian stance reserves formal pastoral authority for men, though women are encouraged to serve in other ministry roles.

Now, the leaders of the SBC are proposing to take their bigoted position to a new level. Here in part is their proposal: *"a cooperating Southern Baptist church … Does not act to affirm, appoint, or endorse a woman serving in the office or function of a pastor/elder/overseer, such as preaching to the assembled congregation."*

The SBC is not alone. A plethora of religious denominations, movements, and organizations claim that women are some kind of second-class citizen based on their twisting of Scriptures.

These positions are primarily a holdover of chauvinistic ideas from generations past.

Recent Controversies

Despite the official ban, some churches have women serving in roles titled as pastors, such as teaching pastors, children's pastors, or women's pastors. This has led to disputes over whether these roles violate SBC policy. Notable cases include Saddleback Church, which was removed from SBC cooperation in 2023 for employing women on its pastoral staff, and NewSpring Church, which retained friendly cooperation despite having a female teaching pastor.

The SBC can skirt discrimination laws because of sincerely held religious beliefs. One should not be surprised. The SBC exists because of its willingness to discriminate in the hopes that white people could own black people.

Formation of the SBC

Why should anyone be surprised? The Southern Baptist Convention was formally organized in May 1845 in Augusta, Georgia, with William B. Johnson of South Carolina elected as its first president. The split from the Triennial Convention, which included Northern Baptists, was over the issue of slavery, as Southern Baptists sought to uphold the institution while Northern Baptists opposed it. Approximately 300 churches joined the new denomination at its founding.

The SBC is not even remotely close to the vision that Jesus Christ has for His church. This is a group that, since its inception, has operated to subjugate others to its will. 150 years ago, these were people of color. No person of color has ever led this group. Now, the debate is on women.

No woman has ever led this group. The SBC is working diligently to ensure that women learn what they have been teaching blacks for over 150 years – SOME OF US ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.

Sons and Heirs

In contrast, we have Scripture, which paints a much different picture for all people, including blacks and women. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.



Bernie L Wade Ph.D.
Presiding Bishop
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ICOF Nigeria: New Chapters and State Leadership Appointments

Bishop Dr Otobong Micheal

ICOF Ambassador to Nigeria / National Coordinator
International Circle of Faith (ICOF) Nigeria

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



'...establishment of new ICOF Chapters within Nigeria and the appointment of State Coordinators and Directors...'

The leadership of International Circle of Faith (ICOF) Nigeria, under the vision and mandate of expanding the work of the ministry across the nation, hereby presents this official report on the successful establishment of new ICOF Chapters within Nigeria and the appointment of State Coordinators and Directors to strengthen the operations and expansion of ICOF works nationwide.

This strategic expansion is part of the organization's commitment to strengthening ministerial networks, promoting leadership development, fostering unity among Christian leaders, and advancing the Kingdom of God throughout the nation.

The newly established chapters will serve as operational centers for ministerial activities, leadership training, fellowship, evangelism, chaplaincy programs, conferences, and community impact initiatives in their respective states and regions.

PURPOSE OF THE EXPANSION

The establishment of these new chapters and leadership appointments is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To extend the reach and influence of ICOF across Nigeria.
2. To strengthen spiritual leadership and ministerial collaboration.
3. To provide administrative structures for effective coordination.
4. To enhance evangelism, discipleship, and chaplaincy programs.
5. To create opportunities for leadership training and empowerment.
6. To support pastors, bishops, ministers, and Christian organizations.
7. To promote unity and excellence within the body of Christ.

INTERNATIONAL CIRCLE OF FAITH (ICOF), NIGERIA



Dr Michael Otobong
ICOF NIGERIA AMBASSADOR



Pst Enyichukwu Offia
Diretor, ICOF SCHOOL OF MINISTRY, NIGERIA

NEWLY APPOINTED STATE COORDINATORS/DIRECTORS



Pst Edwin Majam
ICOF, Abuja



Pst Innocent Letam
ICOF, Lagos Island



Pst Adekunle Adebayo
ICOF, Ogun



Pst Famose Abiodun
ICOF, Ogun



Pst Bamigbe Betiku
ICOF, Oyo



Ap Michael Gbadebo
ICOF, Osun



Pst Victor Akpagu
ICOF, Ondo

Motto: ...fulfilling the prayer of Jesus, that we may be one (John 17:22-23)

www.icof.net

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW CHAPTERS AND APPOINTMENT OF STATE COORDINATORS

Following consultations, strategic planning, and recommendations from the national leadership, the following new chapters have been approved and officially established under ICOF Nigeria alongside the appointment of their respective State Coordinators:

1. Ondo State Chapter
State Coordinator: *Pastor Victor Chiemeziem Akpagu*

2. Abuja Chapter
State Coordinator: *Pastor Edwin Majam*

3. Enugu State Chapter
State Coordinator: *Pastor Famose Abiodun*

4. Osun State Chapter
State Coordinator: *Apostle Mike Gbadebo*

5. Oyo State Chapter
State Coordinator: *Pastor Bamigbe Betiku*

6. Ogun State Chapter
State Coordinator: *Pastor Adekunle Adebayo*

7. Lagos Island Chapter

State Coordinator: *Pastor Innocent Letam Akara*

APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR

In furtherance of strengthening ministerial training and leadership development within ICOF Nigeria, the following appointment has also been officially approved:

Pastor Enyichukwu Offia
Director – *ICOF School of Ministry, Nigeria*

The appointed Director shall oversee the administration, coordination, training programs, curriculum development, and operational activities of the ICOF School of Ministry in Nigeria.

And other functional directors are:-

1. Bishop Dr David Ekanem - Director of Information.
2. Pastor Cyrus Akpabio- Director of Finance
3. Snr Apostle E Akpabio - Director of Programs
4. Rev. John Innocent - Director of Welfare / Prayers
5. Rev. Dr. David Tom Akai - Director of Mission/ National P.R.O

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE APPOINTED LEADERS

The appointed State Coordinators and Director shall be responsible for:

- **Coordinating** ICOF activities within their respective jurisdictions.
- **Organizing** leadership meetings, conferences, and ministerial programs.
- **Facilitating** membership growth and development.
- **Representing** ICOF in official engagements.
- **Promoting** unity and collaboration among ministers and churches.
- **Supporting** national projects and initiatives.
- **Submitting** periodic operational reports to the national office.
- **Advancing** the vision, mission, and values of ICOF Nigeria.

The appointed leaders are expected to demonstrate integrity, accountability, spiritual maturity, and a commitment to ICOF's vision and mission.

EXPECTED IMPACT

The establishment of these chapters and leadership appointments is expected to produce a significant positive impact, including:

- **Rapid expansion** of ICOF presence across Nigeria.
- **Increased** ministerial partnerships and networking.
- **Strengthened** leadership structures.
- **Enhanced** spiritual and social outreach programs.
- **Improved** coordination of ICOF activities nationwide.
- **Greater opportunities** for training, mentorship, and empowerment.

APPRECIATION

The National Leadership of ICOF Nigeria expresses sincere appreciation to all bishops, pastors, ministers, partners, coordinators, directors, and members whose support, prayers, dedication, and contributions continue to advance ICOF's vision in Nigeria.

Special appreciation is extended to the international leadership of ICOF Global for their guidance, encouragement, and continuous support toward the growth of the organization.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of these new chapters and the appointment of competent leaders mark another significant milestone in the advancement of ICOF Nigeria.

It reflects the organization’s commitment to national growth, leadership development, unity within the body of Christ, and the expansion of Kingdom impact across the nation.



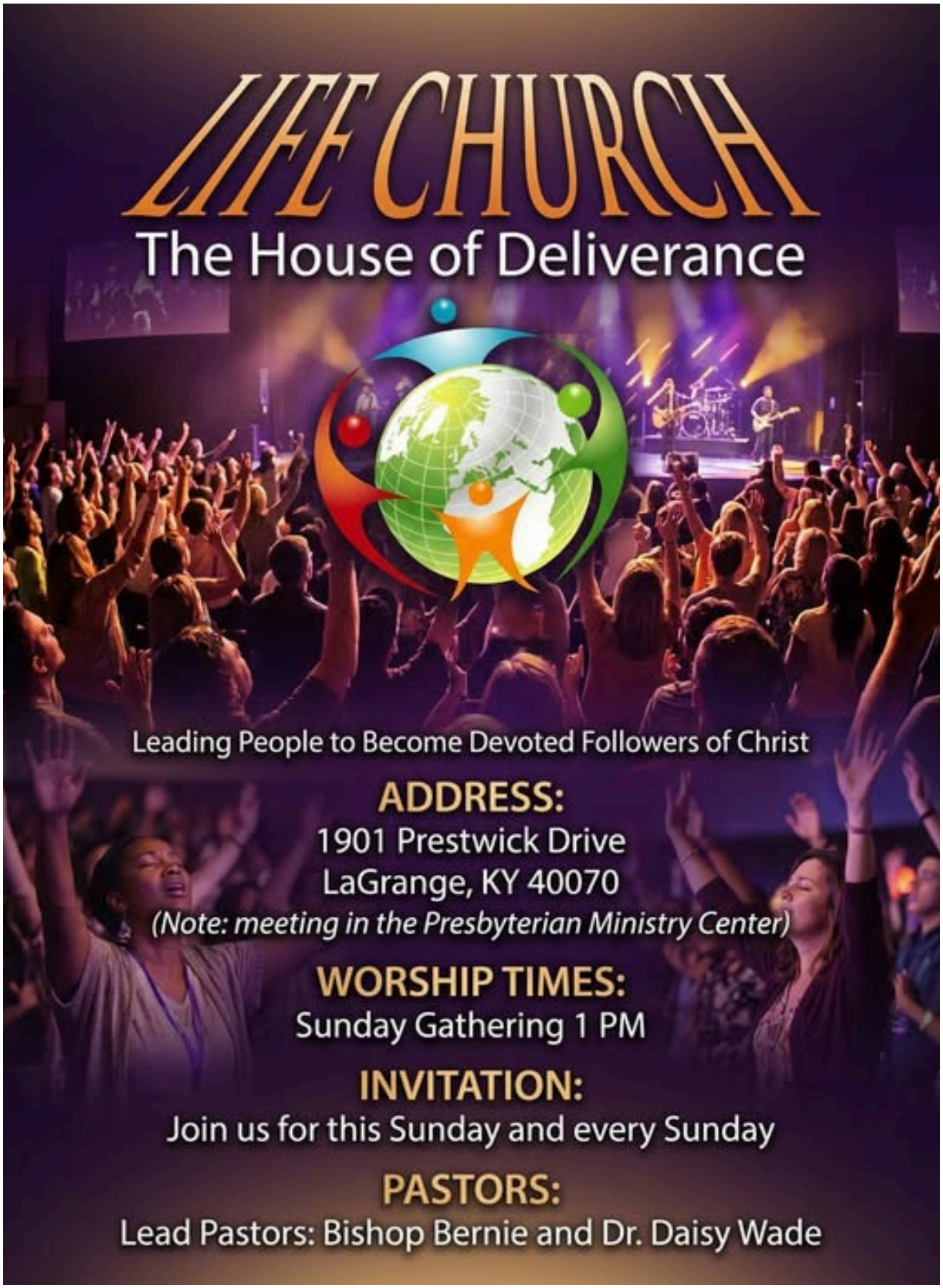
Bishop Dr. Otobong Michael (also known as Prophet Dr. Otobo Michael or by the handle oto_mike) **serves as the International Coalition of Fellowships (ICOF) Ambassador to Nigeria and as an active prayer/national coordinator**. He frequently ministers alongside other ICOF leaders and uses social platforms to host national prayer events and ministerial ordinations.

You can follow his ministry and events on the Otobong Michael Instagram and the Otobong Michael Facebook page.



RAISING KINGDOM LEADERS and THE RELEASE OF NEW DISCIPLES ICOF SCHOOL OF MINISTRY NIGERIA LICENSING AND ORDINATIONS CEREMONY
--- Dr. Otobong Michael---
ICOF Ambassador to Nigeria




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Lead Pastors: Bishop Bernie and Dr. Daisy Wade

Kansas City ICOF Chaplains to attend National Safety Conference

By John W Losh II
AAHEA Administrative Assistant
Chief News Correspondent
ICOF Associate Chaplain
Contributing Writer
Secretary/Chief
News Correspondent
Birland World Foundation



The Serving The Shield organization www.servingtheshield.com located in Golden, Colorado, is holding its 2026 National Safety Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, at the Sheffield Family Life Center on Saturday, June 6th.

The Conference includes twelve keynote speakers from various public Service agencies around the U.S. These include (but are not limited to) Firefighters and A Fire Chief. Police Officers, A Police Chief, and Sheriff's Deputies. A Navy SEAL and A Chaplain.

AAHEA Owner/CEO and ICOF Chaplain General Dr Stephen R Barnhart and I, AAHEA Administrative Assistant/Chief News Correspondent and ICOF Associate Chaplain/Contributing Writer John Losh, will be in attendance.

Both of us attended a Serving The Shield Level 3 Chaplain Training event in November, 2025, instructed by Dr Barry Young. Not only was this an excellent event that Dr Barnhart and I found samples of Chaplaincy Program brochures that we have shared, but I met Jared Altic, who is a Kansas City, Kansas Police Chaplain and owns the Hey, Chaplain Police Wellness Podcast.

The Hey, Chaplain Podcast can be found on YouTube and several other platforms. He has since been a guest on the Faith Horizons: Discovering The Kingdom Of God in Kansas City Podcast www.faithhorizons.com that I have been the Guest Recruiter/Scheduler and Co-Host of since March, 2025.

I have made listening to episodes of the Hey, Chaplain Podcast and taking notes part of my ongoing Chaplain training.

Serving the Shield's Mission (from their website)

Serving the Shield and Rocky Mountain Police & Fire Chaplains exists to guide chaplains in understanding the mission by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve with confidence and excellence.

The Chaplain Mission

- Serving those who serve us.
- Serving the Shield Strategy
- Committed to strengthening and advancing emergency responder chaplaincy by:
- Advocating for Chaplaincy to be embedded in all responder organizations,
- Connecting and organizing chaplains,
- Developing trusting relationships,
- Equipping through excellent training,
- Assist in developing new programs,
- Prepare for large-scale multi-agency crisis responses, and provide leadership to oversee and unify the chaplain movement.

The Chaplain Strategy

To provide practical, emotional, and spiritual support to emergency responder personnel and their families.

Advocating for Chaplaincy to be embedded in all emergency responder organizations

Working with the IACP (International Association of Chiefs of Police) to establish healthy and well-trained chaplain programs in every police and fire agency across the United States. Click here to view the chaplain section's mission and objectives and the IACP Chaplain Resolution.

Connecting and organizing chaplains

We are a collaborative group of chaplains currently serving Emergency Responder agencies.

This is founded on the “more minds are better than one” idea. The goal is to constantly provide shared materials, resources, personnel, and training.

You are not in this alone. There is a group of like-minded chaplains serving with you.

A shared resource mindset will increase our effectiveness as we serve our Law Enforcement community.

Developing trusting relationships

Chaplains should be a vital aspect of each and every Emergency Responder agency.

Chaplains should be trusted and valued by their respective agencies. The Chaplain’s relationships with Officers, Firefighters, Support Staff, and Families should be a priority through their daily activity and interaction. Because of these trusted and valued relationships, the Chaplains should be the individuals who are relied upon in moments of crisis.

Chaplains should be capable of providing safe and confidential support in both preventative interaction and in the midst of the challenging situations and circumstances that will impact every member of the Emergency Responder world.

Equipping through excellent training

We have developed a Chaplain Training Standard. This clearly defines basic level training expectations as well as ongoing training levels for all Chaplains

Chaplains must be prepared for every situation.

All active Chaplains should be trained to an appropriate level of competence.

Assist in developing new programs

We can assist with the development of new chaplain programs.

We will provide the needed guidelines, structure, and strategy to initiate an effective chaplain program. Every agency is different, and every agency will have a unique culture.

However, there are always specific non-negotiables in the establishment of a chaplain program.

Prepare for large-scale multi-agency crisis responses

We come alongside participating chaplains to support and serve them and their agency in the midst of a large crisis incident. This response is specific to Emergency

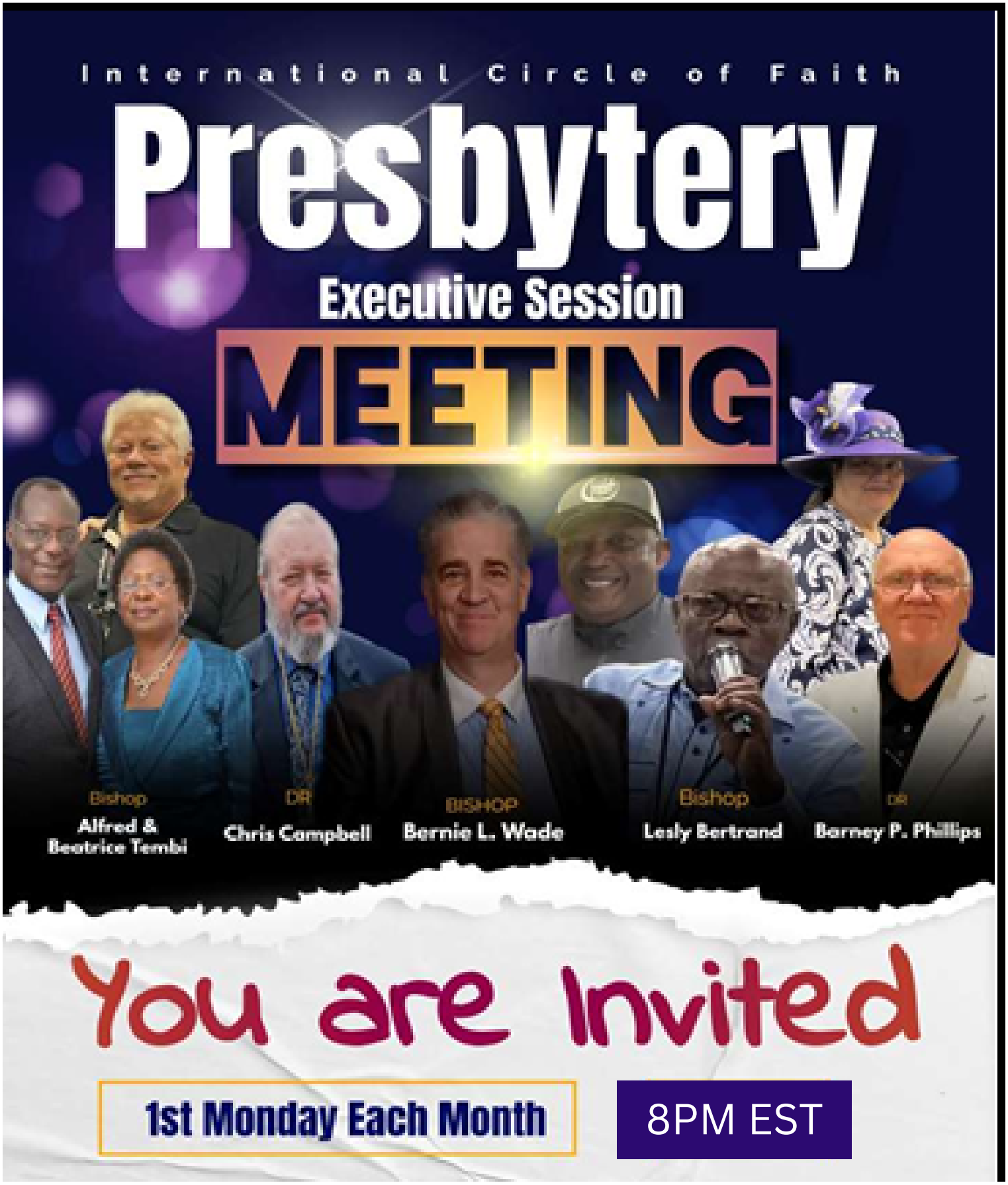


Responder personnel and their families. When a crisis requires more assistance than current chaplain teams can manage, we will be available, upon request, to respond with known and qualified RMPFC-affiliated chaplains.

Provide leadership to oversee and unify the chaplain movement

We provide additional accountability within agencies. We will not replace the primary accountability structure within current agencies but will provide ongoing and additional connection points for chaplains. This accountability will ensure ongoing growth, consistent expectations, and maintain a high level of maturity and character for individual chaplains.

Dr Barnhart and I look forward to this opportunity to continue our Chaplain education at the conference.


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7 Reasons Why Many Churches Only Have a Few True Believers

*R*epublished with permission. Original date: **May 19, 2026**

by Bishop Joseph Mattera

SHOWCASING



"To soil one's garments is to allow the world, sin, or idolatry to stain one's life and witness."

In **Revelation 3:1–5**, Jesus delivers one of the most piercing rebukes to the church in Sardis:

"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead… You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

This is a staggering indictment. Here was a church with a reputation for life—perhaps known for its activity, influence, or history—yet in the eyes of Christ it was spiritually dead. Even more sobering is the phrase: *"You have a few names…"* This implies that the majority had compromised, while only a remnant remained pure.

The imagery of *"soiled garments"* points to moral and spiritual compromise. In Scripture, clean garments often symbolize righteousness, purity, and readiness to stand before God. To soil one's garments is to allow the world, sin, or idolatry to stain one's life and witness.

The tragedy of Sardis is not that it had no believers, but that it had so few who remained untainted.

This passage forces us to ask: Why is it that in many churches, only a few remain spiritually vibrant, pure, and faithful?

The following are seven reasons.

1. **A Reputation for Life Replaces the Reality of Life**

Jesus said, ***"You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."*** This reveals the danger of mistaking reputation for reality.

Churches can become known for past moves of God, strong branding, large gatherings, or influential leaders. Over time, the memory of life replaces the experience of life. Instead of cultivating ongoing renewal, they rely on legacy.

When a church lives off yesterday's blessing/ only a few who pursue God personally will remain spiritually alive. The rest will be sustained by appearance rather than encounter.



1. **Spiritual Complacency Goes Unchallenged**

Jesus commands them, ***"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."***

This implies a slow drift—not sudden collapse. Sardis was not in open rebellion; it was in quiet decay.

When complacency is not confronted from the pulpit or in leadership, it spreads through the congregation. Prayer diminishes. Hunger fades. Discernment weakens.

In such an environment, only those who intentionally cultivate a life with God will remain unsoiled. Everyone else gradually adapts to the low spiritual climate.

2. **Cultural Accommodation Replaces Prophetic Distinction**

Sardis likely avoided persecution because it did not challenge the surrounding culture. It blended in.

Whenever the church becomes more concerned with acceptance than with faithfulness, it begins to reflect the values of the world instead of the kingdom. This results in subtle compromises—ethical, moral, and spiritual.

When there is no clear line between the church and the culture, most will drift toward cultural norms. Only a few will resist and remain distinct.

3. **Outward Activity Masks Inward Emptiness**

Jesus said, ***"I have not found your works perfect before God."***

This means they had works—but those works were incomplete, lacking spiritual substance.

5. **Sin Is Tolerated Rather Than Confronted**

The concept of *"soiled garments"* implies defilement that was not properly addressed.

When sin is minimized, redefined, or ignored, it spreads within the body. What is tolerated eventually becomes normalized.

In many churches, the desire to maintain peace or avoid offense leads to silence regarding issues of holiness. But silence is not neutrality—it is permission.

As a result, only a few who fear the Lord more than they fear man will guard their lives from defilement.

6. **Leadership Fails to Cultivate Spiritual Vigilance**

Jesus' command to ***"wake up"*** in verse 2 suggests that the leaders—and the church as a whole—had fallen asleep spiritually.

Spiritual vigilance requires intentional leadership that prioritizes prayer, discernment, and accountability. When leaders become more focused on maintaining systems than on cultivating spiritual life, the church loses its alertness. Without watchfulness, compromise enters unnoticed.

In such a setting, only a few remain awake—those who take personal responsibility for their walk with God.

7. **People Rely on Corporate Identity Instead of Personal Devotion**

The fact that Jesus highlights *"a few names"* indicates that spiritual life is ultimately individual, not merely corporate.

It also illustrates how Jesus intimately knows the condition of every church and single believer.

Many in Sardis likely identified with the church but did not cultivate a personal relationship with Christ. They assumed that being part of a recognized community equated to spiritual health.

But God does not evaluate us based on association—He looks at the heart.

When believers rely solely on the strength of the community without developing personal devotion, they become vulnerable to compromise. Only those who walk closely with Christ on a daily basis remain unsoiled.

Conclusion

The message to Sardis is both a warning and an invitation.

It is a warning that a church can have a reputation for life while being spiritually dead. It is possible to be surrounded by activity, influence, and history—and yet lack the presence and power of God.

But it is also an invitation.

Jesus did not say there were none who remained faithful—He said there were a few. God has always preserved a remnant who have not soiled their garments and promised that they will walk with Him in white. This speaks of intimacy, purity, and victory. It reminds us that no matter how compromised the environment, it is still possible to live a life that honors Christ.

The call is clear:

"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent." **(Revelation 3:3)**

In every generation, the church must decide whether it will settle for reputation or pursue reality… whether it will blend in or stand out… whether it will drift or remain watchful.

May we not be content to be part of a church that is known for being alive…

But be among the few who truly are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bishop Joseph Mattera is an internationally known author, consultant, and theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence culture. He is the founding pastor of Resurrection Church and leads several organizations, including The U.S. Coalition of Apostolic Leaders and Christ Covenant Coalition. Dr Mattera is the author of 13 bestselling books, including his latest, "The Purpose, Power, and Process of Prophetic Ministry," and is renowned for applying Scripture to contemporary culture. To order his books or join the many thousands who subscribe to his newsletter, go to **josephmattera.org**



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The Inner Critic

by Joseph Benton Howell, PhD

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



'For some of us, the inner critic can take a great toll, plummeting us into guilt and despair.'

Where do the voices come from that point out to us our mistakes, our shortcomings, failings, and sins? You know the voice—we all have one. It is the inner critic who monitors, edits, and criticizes everything we say, do, or even think. For some of us, the inner critic can take a great toll, plummeting us into guilt and despair.

Psychologists and neuroscientists have determined the root causes of the inner critic, and this article will discuss these. Simply being conscious of this inner voice helps us to quiet it and to hopefully prevent its harmful effects.

I also offer a way forward without an inner critic that grounds us in a state of being that supports us, our self-esteem, and self-worth. This is the state of being the Beloved. The beloved is discussed as being synonymous with our soul, our essence. It is our powerful spiritual identity at our core that is usually covered by the ego.

Where does the inner critic come from?

The inner critic constantly evaluates, warns, accuses, judges, and frequently condemns. It criticizes our behavior, thoughts, motives, and feelings. Its roots lie in what psychoanalytic theory calls the superego—the moral and regulatory dimension of the psyche that first internalizes parental authority, values, expectations, and standards. It eventually expands to include other authorities and codes of behavior to which we adhere.

The superego functions as an inner moral compass, alerting us to actions that may lead to shame, guilt, rejection, or punishment. Its task is to restrain and transform our primitive drives so that we may live within the boundaries of relationship, society, and conscience.

Sigmund Freud described the psyche as consisting of three primary structures: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id contains our instinctual and primal drives, impulses, desires, appetites, and wishes. Left unchecked, these primitive impulses could lead to destructive behaviors that result in alienation, shame, guilt, and punishment. The superego contains our conscience. Those with impaired or underdeveloped superegos have little or no conscience and can fall into the categories of sociopathy and criminality.

The ego, however, is the major structure that moves us through life. It develops gradually from infancy and eventually becomes the container for our personality and perception. By approximately age six, the ego has become the central way the child navigates the world. It carries our self-image, our narrative identity, our curiosity, and our adaptive strategies. The ego mediates between the demands of the id, the expectations of the superego, and the realities of external life.

The superego develops through early attachment relationships with parents and caregivers during infancy and early childhood. The attachment process begins with the infant's learning to trust that caregivers will provide nourishment, safety, comfort, affection, and love. Through repeated interactions, the child forms bonds that create security and emotional regulation.

The earliest manifestations of the superego are in the infant's realizations that certain behaviors please caregivers while others displease them. This realization develops on psychological, emotional, and neurological levels. Behaviors that receive approval are reinforced and likely to be repeated, while behaviors that evoke disapproval, irritation, withdrawal, or punishment become associated with distress.

Over time, neural pathways are strengthened around reward and inhibition. This is how the child first internalizes the distinction between what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Psychologist Erik Erikson outlined stages of psychosocial development that further illuminate the origins of the superego and, eventually, the inner critic.

The first stage, ***Trust vs. Mistrust,*** occurs in infancy. During this stage, the child develops primary attachments and learns whether caregivers can be trusted to meet basic emotional and physical needs. These early interactions form the first layer of relational expectation and emotional patterning.

The second stage, *Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt*, generally occurs between the end of infancy and around age three. During this period, the child begins to exercise independence—walking, feeding themselves, exploring, and gaining control over bodily functions and actions. As the child tests limits, caregivers establish boundaries through correction, disapproval, or punishment.

Because the caregiver is also the child's primary source of love, safety, and belonging, correction can feel like a form of relational rupture. The child naturally experiences shame and self-doubt when they perceive disapproval from those they depend on most deeply. The child gradually learns that they can make mistakes, feel shame, and yet remain loved and accepted.

The third stage, *Initiative vs. Guilt*, generally unfolds between ages three and six. Here, the child expands psychologically and socially. They test ownership, power, influence, rules, and boundaries. Actions become increasingly intentional, and moral development becomes clearer.

At this stage, the child begins to experience not merely shame, but guilt. Shame focuses on the self—I am bad. Guilt focuses on behavior—I have done something wrong. Intellectually and emotionally, the child begins to recognize that their actions may cause pain, harm, disappointment, or injury to others. This marks an important step in the development of empathy, morality, and conscience.

Rules, promises, fairness, and obligations become increasingly important. Standards are internalized not only to avoid punishment and preserve attachment, but also because the child begins to empathize with others. Through family life, peer interaction, school experiences, and social participation, codes of conduct become integrated into the personality.

Neuroscience supports this developmental picture. During these years, attachment circuits deepen, emotional regulation systems expand, empathy networks mature, threat detection systems become more active, and social-learning pathways become increasingly sophisticated. Memory capacity grows, Neuroscience, shame, and guilt, allowing children to internalize relational experiences and moral expectations more fully.

Given this developmental background, it becomes clear that the superego is essential to human life. Without it, we would lack an internal sense of morality, accountability, empathy, and ethical restraint. Shame, self-doubt, and guilt are not inherently pathological; they are signals that we may have crossed a boundary that we ourselves recognize as meaningful or necessary.

Shame is the more primitive emotional reaction. It resembles the feeling of being *"caught with one's hand in the cookie jar."* It is immediate, exposed, and self-conscious.

Guilt is a more developed moral emotion. It is the feeling of remorse or sorrow for having violated one's own moral code or caused harm to another person. Guilt reflects a growing capacity for empathy, reflection, and ethical awareness.

The superego does not *want* us to experience shame and guilt. Much of its energy is devoted to warning, cautioning, restraining, and redirecting behavior to prevent painful consequences. Yet the superego also possesses a punitive side. When overactive or distorted, it can become excessively repressive and harsh.

Component and Origins of the Inner Critic

The inner critic is an extension of the superego into conscious awareness. The inner critic perpetuates an ongoing internal commentary that evaluates, judges, edits, predicts negative consequences, and in some cases administers psychological punishment. While its original purpose is protective, it can become distorted into a destructive force that damages self-esteem, undermines relationships, and erodes emotional well-being.

Although each person's inner critic is unique, its sources are remarkably universal:

1. Internalized impressions from early caregivers regarding what was acceptable or unacceptable (including preverbal experiences) of approval, rejection, disappointment, or punishment.
2. Internalized expectations from teachers, peers, authorities, and communities.
3. Internalized moral codes from families, organizations, cultures, and religious systems.
4. Internalized cultural ideals regarding success, worthiness, morality, strength, appearance, or identity.
5. Ethical and moral preoccupations that have become deeply codified within the superego and transmitted into the functioning of the inner critic.
6. Attitudes and behaviors from the pain body.
7. The need to please, obey, or conform to the mores of the current psycho-situation.
8. Internalized projections onto the Divine of the Divine's judgments of us.
9. Guilt and shame complexes.

The inner critic often functions in the following ways:

1. It reminds us of standards and expectations, but in harsh and condemning language that characterizes the self as defective, inadequate, wrong, weak, or unworthy.
2. It generates worst-case scenarios and catastrophic predictions.
3. It rehearses punishments and consequences, imagining rejection, humiliation, or failure.
4. 1.It unleashes self-punitive thought loops, rumination, and internal verbal attacks.

5. It intensifies guilt into forms of self-condemnation that can become emotionally paralyzing.
6. It edits and over-edits what is said, and compromises what we do.
7. It projects negative thoughts and feelings about how others perceive us.
8. It listens to our excuses against its accusations and never accepts them.
9. It predicts that we are hopeless and that things will never change.

Every person within each Enneagram personality type has their own flavor of inner critic and its own way of operating. But each inner critic of each type can be reduced to the following lies they tell themselves. Each inner critic is based on the wounds we receive when we disconnect from essence.

1. The world has gone all wrong. I have to fix it, but am plagued every day by the knowledge that there is too much to set right, and that I, too, am flawed.
2. As desperately as I try to feel loved, I will never be.
3. Regardless of how voraciously I drive myself to accomplish and receive recognition, I always fail or fall short. I am not enough.
4. I am defective, unseen, and abandoned. I will never feel authentic or happy.
5. The outside world besieges me. My safe harbor will always be inundated by others who diminish me, and I will never feel whole, free, and in charge.
6. I will always be scared of what's next, and of what will happen to me. Danger lurks around every corner and is ready to devour me. I lack the strength to protect myself.
7. I am so busy darting around and consuming, but I will never have the satisfaction I seek.
8. My armor shields me from the intimacy and touch I so desire, but will never receive. I do it to myself because I refuse to be vulnerable.
9. I will always belittle myself to keep the peace. When others see this, they have the right to belittle me, too. It does not matter.

The inner critic is therefore a pathological exaggeration of the psyche's natural self-regulating capacities. What begins as healthy moral guidance can become distorted into chronic self-belittlement, perfectionism, shame, and psychological self-attack.

Healing the Inner Critic

Yet there is also a profound paradox within human development: the very empathy that gives rise to conscience can also become the means by which the inner critic is healed.

When a person learns to extend empathy and compassion toward themselves, they begin to recognize how unfairly and harshly they have treated their own humanity. They begin to see themselves not merely as offenders, but also as wounded persons shaped by fear, attachment, conditioning, and survival.

Self-compassion does not abolish morality; it humanizes it. In spiritual language, when we come to understand ourselves as beings worthy of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love, the inner critic gradually loses its authority. To embody oneself as the Beloved is to stand in a deeper identity than shame. The inner critic's accusations become increasingly powerless because they no longer define who we are at our core.

The Beloved may still make mistakes, experience remorse, and seek repair—but the Beloved is not reducible to failure. And ultimately, what the inner critic says about the Beloved is no longer absolute truth, but merely the echo of an earlier and more frightened voice.

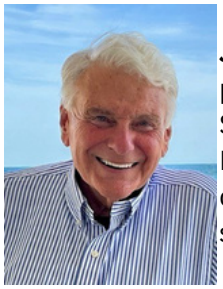
Living in one's soul rather than only in one's ego is the most potent antidote to the Inner critic. To the beloved in soulality, the inner critic is irrelevant. The shift to soulality is a shift away from shame, self-doubt, and guilt into the soulscape of support, unconditional love, and abiding joy. Steeped in the soul, every challenge that the inner critic throws out is cast off.

Instead of harsh predictions of punishment and rejection, the Beloved lives assured of its belongingness, its place, and its blessedness. Instead of listening to catastrophic predictions, the Beloved is attuned to the voice of love, acceptance, understanding, and forgiveness. Rather than imagining failure, it imagines healing and harmony.

It does not allow the negative to take hold of its nervous system, but bathes that system in love. It looks at guilt and, with love and through self-inquiry, discerns if there is truth to it or if it is irrational. After discernment, if forgiveness is called for, forgiveness is sought from self and from the Divine. The Beloved comes from such a place of love that its truth and recommendations are always spoken with an intent to shed light and to build people's self-respect.

The Beloved in its soulality inquires about its thoughts and feelings; it asks, are these projections or are they valid? It asks, *"Where do these feelings and thoughts come from?"* It is not dependent on others' opinions of them. The Beloved does not enter into dialogues or arguments with the inner critic. The Beloved as a human will make mistakes and trespass against its own standards and those of others. Yet the Beloved in soulality never loses faith and hope.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joseph Benton Howell, Ph.D., founder of **the Institute of Conscious Being**, is a clinical psychologist, spiritual teacher, and IEA Accredited Professional Teacher. Educated at Samford University, Yale Divinity School, the University of Virginia, and Harvard Medical School, Dr. Howell has taught widely on the Enneagram, dream work, spiritual development, and soul transformation. With his wife, Lark Dill Howell, he shares wisdom shaped by scholarship, clinical practice, grief, and lifelong spiritual discovery.


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Psalm 150:6
English Standard Version
6 Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!
Everything that has breath!
Not some things. Not humans,
it says EVERYTHING!
Meaning that even though
we don't physically witness it,
all of creation bows before
One God!
That is something and
what a great God we serve!
AMEN!

From Uganda to Denver:

Pastor Robert Kayanja
UNAA Worship Experience

When the Ugandan North American Association gathers in Denver for its 38th Annual UNAA Convention & Trade Expo, the weekend will close with a powerful moment of worship, reflection, and spiritual encouragement.

Pastor Robert Kayanja, Founder and Senior Pastor of Miracle Centre Cathedral, will travel from Uganda to Denver, Colorado, to serve as Minister and Keynote Speaker for the Sunday Interfaith Service and Closing Ceremonies.

According to UNAA President and CEO Lambert Etibot, the service begins at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, September 6, 2026, and is expected to bring together believers, families, friends, and community members for an uplifting experience of worship, fellowship, and inspiration.

Known internationally as an evangelist, preacher, and influential faith leader, Pastor Kayanja's ministry has touched millions through preaching, outreach, and humanitarian service. His presence at UNAA Denver 2026 adds a deeply spiritual dimension to a convention already centered on business, culture, entertainment, networking, and discovery.

The official convention flyer describes the gathering as a "transformational worship experience," featuring an anointed service, powerful teachings, and a dynamic keynote address. With the theme "Achieving Great Achievements," the event invites attendees not only to celebrate Ugandan identity and excellence abroad, but also to reflect on faith, purpose, and the higher calling that strengthens communities across generations.

For many Ugandans in North America, UNAA is more than an annual convention. It is a homecoming, a cultural bridge, and a place where vision is renewed. Pastor Kayanja's journey from Uganda to Denver symbolizes that bridge beautifully, connecting the spiritual heartbeat of Uganda with the aspirations, achievements, and shared hopes of the diaspora.

As the convention concludes, his keynote message is expected to offer more than inspiration. It will be a call to faith, unity, courage, and renewed purpose. In a season when communities everywhere are searching for strength and direction, this worship experience promises to be a memorable closing moment for UNAA Denver 2026.

The 38th Annual UNAA Convention & Trade Expo will be held in Denver, Colorado, with registration available through UNAA's official convention platform.


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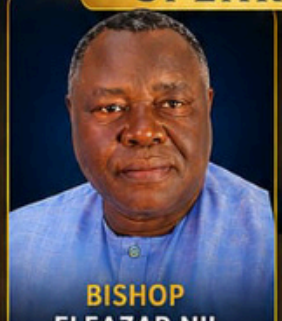
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Planting More Than a Church:
Building a Living Witness in Nairobi

by Pastor Wali Hannington

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



'It begins with a burden, a people, a place, and a plan bold enough to turn holy desire into disciplined action.'

This strategic plan was born from a burden to see Nairobi touched by a Christ-centered, Spirit-led, and community-transforming church. Our desire is not simply to gather people, but to raise a family of faith that worships deeply, disciples faithfully, and serves its city with compassion.

Church planting is never merely a construction project. At its best, it is a holy act of obedience, vision, stewardship, and courageous leadership. The proposed Life Church Nairobi Kenya initiative presents a clear and practical roadmap for launching a new congregation in Nairobi City.

Its mission is to spread the Gospel, nurture believers, serve the community, and establish a sustainable ministry presence.

The heart of this plan is refreshingly relational. Rather than simply adding another church to the city, the vision is to cultivate an authentic family of faith where worship, discipleship, fellowship, evangelism, and compassionate service become the visible marks of the congregation.

The church is envisioned as a Christ-centered, Bible-believing community that transforms lives through the power of the Gospel while also addressing real human needs through counseling, mentorship, charity, family support, youth outreach, and community service.

The strategy unfolds in practical phases. First, the ministry will secure land, install a worship tent, construct office and restroom facilities, and establish basic utilities. Second, the church will be furnished and equipped for worship, administration, and ministry operations.

Third, the launch will be supported through soul-winning campaigns, open-air crusades, leadership conferences, and evangelistic outreach. Finally, the church will move toward long-term growth through weekly worship, discipleship programs, stewardship development, leadership training, and income-generating initiatives.

The financial plan is modest but purposeful. The first-year requirement is projected at $50,045, including $43,245 in capital investment and $7,800 in annual operating costs. These funds will support land leasing, temporary worship facilities, office construction, furnishings, equipment, electrical installation, launch evangelism, and basic monthly ministry operations



"The strongest church plants are not built around attendance first. They are built around spiritual authenticity, disciplined leadership, and a burden for the community."



The financial plan is modest but purposeful. The first-year requirement is projected at $50,045, including $43,245 in capital investment and $7,800 in annual operating costs. These funds will support land leasing, temporary worship facilities, office construction, furnishings, equipment, electrical installation, launch evangelism, and basic monthly ministry operations

The plan also sets measurable ministry targets: 300 souls won in the first year, 100 weekly attendees within the first year, 150 active members within three years, 20 leaders trained annually, and one additional church planted within five years. These goals reveal a church-planting model that is not only spiritual but also strategic, accountable, and growth-minded.

Life Church, Nairobi, Kenya, is more than a proposed congregation. It is a seedbed for worship, discipleship, leadership, outreach, and community transformation. With prayer, wise partnerships, faithful stewardship, and disciplined execution, this church plant has the potential to become a living witness of hope in Nairobi and a model for future multiplication.

That distinction is crucial.

The Nairobi plan sets measurable ministry targets: 300 souls won in the first year, 100 weekly attendees within the first year, 150 active members within three years, 20 leaders trained annually, and one additional church planted within five years. These are not casual hopes. They are strategic markers that give the ministry a way to evaluate fruitfulness, discipline, momentum, and multiplication.

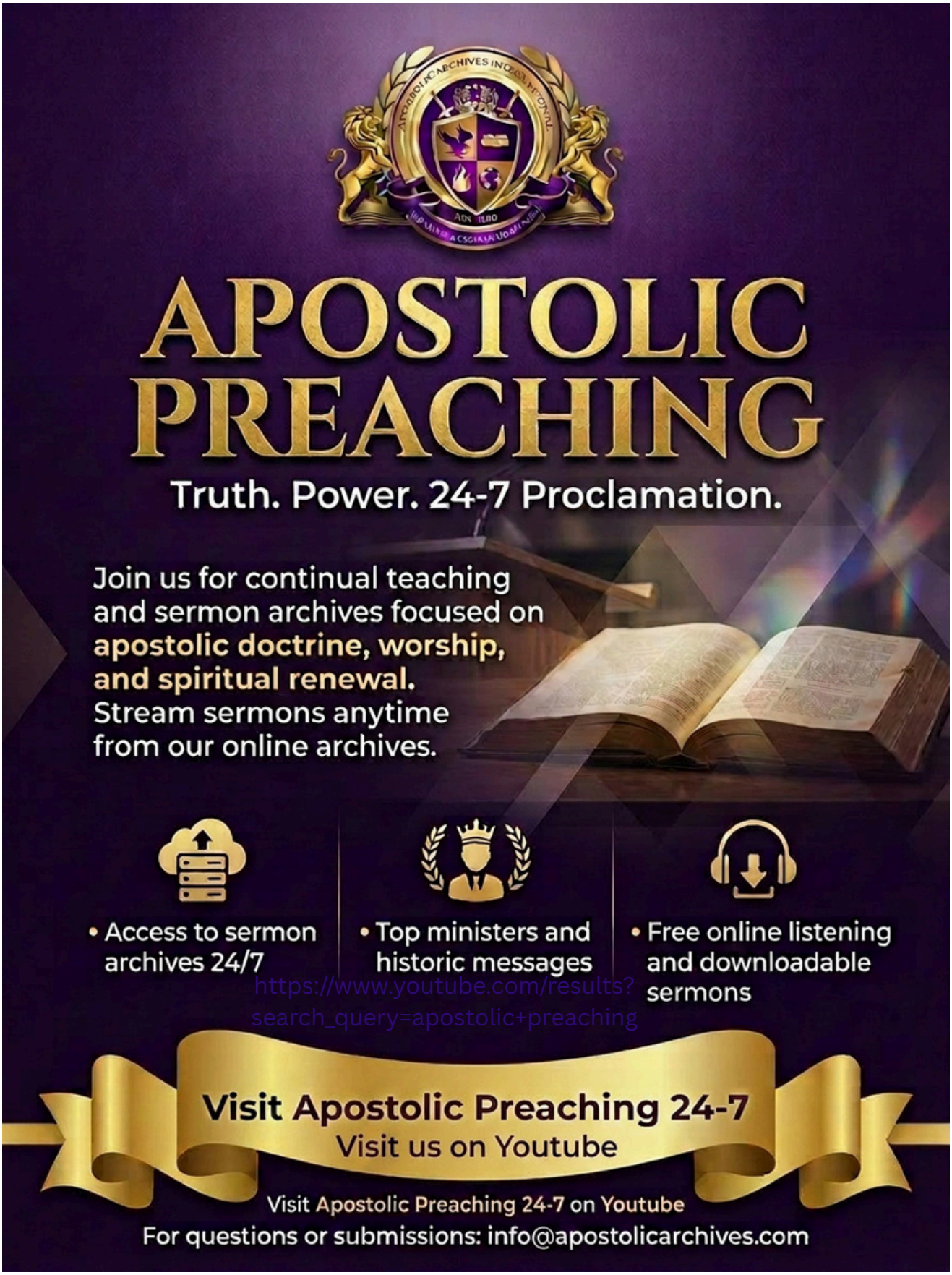
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pastor Wali Hannington is a seasoned Bible teacher with more than 20 years of ministry experience. He brings cross-cultural experience, authenticity, and a heart for social change in Africa. An article writer and author, he enjoys training, counseling, and coaching on relationships and marriage, turning quiet reflection into books, articles, and life-giving educational messages today.

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Future-Ready Faith:

Strengthening Ministry Without Losing the Mission



The future of ministry does not belong to the loudest, flashiest, or most technologically advanced organization. It belongs to faithful leaders who are willing to look honestly at where they are, listen carefully to what God may be revealing, and take courageous steps toward renewed mission. That is the heart of the Future-Ready Ministry Assessment, a practical worksheet package designed for pastors, boards, ministry teams, Christian schools, and faith-based organizations seeking stronger, healthier, and more mission-focused leadership.

This tool is not a test to shame leaders or expose failure. It is an invitation to reflection. Every church, school, and ministry carries both strengths and strains. Some areas may be healthy and growing. Some may be tired, unclear, under-supported, or need more attention. The assessment gives leaders a simple way to name reality without fear and to move forward without panic.

At its core, future-ready ministry is deeply conservative in the best sense of the word. It does not ask leaders to abandon biblical conviction, spiritual identity, or sacred calling. Instead, it asks what must be preserved, what must be strengthened, what must be reformed, and what must be released. That kind of discernment is not trend-chasing. It is stewardship.

The ten assessment areas speak directly to the real pressures facing today's ministries: leadership health and self-care, trust and spiritual credibility, depth of discipleship, conflict-faithful leadership, shared leadership and succession, digital and AI stewardship, missionary re-engagement, communication clarity, governance readiness, and adaptive vision. Together, these areas form a clear picture of whether a ministry is simply maintaining activity or preparing wisely for the road ahead.



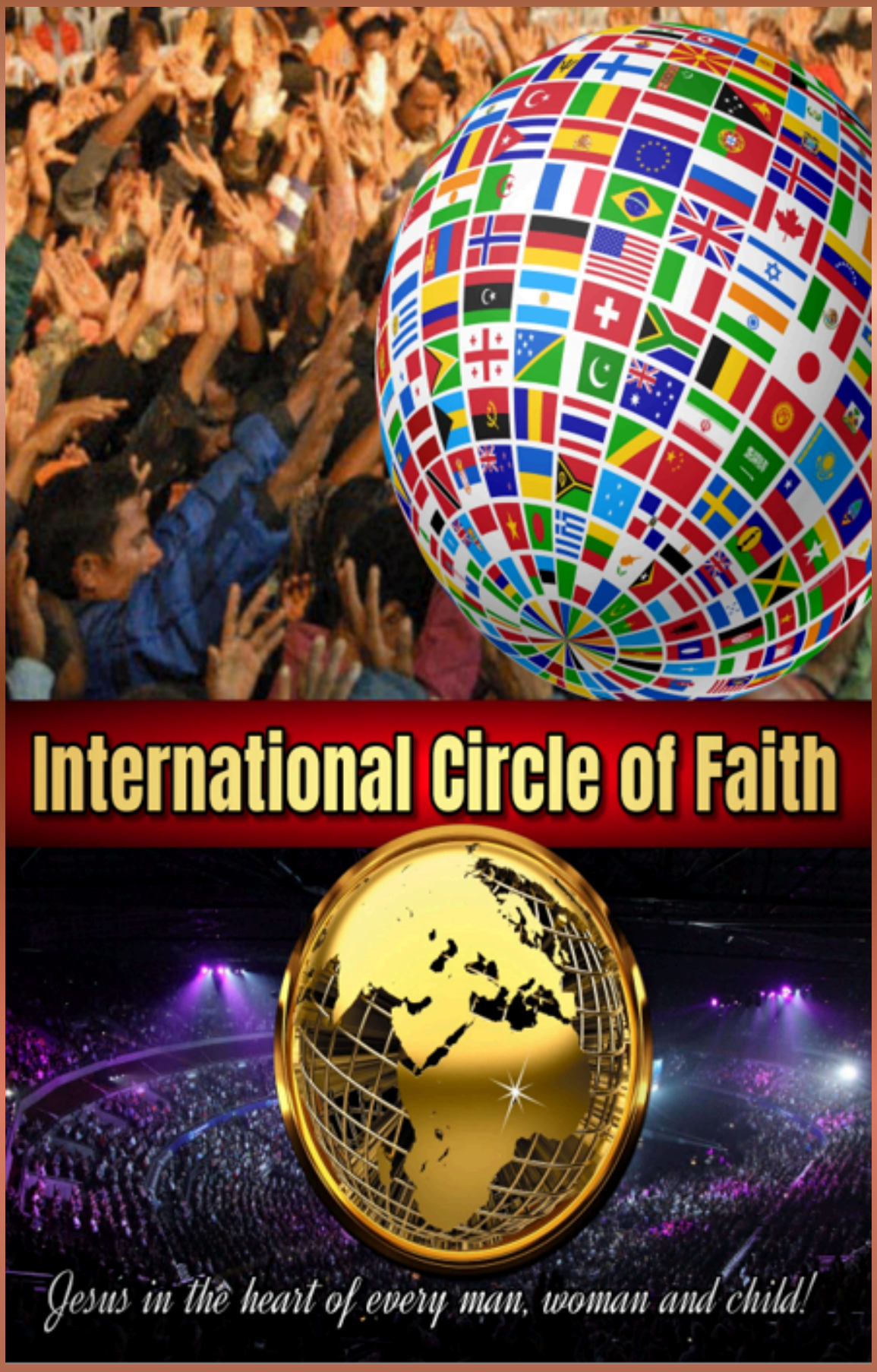
"The future does not require the Church to abandon the mission. It calls faithful leaders to carry the mission with renewed wisdom, courage, and clarity."



One of the strongest features of the assessment is its hopeful realism. It recognizes that some ministries may need urgent renewal. Others may be vulnerable but viable. Some may be stable and strengthening. A few may already be future-ready and mission-focused. But in every case, the recommended response is practical: identify the weakest areas, assign responsibility, create a 30-day action step, and build a 90-day strengthening plan.

This matters because the future is not waiting for weary leaders to catch their breath. Families are changing. Communities are shifting. Young people are asking different questions. The disconnected, wounded, skeptical, busy, and spiritually curious are still within reach, but they may not be reached by yesterday's assumptions.

Download the Complete Future-Ready Ministry Assessment **Here**


International Circle of Faith
Jesus in the heart of every man, woman and child!

SAFE PEOPLE
20 Traits of Unsafe People

(from Dr. Henry Cloud's book ***Safe People***)

Part 2 of a 4 Part Series

Welcome back to the next section of the manuscript. (link to part one's issue, where the first part is within)

If you may recall, the introduction and part one spoke at length that spiritually and emotionally healthy relationships require discernment, humility, boundaries, and character awareness: *"unsafe people"* are often marked by defensiveness, blame-shifting, manipulation, instability, poor communication, resistance to accountability, boundary violations, gossip, lack of empathy, and little evidence of growth, while *"safe people"* draw others closer to God, closer to healthy community, and closer to becoming who God created them to be.

The central message is that choosing safe relationships is not judgmental but wise and biblical,



'Spiritually and emotionally healthy relationships require discernment, humility, boundaries, and character awareness'

because relationships can either bring grace, growth, healing, and strength or produce repeated pain, confusion, and spiritual harm.

The material urges readers to evaluate the character of those they date, befriend, or follow spiritually, while also examining their own patterns, wounds, loneliness, fear, lack of boundaries, or unmet needs that may cause them to keep choosing harmful people. Real change comes through confession, support, self-awareness, skill-building, spiritual growth, and the courage to establish boundaries or step back from destructive relationships when necessary.

Part 2

Learning to Be Safe



Has this question ever crossed your mind? Okay, I finally found a safe person. Now what do I do with him? Look at him? Take him home? Go to a movie? Ride off into the sunset? Many of us are quite unfamiliar with the dynamics of closeness.

The good news is that we can take action to become more intimate. These actions lead us into deeper connections with God's people, which then sustain us for life and growth.

There are several major tasks and opportunities ahead of you when you make the connection. Let's take a look at them.

Learn to Ask for Help

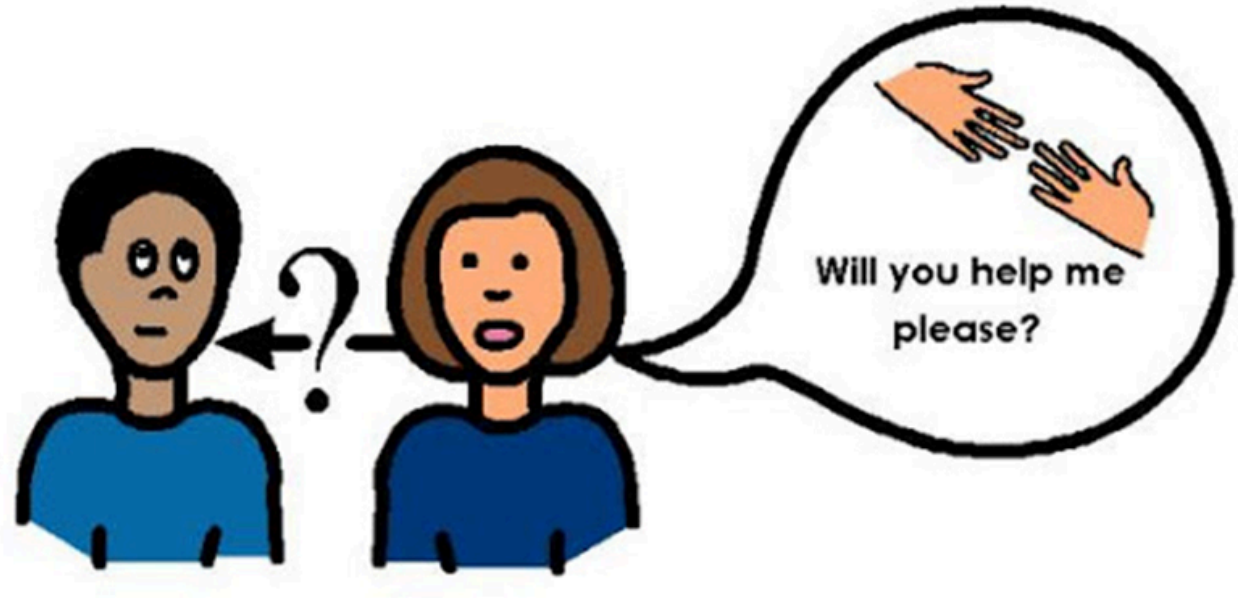
God places a high premium in the value of asking directly for help. Forms of the word ask appear almost 800 times in the Bible, many of them an invitation from God for us to ask for things:

- *"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."* (**Matthew 21:22**)
- *"You do not have, because you do not ask."* (**James 4:2**)
- *"And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him."* (**1John 3:22**)

Not only are we to ask God for what we need in prayer, but also to ask other people: Paul wrote to his friend Philemon, "Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask" (Philemon 21). Asking is human and divine because God created us to ask.

Why is learning to ask for love so important? Here are a few of the reasons asking is helpful for us:

1. **When we ask**, we develop humility. To request help or support from another destroys any illusions of self-sufficiency we might harbor. Asking helps us remember that we are incomplete, that we are needy, and that we are to seek outside of ourselves to take in what we need. This creates the position of humility in us, which opens us up not only to others but also to God.
2. **When we ask**, we are owning our needs. Asking for love, comfort, or understanding is a transaction between two people. You are saying to the other: "I have a need. It's not your problem. It's not your responsibility. You don't have to respond. But I'd like something from you." This frees the other person to connect to you freely and without obligation. When we own that our needs are our responsibility, we allow others to love us because they truly have something to offer. In other words, asking is a far cry from demanding. When we demand love, we destroy it.



3. **When we ask,** we are taking initiative. Asking is the ultimate "passivity-buster." It helps us out of the trap of wishing and hoping someone will somehow sense our pain intuitively and come to our rescue. It also means that asking keeps us much more in control of our lives. We aren't dependent on the clairvoyance of our friends (what a relief to them!).
4. **When we ask**, we are developing a grateful character. God cherishes a grateful heart. He knows that gratitude will produce love in his people. Those who have been helped will help others. Those who have been loved and forgiven little love little (**Luke 7:47**).
5. **Asking** increases the odds that we'll get something. Though it sounds too obvious to say, it's important. How many times have you neglected reaching out to someone who is now absent from your life? Askers really do tend to get more out of their relationships.

What do I ask for? This is important because many of us confuse function with relationship here. In other words, we're not talking about borrowing a cup of sugar from your neighbor, or getting a ride to the airport. Asking for functional reasons is fine, but it will not help you develop relationships. In fact, it's easy to avoid relationships by asking only for functional things.

Learn to ask your safe people for the very things you found them for: a relational connection. Learn how to ask for your emotional tummy to be filled just like you'd ask for breakfast for your physical body. Ask someone to be with you spiritually and emotionally, the same way that Jesus asked his closest friends in his darkest hour: ***"'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,'*** he said to them, ***'Stay here and keep watch'"*** (**Mark 14:34**).

Learn to Need



God created you to long for attachment, to desire to matter to someone, and to "hunger and thirst" for relationship. He made you that way so that you could know when to seek comfort and connect. Just like your car's gas gauge, your needs tell you when you're on "empty."

However, your needs for relationship may have been buried. They may be so far underground that you've despaired of ever finding them again. If so, this second task, "learning to need," is vital for you.

You can regain your experience of neediness. You had it once: almost all babies are born with the God-given desire to be protected, connected, and comforted. And God is in the business of redeeming that which is lost, including disenfranchised parts of our souls.

1. **Confess your inability to need.** Tell the truth to your safe relationships about how hard it is to rely on others, depend on others, and actually want others close. This lets your friends know that you truly need. As they draw closer to you, instead of shrinking back, you slowly learn to trust again. What is occurring is that the internal need begins to respond to the warmth, constancy, and safety of your relationships.
2. **Don't fake it.** You might be tempted to pretend you're closer and needier than you feel, hoping you can generate the feelings. This isn't helpful.

It distracts your safe people from your real condition and discourages the lost part of you from being known. This will probably take some time, but safe people understand that and have time.

3.Keep your boundaries. Pay attention to your need for separateness. Let people know when you've had enough connecting time, and don't push it too hard. This helps you feel much safer internally, and more ready to take risks, knowing you won't be swallowed up in relationship.



Work Through Resistances

What is resistance? Resistance is our tendency to avoid growth. It's our drive to keep the spiritual and emotional status quo. We incline to move away from God's provisions for our growth.

And we all have it.

Many of the dynamics that drive us to choose unsafe people or no people at all are resistances. We're loaded with ways to keep our hearts from encountering loving, supportive people. As crazy as it sounds, we often build entire lifestyles around avoiding those who would help fill us up.

So, how do I deal with resistances?

1. **Identify your resistances.** The more aware you are of your specific resistances to love, the more power you have over them. Denial is your worst enemy here. With the feedback of friends, make a list of the ways you shrink from safe people, and become a student of these dynamics. They are a "road map" to understanding yourself and your real needs.

2. Bring them into relationship. It takes humility to ask people to help you work through perfectionism, guilt or other issues. But safe people are the last to throw stones. They've got too much experience with their own issues. You'll find warmth and patience with your resistances. What's more, you'll find that your resistances will begin to melt as you connect.



3. **Meet the needs underlying the resistances.** Remember that these oppositions are designed to protect you from hurt. They're obsolete guardians of your soul, like Adam and Eve's fig leaves. And when the true spiritual needs underlying them have been met, they lose their power.

The fight is largely over. Actively seek the connections, the truth, the forgiveness, and the equality with others.

4. Do the opposite of what the resistances tell you. If you're in need, your internal opposition may tell you to do some destructive things, like:

- Go only to God with this.
- Handle it yourself.
- Ignore your need.
- Realize it's your moral failure.·Suck it up. Don't be weak.
- Find someone to criticize you.
- Find someone to "caretake."

Rebel! Rebel against the unbiblical authority of the resistances! They'll tell you to find critical, irresponsible, or abandoning people, or not to seek at all. Instead, seek out loving, responsible, and faithful people.

Invite the Truth About Yourself

One of the most valuable things you can do with your safe people, ranking up there with asking for help, needing, and melting resistance, is simply to invite the truth about yourself.

We have so many blind spots and areas where we aren't aware of our self-destructiveness. The psalmist's invitation to God echoes the same issue. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). God often uses people to answer that prayer.

There are lots of ways to implement this step. You can ask for feedback in a hundred different ways. However, it could be summarized into two questions. If you will regularly ask these two questions to your safe people and use the answers, your life can flourish. They are:

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They are:

1. What do I do that pushes you away from me?
2. What do I do that draws you toward me?

There are a few more difficult words to ask a person, yet nothing more helpful. When you ask these questions, you're saying several important things to your safe people. You're telling them:

- I value how you feel about me.
- I want you to be a very important part of my life.
- I respect what you observe in me.
- I don't want to hurt you or our relationship.
- I trust you with my most vulnerable parts.

Many are terrified at the prospect of hearing feedback from others. You may have heard many hurtful or untrue things about yourself from a critical person. Or you may feel that you're a sham, and that others are waiting to pounce on you and expose you to the world.

Safe people just aren't wired like that. Your safe person wants you to know the truth for two reasons. First, the truth increases love. People who are free to be honest are free to love each other. This is because the fear of loss of attachment is one, and *"there is no fear in love"* **(1 John 4:18**). And second, the truth is always your friend. Understanding how we turn people off can go a long way in increasing the quality of our relationships and work lives. This is part of what the truth setting us free is all about (**John 8:32**).

You'll hear insights, perceptions, emotions, and observations you may have never expected. When people feel truly free to tell you the truth, they tend to be quite honest but also quite loving. Remember, your safe person has heard you take the initiative to ask for the truth. There exists no concrete wall of denials to break through.

Enter into Forgiveness

Safe people are very forgiving people. They have given up on the idealistic demand that they, or anyone else, will be perfect in this life. They know that they continually need divine and human "debt-cancellations." And they expect failure and disappointment from those they love, It's normal in their universe, something to be accustomed to.



They are familiar with the losses and sins of this world. They don't fight it or become indignant or bitter. They know that's just the way a post-Fall, pre-eternity world is. They know that loving is much more important than holding onto the past.

Learn to be "two-sided" in forgiveness. Use your time with your safe people to learn the skills of forgiveness.

1. **Learn to receive forgiveness.** When we are forgiven in our relationships, we truly know what it is to be "home." Being forgiven for our sins, weaknesses, imperfections, and badnesses means reconciliation. It means that someone else knows and doesn't condemn us.

Receiving forgiveness allows us to integrate judged and condemned parts of ourselves. As we experience someone outside who accepts us as we are, we begin to accept the realities of who we are also. In other words, the parts of our soul stop fighting and trying to kill each other. They start working together, as the gears mesh in a finely tuned machine.

Here are some skills of receiving forgiveness:

- Learn to apologize.
- Learn to feel empathy for the pain you cause others, rather than guilt.
- Learn to admit your faults without rationalizing or making excuses.
- Learn to ask, "Will you forgive me for hurting you?"
- Learn to take in forgiveness without attempting to make up for your fault, or to pay for your trespass.
- Learn to accept the love that knows we are frail, and loves us still.

Learn to give forgiveness. Forgiven people become forgiving people. When your safe people look you in the eye and say, "You are forgiven," the relief, love, and gratitude are immense. You become a champion for forgiveness. The good news about giving forgiveness is that it's not really about the person who hurt you. Forgiveness does free the perpetrator, even though he may be unrepentant, in denial, or dead. But at a deeper level, the person whom forgiveness frees is you.



Give Something Back

So far, we've laid out the five emotional and spiritual character growth tasks that safe relationships were made for. They build us up, mature and repair us, and most importantly, help reestablish God's image in us. But there's more to life than being helped.

When we receive all that goodness inside us, gratitude takes over. Just like when we're forgiven, we feel a responsibility to give to others what we've taken in.

Now, restrain the urge to anxiously try to figure out what in the world you can give. It's pretty simple, really. We are limited to giving what we have received, and no more. There will be needs you can't meet in your safe people, and places they need to go spiritually where you haven't yet set foot. God has someone else ready to help them.

Conclusion

To become a safe person, you need to practice these steps over and over again: ask for help, learn to need, work through resistances, invite the truth about yourself, enter into forgiveness, and give something back. These steps will keep us busy for a long, long time. But this is work that has meaning and purpose. It is work that will reap wonderful spiritual and emotional fruit for us and others

Next month the story of Unsafe People vs Safe People continues with

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When the Shepherd is Tired

Ministry is holy work, but it is not light work. Across the world, and especially here in the United States, ministers are carrying spiritual, emotional, relational, and organizational burdens that can no longer be ignored.

by Dr. Timothy Hoflund

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



'Ministry leaders are often expected to stand strong for everyone else, but many are carrying burdens they rarely have safe space to name.'

There is a quiet kind of exhaustion that does not always show up in the pulpit.

It is the tiredness behind the sermon. The weight behind the smile. The silent ache beneath the words, *"I'm praying for you."* Ministry leaders are often expected to stand strong for everyone else, but many are carrying burdens they rarely have safe space to name.

Across the world, ministers, pastors, missionaries, chaplains, teachers, and spiritual leaders are facing increasing pressure.

They are asked to preach hope in anxious times, guide people through crisis, counsel families in pain, manage organizational change, inspire volunteers, raise resources, respond to emergencies, and remain spiritually fresh while doing it all. The calling is sacred, but the cost is real.

Here in the United States, the challenges are especially visible. Many ministry leaders are serving in a culture marked by declining church attendance, political division, family fragmentation, financial pressure, volunteer fatigue, and increasing skepticism toward institutions.

The minister is no longer simply a preacher or teacher. In many settings, he or she is also expected to be counselor, administrator, fundraiser, conflict mediator, community organizer, digital communicator, and visionary strategist.



That is a heavy mantle for one soul to carry alone.

TRUE Hope Ministries of America speaks directly to this need. Under the leadership of Dr. Timothy Hoflund, the ministry exists to help ministers thrive, not merely survive. Its mission is rooted in a simple but powerful truth: stronger ministers help build stronger churches, and stronger churches help believers grow in confidence, maturity, and Gospel witness.

Ministry is tough. It takes its toll on everyone. TRUE Hope's own ministry-care framing points to the reality that many ministers feel isolated, and many struggle with mental and emotional pressure. Even where exact statistics require outside verification, the lived truth is hard to deny. Too many servants of God are surrounded by people but starved for peer support. They are visible to many but truly known by few.

This is why ministry networks matter. A healthy fellowship is not just an administrative covering. It is a spiritual refuge. It is a place where leaders can be encouraged, corrected, refreshed, equipped, and reminded that they are not carrying the Kingdom by themselves.

The Church must recover the art of caring for its caregivers.

When the Shepherd Is Tired

There is a quiet kind of exhaustion that does not always show up in the pulpit.

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Ministry leaders are often expected to stand strong for everyone else, but many are carrying burdens they rarely have safe space to name.



Ministers need prayer, but they also need friendship. They need accountability, but they also need tenderness. They need training, but they also need rest. They need people who can ask, not only *"How is the church doing?"* but *"How is your soul doing?"*

The shepherd may be tired, but he does not have to be alone.

'The Church must recover the art of caring for its caregivers.'

And when ministers are strengthened, the blessing does not stop with them. It flows into congregations, families, communities, and nations. A renewed minister becomes a renewing presence. A supported leader becomes a stronger servant. A healthier shepherd helps guide a healthier flock.

That is the promise behind TRUE Hope Ministries of America: to stand with those who stand for others.

The Hidden Weight of Ministry Leadership

Ministry often looks inspiring from the outside, but behind the visible work are pressures that many leaders carry quietly.

Common challenges facing ministers include:



Isolation

Many ministers serve without trusted peer relationships where they can speak honestly without fear of judgment.

Emotional fatigue

Constantly caring for others can drain the heart when leaders have no regular place to be restored.

Mental health strain

The pressure of preaching, counseling, conflict, finances, family needs, and public expectations can become overwhelming.

Leadership overload

Many ministry leaders are expected to function as pastors, administrators, fundraisers, counselors, strategists, and community leaders all at once.

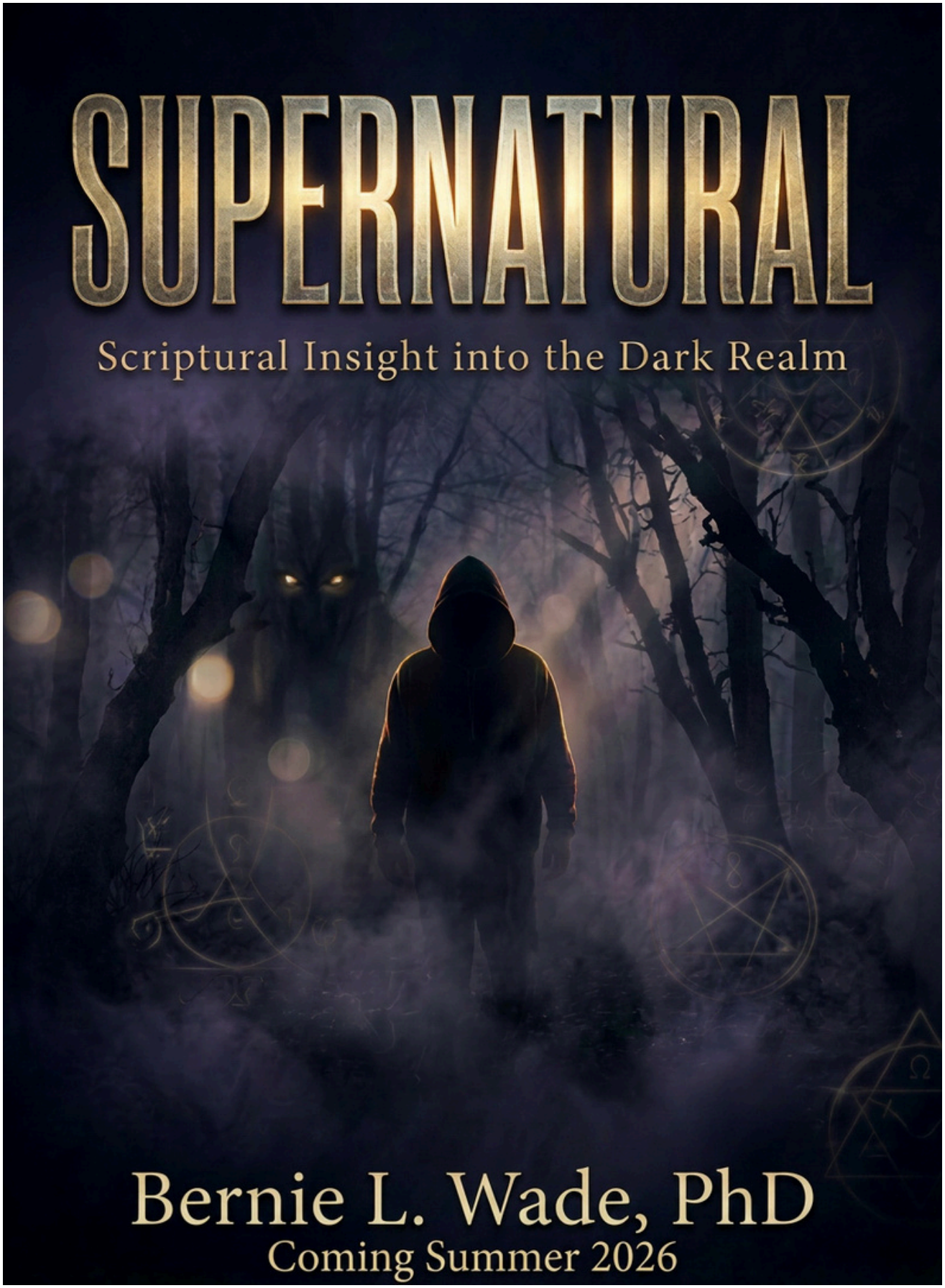
Spiritual weariness

When ministry becomes a constant output with little replenishment, even faithful leaders can begin to feel spiritually dry.

Dr. Timothy Hoflund, Senior Ministry Leader of TRUE Hope Ministries of America, serves ministers across the United States with a clear and needed mission: helping ministry leaders thrive in their callings. TRUE Hope Ministries strengthens fellowship members first, then partners outward to develop stronger leaders, healthier believers, and bolder Gospel proclamation.

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The Present Moment and the Enneagram

by Joseph Benton Howell

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



‘But the stress reminded me, “I have felt this before.’

The Present Moment and the Enneagram Part 1

You are warmly invited to share in this month’s Reflections on the subject of *“The Present Moment and the Enneagram.”*

In making the pivotal shift from ego to soul, all nine of the Enneagram energies require us to live in the now. The now is also called the present moment.

On a hurried day, I was in a traffic backup. Caught between cars, I couldn’t move forward. This was frustrating as I had an appointment soon. Under this stress, I assumed the familiar ego stance of picturing the worst-case scenario and everything that could go wrong because of my tardiness. I was fu*ming under the collar. But the stress reminded me, “I have felt this before. Now, what do I do to alleviate this frustration? Oh yes, these are the times when I most need to shift into soul.”*

I immediately dropped into my soul, and the tense traffic before me lifted like a curtain. My soul’s eyes landed on a "For Sale" sign in front of an old church to the right of me. My eyes traveled to the top of the church, where there was a white cross.

I imagined how many Sundays that building had housed congregations and services and how many weddings and funerals there had been. I realized my car was right beside consecrated ground. I noticed the venerable church’s stained-glass windows and architectural details, and wondered whether it would become home to another congregation or be razed to make room for a gas station.

My eyes traveled upward again to the cross that had looked over the historic structure for decades. In awe of the building and its past, I couldn't help but say a prayer that it would be redeemed. Yes, redeemed, just as so many of its people in its walls had been redeemed over the years by the sacraments, the community, and by the Almighty.

I had no way of knowing what the present moment would show my soul. I had no idea that it would remind me of hallowed ground, of sacred spaces, or of communities of yesteryear.

All I know is that the stress of traffic, the ruminations of the future, and the frustration in being trapped all evaporated in the Holy Present.



Before I knew it, the traffic began to move. Each moment of each Enneagram type reveals another story, another insight, and another way to experience the Divine.

Spiritual practice: The next time you are caught in traffic or in a situation that prevents you from continuing with your plans, stop and think: "How can I use this delay for my spiritual well-being?" Take a deep breath and see what arises as the curtain is lifted to reveal the present moment.

Self-inquiry: Would I rather rush to make it on time rather than wait and see what unfolds in the moment?

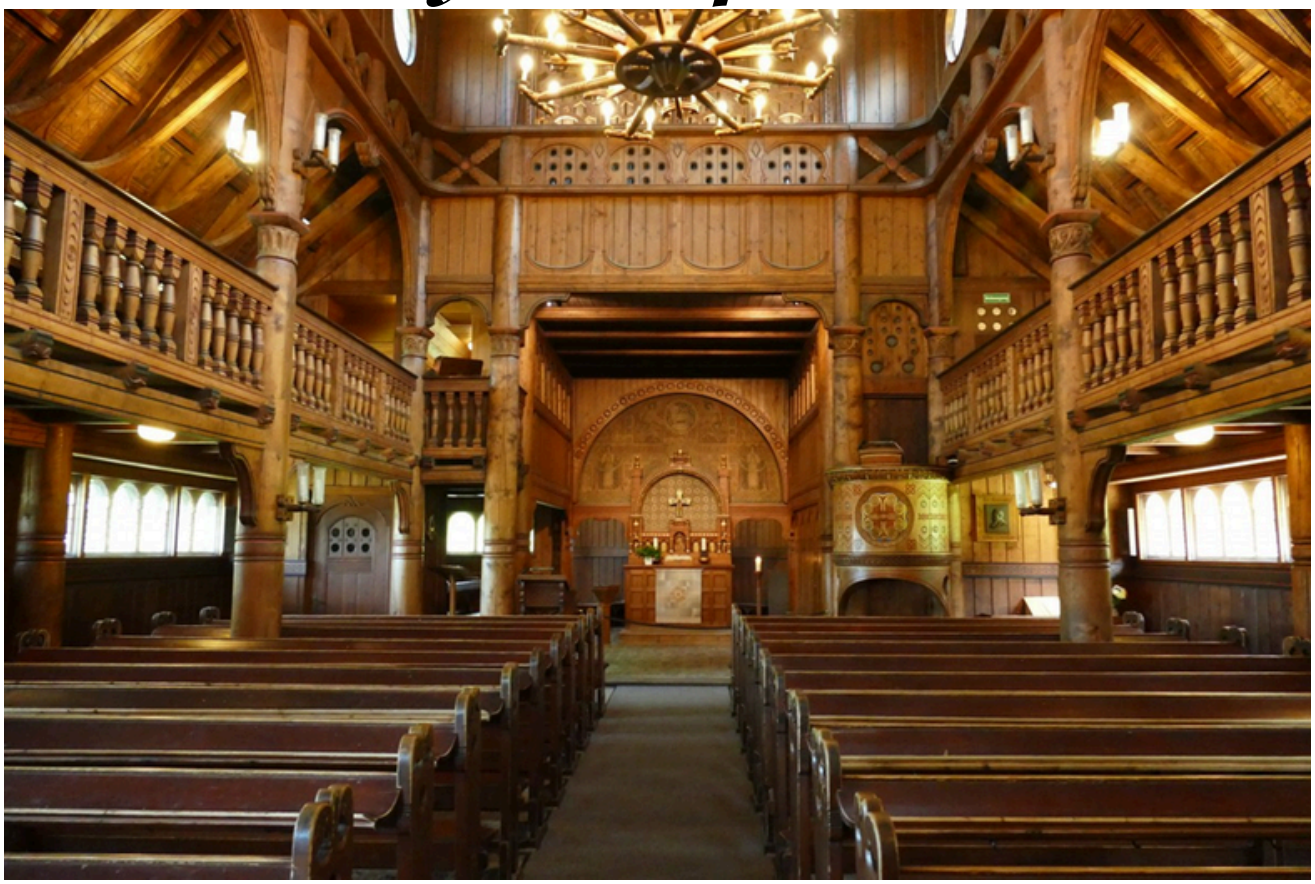
Prayer:
Dear God, I pray to have the curtain of every present moment lifted to show me the Holy Present. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joseph Benton Howell, Ph.D., founder of the Institute of Conscious Being, is a clinical psychologist, spiritual teacher, and IEA Accredited Professional Teacher. Educated at Samford University, Yale Divinity School, the University of Virginia, and Harvard Medical School, Dr. Howell has taught widely on the Enneagram, dream work, spiritual development, and soul transformation. With his wife, Lark Dill Howell, he shares wisdom shaped by scholarship, clinical practice, grief, and lifelong spiritual discovery.

The Church Cannot Reach a Community It Refuses to Touch



Some statements do not simply land in the ear.

They land in the spirit.

I heard one recently from a ministry leader responsible for serving nearly 30 churches. He knew their pastors. He knew their patterns. He knew their strengths and weaknesses from more than a distance.

His observation was sobering.

Very few of those churches had any consistent, intentional outreach into the communities they were called to serve. Some believed they did, but what they called outreach was really guest follow-up. They were contacting people who had already walked through the door.

That is not outreach.

That is reception.

There is nothing wrong with welcoming visitors. Every church should do that with grace, warmth, and excellence. But following up with guests is not the same as reaching neighbors. An open door is not the same as an active mission.

Somewhere along the way, many churches confused attraction with outreach.

We improved the worship experience. We upgraded the music, lighting, screens, coffee, signage, websites, and service flow. Much of that matters. Excellence matters. Hospitality matters. But a worship service is not a fishing net. It is not the mission field. It is the gathering place of the people who have already come.

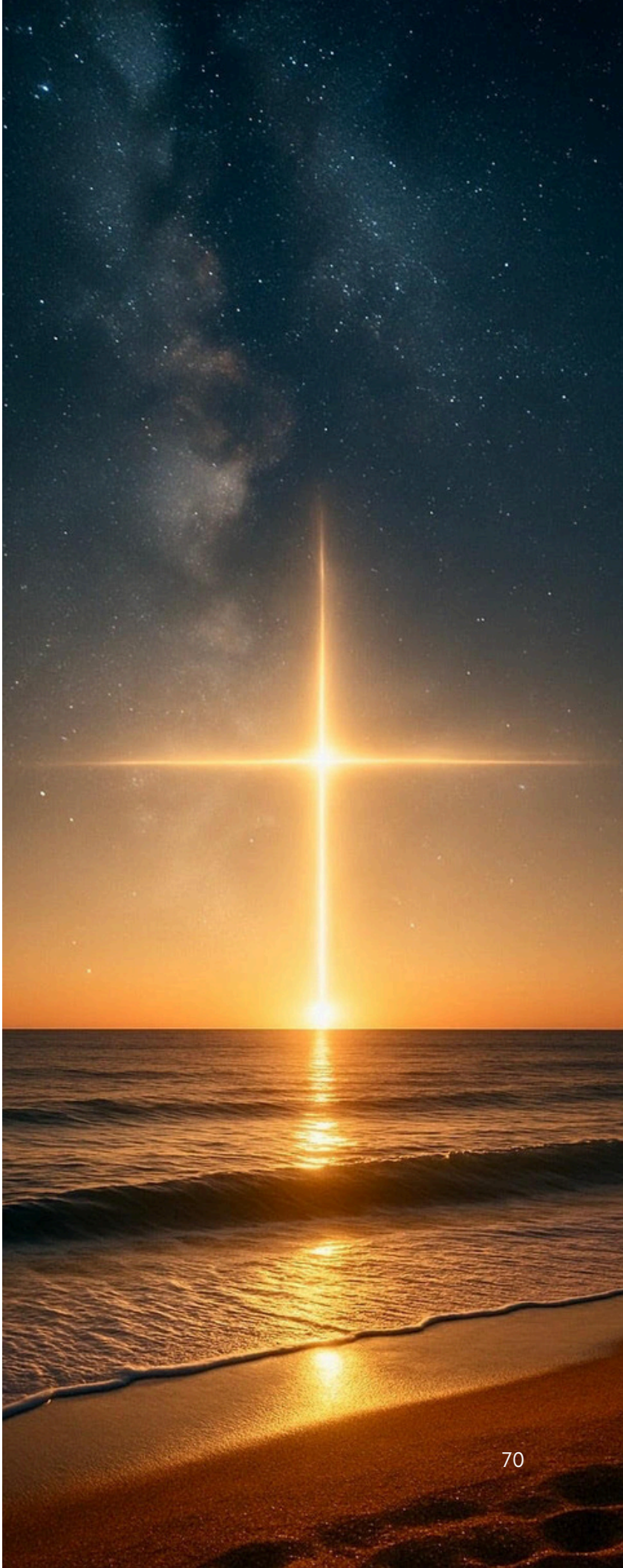
The Great Commission was never built on the hope that lost people might wander into our buildings.

It was built on the command to go.

That one word still confronts us: go.

Go into the neighborhood. Go to the family in pain. Go to the student without direction. Go to the single mother under pressure.

Go to the elderly man no one checks on. Go to the child who has never heard the gospel in a way that sounded like love. Go to the people who may never come unless someone first goes to them.



The church was never called to be a spiritual showroom. It was called to be the living Body of Christ, moving with compassion through the world.

And yet many churches are busy without being outward.

That is the danger.
A church can have meetings every night and still have no meaningful presence in the community. It can have full calendars and empty mission. It can preserve tradition, protect preferences, and maintain programs while slowly losing the pulse of its calling.

Mission usually does not die in one dramatic moment.

It drifts.

A little less visitation.

A little less evangelistic urgency.

A little less community engagement.

A little more comfort.

A little more internal maintenance.

A little more energy spent keeping insiders satisfied.

Eventually, we rename everything outreach so we do not have to admit we have lost the real thing.

The fellowship meal becomes outreach.

The committee meeting becomes outreach.

The livestream becomes outreach.

The church picnic becomes outreach.

But if everything is outreach, then nothing is outreach.

Outreach must mean more than church activity with a religious label. It must mean intentional movement toward people who are not yet connected, not yet discipled, not yet reached, and perhaps not even sure the church cares about them at all.

Some churches stopped doing outreach because too few people participated.

I understand the discouragement. Every pastor knows the pain of announcing a ministry effort and watching the same faithful handful show up. But small obedience is not failure. Twelve people making three meaningful contacts a week is thirty-six touches of grace. Over a year, that becomes nearly two thousand points of connection.

That is not small.

That is seed.



The Kingdom has always known what to do with a remnant.

The greater question is not how many showed up. The greater question is whether the church still believes lost and hurting people matter enough to inconvenience the saved.

That is where the truth gets uncomfortable.

Some churches will fight for their favorite music style, preferred schedule, carpet color, room setup, or sacred tradition, while showing little grief over neighbors who are spiritually empty, lonely, addicted, grieving, financially broken, or raising children without any faith community around them.

That is not just a ministry problem.

That is a heart problem.

When a church becomes more protective of its preferences than passionate about people, it begins to function more like a museum than a mission.

Museums preserve what used to be.

Missions reach what still can be.

This does not mean every church must return to old methods exactly as they were. Communities have changed. People are more guarded. Trust takes longer to build. Cold-call visitation may not work everywhere the way it once did.

But if an old method is retired, a new obedience must replace it.

We cannot say, *“That does not work anymore,”* and then do nothing.

So the question becomes simple:

What is your church doing every week to connect with people beyond the building?

Who is being prayed for by name?

Who is being visited?

Who is being served?

Who is being invited?

Who is being listened to?

Who knows your church cares?

The answers do not have to be flashy. Vacation Bible School, neighborhood prayer walks, school partnerships, recovery ministries, community meals, senior outreach, mentoring, service days, home Bible studies, and compassion projects may not sound trendy. But neither does a shepherd leaving the ninety-nine to find one lost sheep.

Faithfulness is not always fashionable.

Sometimes the most powerful ministry looks ordinary until heaven reveals what it accomplished.

A congregation that only breathes inward eventually suffocates.

Outreach is the church learning to exhale again.

It is compassion leaving the sanctuary. It is faith putting on shoes. It is the difference between a church that talks about its community and a church that is known by its community.

The choice is painfully clear.

Reach out and live.

Withdraw and decline.

The lights may still come on. The songs may still rise. The sermon may still be preached. But if the mission has died, the building only echoes what used to be alive. It is time to go back outside.

Not because it is easy.

Because it is obedience.

Not because everyone will go.

Because someone must.

Not because the culture is friendly.

Because the gospel is still good news.

And good news was never meant to sit inside the church waiting for someone to stumble in.

It was meant to be carried.

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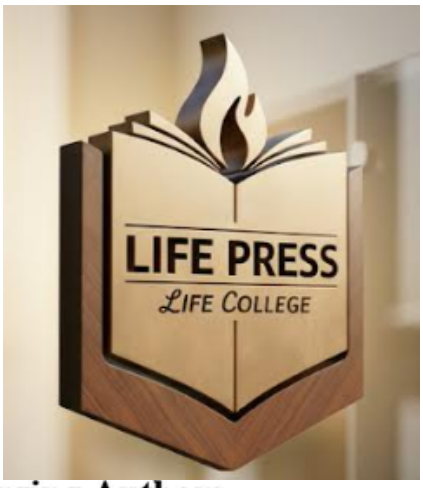
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American Association for Higher Education Announces Five-Year Strategic Plan for International Operations

by John W. Losh II

The U.S. Headquarters of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHEA) announced on May 11 that it has entered into an agreement with Dr. Ismael L. Togbah of AAHEA in Paynesville, Liberia, Africa, to develop and implement a comprehensive Five-Year Strategic Plan for international operations, with the long-term objective of appointing an International Director.

Dr. Togbah recognizes the challenges that both AAHEA and ICOF have faced in recent years when working with individuals in other countries who expressed interest in ministry or organizational involvement, but were ultimately unwilling to fulfill the responsibilities, commitments, or financial obligations necessary to support sustainable operations.

In response, Dr. Togbah has submitted a detailed written proposal outlining a strategic framework designed to ensure accountability, operational effectiveness, and long-term success for AAHEA's international initiatives.

The proposal includes the following foundational accomplishments and strategic initiatives:

1. Establishment of office space
2. Engagement of a working secretary
3. Creation and active management of a Facebook page with daily content updates
4. Planning for two major events scheduled for later in 2026
5. Development of an Executive Vision Statement

The strategic framework further outlines:

Key Strategic Areas

- Objectives and organizational goals
- Expected outcomes through strategic international partnerships, including proposed partnership targets
- International operational strategies
- Accreditation, membership, and recognition support services
- Academic leadership development
- Professional recognition programs
- Continental associate and representative networks

(Additional Key Strategic Areas on following page)

Key Strategic Areas

(continued)

- Responsibilities of AAHEA representatives in participating countries
- National organizational programs
- Student recruitment and educational initiatives
- Capacity-building programs
- International program hosting
- Revenue-sharing and sustainability planning

Program Development Initiatives

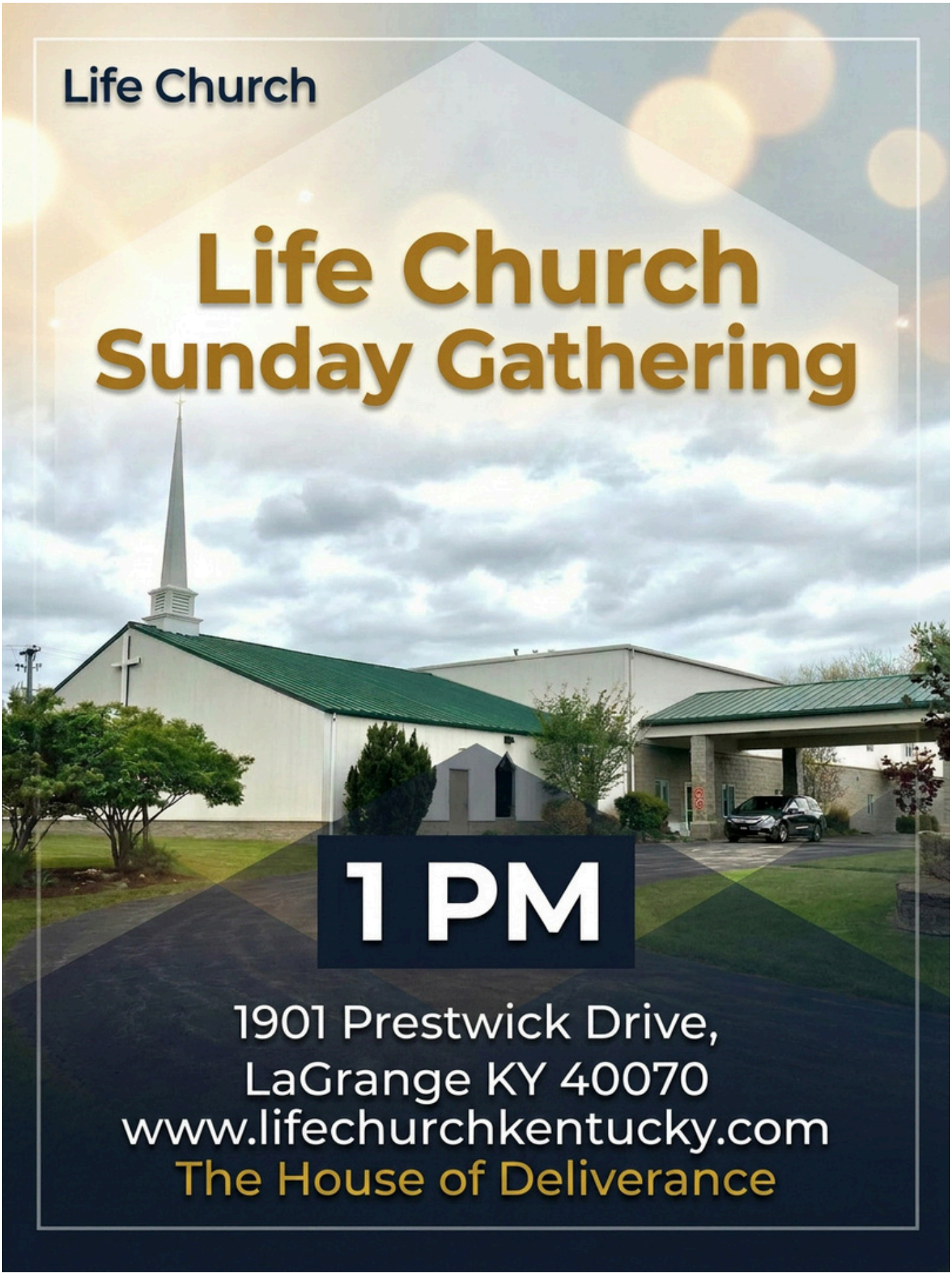
- International online seminars
- Women's empowerment programs
- Youth and student development programs
- Government workforce development initiatives featuring affordable distance-learning opportunities
- Government relations and public institutional engagement
- Educational policy support
- Long-term sustainability and investment planning
- Shared educational investment opportunities
- Implementation guidelines for the strategic plan
- Expected five-year outcomes and measurable impact goals

AAHEA leadership expressed enthusiasm and optimism regarding the future of the initiative and looks forward to seeing the Five-Year Strategic Plan successfully implemented for the benefit of all involved and to the Glory of God.

Reported By



John W. Losh II is the Administrative Assistant & Chief News Correspondent, AAHEA, ICOF Associate Chaplain, Contributing Writer & Education Board Member, Secretary & Chief News Correspondent, Birland Global Foundation


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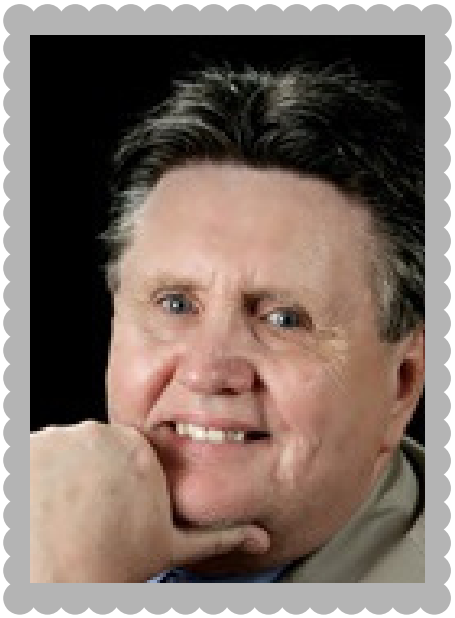
Are You REALLY Grateful?

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:18

by David James Dunworth SDG

SHOWCASING



‘Real gratitude is not a mood that comes and goes with the headlines.’

We live in a culture that treats *“gratitude”* like a seasonal accessory. In November, we post lists of blessings. In good times, we say we’re *“so thankful.”* But beneath the hashtags and polite phrases, a harder question awaits: Are you really grateful?

Real gratitude is not a mood that comes and goes with the headlines. It is a posture of the heart, a way of seeing God that does not collapse when life refuses to go our way.

When Paul told believers to *“give thanks in all circumstances,”* he was not insulated from pain. He wrote as a man who knew prison, scarcity, and rejection. Gratitude for him was not a warm feeling. It was an act of trust.

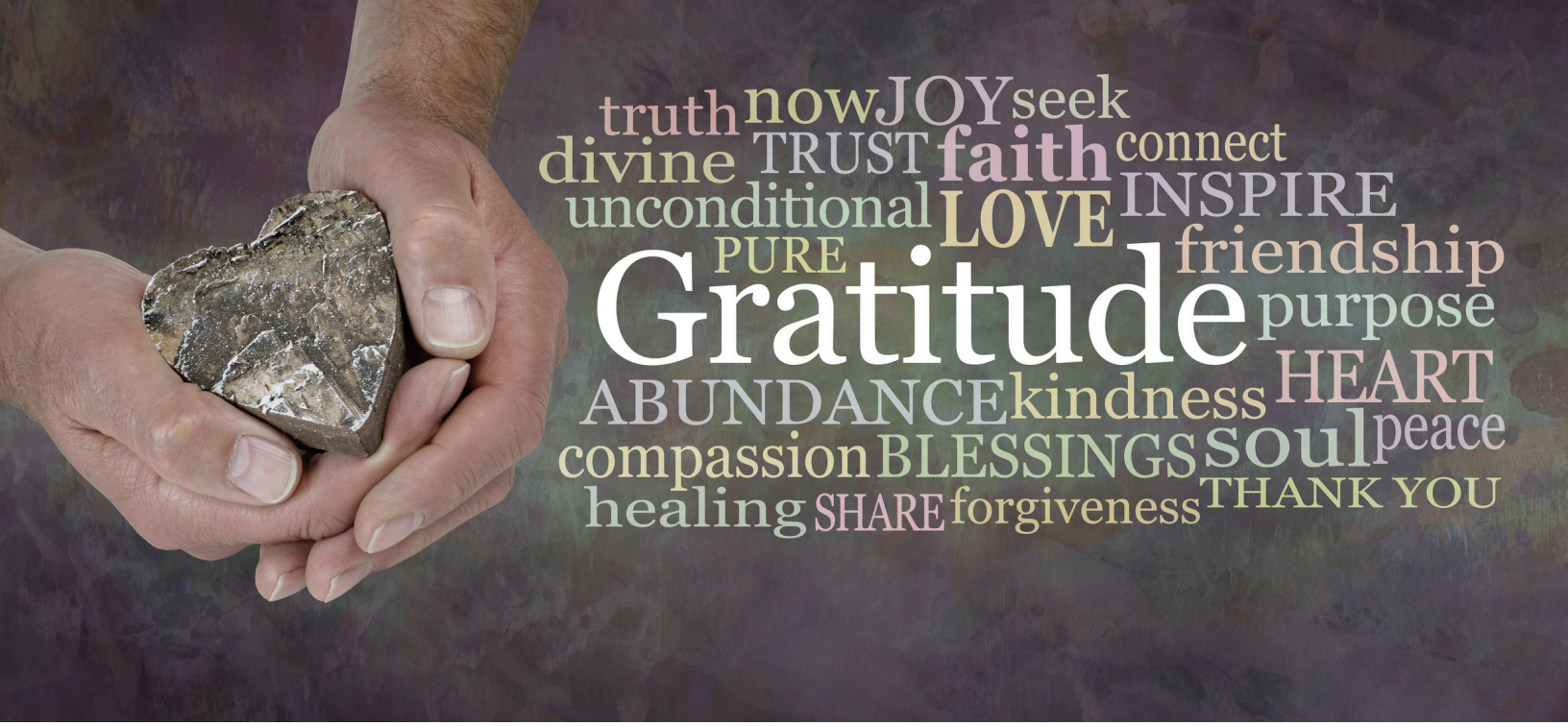
Superficial gratitude thanks God for what He gives. Mature gratitude thanks God for who He is. One rests on circumstances, the other rests on character.

When the job comes through, when the diagnosis is good, when the relationship is restored—yes, we should celebrate. But what about the prayers that seem unanswered, the doors that stay shut, the seasons that feel barren?

Job’s response in the midst of staggering loss still arrests us:

“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”

— Job 1:21



Those words are not naïve, and they are not easy. They rise from a heart that has decided, in advance, that God is worthy of praise whether or not life makes sense. That is the kind of gratitude our age desperately needs to see: not a denial of suffering, but a defiant worship in the midst of it.

This kind of gratitude does not come naturally. Paul confessed, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."* Learning implies process—practice, failure, repentance, progress. Gratitude grows as we deliberately turn our attention from what we lack to the grace we already live in.

Breath in your lungs. Scripture in your hands. Access to the Father through Christ. The quiet work of the Holy Spirit, convicting, comforting, guiding. None of this is owed to us.

Grumbling keeps us at the center: my desires, my timeline, my comfort. Gratitude recenters the story on God: His purposes, His wisdom, His glory. To give thanks in all circumstances is to say, "I trust You here. I don't need to understand everything to worship You in this moment."

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise."
— Psalm 100:4

In the end, gratitude is not decoration on the Christian life; it is an entrance. Thanksgiving is how we step into the courts of God, on ordinary Tuesdays, in hospital waiting rooms, in traffic, at kitchen tables.

So, are you really, truly grateful? Not just in theory, but in the way you respond, speak, post, and pray? If the honest answer is "not yet," you are in good company. Gratitude can be learned. And by the grace of God, you can begin today, right where you are to thank Him not only for what He has done, but for who He is.

IN OTHER NEWS



A.J. Griffin recently made a decision that surprised much of the sports world—retiring from the NBA at just 21 years old to pursue full-time Christian ministry. At an age where most players are still fighting to establish their careers, Griffin chose to step away from the spotlight, the contracts, and the fame to follow what he believes is a higher calling. Whether people agree with it or not, his decision has sparked a wider conversation about purpose, identity, and what truly matters in life.

In one of his statements, Griffin shared a simple but powerful conviction: ***"you can have all the riches in the world, but the only thing that truly matters is your relationship with Jesus."*** That perspective echoes a deeper biblical truth found in Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" His words and his decision both point back to the same question—what good is success if it costs you your soul?

Griffin's choice challenges a culture that often defines success by status, money, and achievement. Walking away from the NBA is not a small decision—it represents years of sacrifice, discipline, and dream-chasing. Yet his story suggests that even when you reach the height of what the world calls *"making it,"* there can still be a deeper hunger that only Jesus Christ can satisfy.

At its core, this is a reminder that every person eventually has to decide what they value most. Careers can open doors, fame can bring influence, and wealth can create comfort—but none of it replaces a life anchored in Jesus Christ!

Craig Johnson

Thought Leadership:
AI and the Entrepreneur

by Paul Roati



At our recent Business Lunch event held at The Coffee Commune and sponsored by AI Powerhouse, a fascinating Q&A unfolded that cut straight past the usual corporate tech-jargon. Philip Di Bella, a leader famous for building businesses on a foundation of raw emotional engagement – took to the stage with Ed Dale to answer a critical question: How do you implant AI into a philosophy built on storytelling and human connection?

Like many entrepreneurs, Di Bella admitted to initial skepticism. But his perspective shifted when he stopped looking at what AI could do mechanically, and started looking at what it could solve culturally.

The true frontier of AI isn't technical; it's emotional. The leaders who win the next decade won't be those who build the most complex algorithms, but those who understand how to use AI to preserve, protect, and amplify human connection.



Image Credit: Aspinal of London - *Midi Mayfair*®
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1. Look Beyond the 'Handbag' Function of Technology

To understand how to deploy AI, Di Bella challenges leaders to look at consumer behaviour through a brilliant analogy: a luxury handbag.

"A function of a handbag is to carry multiple things efficiently. So you can buy one of those for $50... Or you can buy one for $3,000... Or you can go away, and you can buy one from Hermès for $20,000. But the function of that handbag is identical—the difference in what you buy comes down to emotional engagement. So when I looked at AI, I didn't look at its function. I looked at how I needed to engage and solve the problems that are happening emotionally."

Right now, businesses are fighting the exact same battles: staff retention, attraction, productivity, and efficiency. If you view AI purely as a tool to replace people, you create a sterile, transactional business environment. But if you view AI as a resource to free your people from back-end friction, you allow them to do what humans do best: engage emotionally.

2. Redefining the Org Chart: Welcome Your Digital Colleagues

What happens when a critical executive walks out the door, taking years of institutional knowledge with them? When Di Bella's long-time CFO announced he was leaving to start his own business, his initial entrepreneurial instinct was panic over the lost knowledge. But he quickly pivoted, asking: "What resource do I need to solve this?"

His brief to Ed was characteristically blunt:

"I want you to build me a CFO. What would it take? Can you do it? I'm going to give you the outcome. I don't want to know what goes on... Don't tell me about the technical components. The outcome is simple. Build me a CFO. A CFO's name was Simon. I said, 'Build me, Simone.' And that's how it started."

At the Coffee Commune, they are integrating automated data analysis – tracking labor-to-sales percentages, shifting production metrics from the roastery, and even pulling in weather widgets to forecast menu demand and daily takings.

"What are we trying to do to reverse engineer rather than sit there and whinge about it?... If we can use AI to stop that [waste], we don't have to put the coffee roaster's price up, which means the coffee roaster doesn't put the cafe's price up, which means a cafe is still drawing $6 or $7 per cup... We started with the outcome of productivity and efficiency – the ability to collect data and analyze it so we can make strategic directions. We just fast-tracked it all."

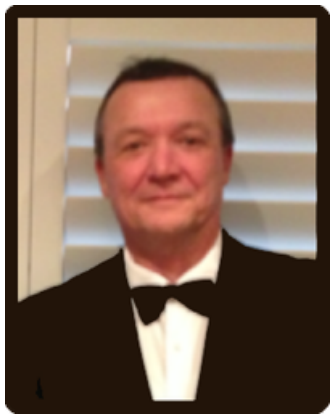
The Path Forward

The message from Di Bella is clear: keep your forward-facing operations deeply humanized. Do not use AI to make cold, synthetic phone calls or write robotic customer emails.

Instead, deploy it ruthlessly in the background. Stop wasting time in *"toolbox meetings where messages get lost in the ####### message."* Treat AI as a resource – just like time, health, and capital. Use it to fast-track your data analysis, eliminate back-end friction, and clear the bureaucratic runway.

When you automate the mundane, you give your people the greatest gift a leader can provide: the time and energy to connect, create, and lead with purpose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Roati's distinct background includes excelling in his corporate career with global leaders in oil and travel. He has a history of entrepreneurship, creating industry-challenging brands and businesses in cosmetic injectables, establishing two global coffee industry brands, and reshaping access to global travel opportunities. He's a global connector of coffee, travel, and Christian marketplaces.







Today at the Coffee Commune, “Simone” is an active part of the business. She doesn’t replace the human financial controller, Emil; she supercharges him. By pulling production data straight from the IPM coffee roaster’s computer and cross-referencing it with accounting data from Xero, the AI delivers a powerhouse financial and operational analysis to the leadership team every single morning.

3. Data is the Ingredient; Wisdom is the Chef

AI is the world’s largest digital copywriter and research buyer. If a footprint exists in the digital world, AI can find it and synthesize it. But a digital footprint is only as good as the strategic intent and wisdom behind the prompt.

As Di Bella points out, there are plenty of “two-minute noodle” experts out there who search for something for two minutes and think they are masters. Real game-changing innovation requires human wisdom to guide the machine.

“AI is not a replacement. It is another tool in your belt. It’s another resource in your kit. Time is a resource, health is a resource, money is a resource, and people are a resource. AI is a resource… You give a scalpel to a surgeon, and they can save a life. You give a scalpel to a thief, and they take one.”

Data of itself is useless. The wisdom to understand which metrics actually move the needle and what strategy to build from that data is a purely human capability bred from decades of real-world experience.

4. The Macroeconomic Mandate: Fighting Inflation with Efficiency

Using AI in the back end isn’t just a luxury for tech startups; it is becoming a survival mechanism for traditional brick-and-mortar industries.

Speaking from the heart of the hospitality sector at the Coffee Commune, Di Bella laid out the harsh macroeconomic reality. Small businesses like cafes are operating on razor-thin margins of 3% to 5%, crippled by rising costs of electricity, gas, wages, and packaging. Yet, there is a hard ceiling on what consumers are willing to pay for a cup of coffee.

When your input costs go up, but you cannot raise your prices without losing your customers, you hit a structural crisis. The solution isn’t to complain; it’s to use technology to squeeze out back-end waste.

Recognizing the Role of Life Church in Ordination And Ministry

by John W. Losh II



Among the many services offered through the ministries of the American Association for Higher Education and the International Circle Of Faith is ordination for chaplains and other ministers.

Instrumental in leading this important aspect of ministry is Life Church Kentucky, pastored by Bishop Bernie L. Wade. The ministry has played a significant role in supporting and recognizing individuals called to Christian service.

Life Church was organized in 2010 out of a desire to establish a Spirit-led ministry in the Henry County area of Kentucky. While its original focus was on Henry County, the ministry soon expanded into Jefferson, Oldham, and Trimble Counties, and beyond. For the past several years, Life Church has gathered on Sundays in nearby La Grange. Services are held at the LaGrange Presbyterian Ministry Center, located at 1901 Prestwick Drive, La Grange, Kentucky, beginning at 1:00 p.m. EST. Additional ministry locations and small groups also meet throughout Jefferson County during the week.

A growing regional network of ministers connected with Life Church is now providing worship and ministry opportunities throughout Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, and neighboring regions. The ministry welcomes like-minded ministers and churches who desire to participate in this expanding fellowship.

Life Church emphasizes worship centered on Jesus Christ and a strong sense of Christian family. Members gather not only for worship but also for fellowship, prayer, encouragement, and ministry. Prayer begins before the Sunday service at 12:30 p.m., followed by worship and a time of exhortation and Scripture teaching led by members of the ministry team. Services may also include prayer for the sick, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and other expressions of Christian faith and worship.

Life Church Kentucky offers a multi-faceted approach to ministry, including:

- **Leadership and Service**
- **Marriage and Family Ministry**
- **Mentoring**
- **Children's Ministry (Life Kids)**

Each ministry area connects with additional outreach and discipleship opportunities designed to strengthen families, churches, and communities.

Within Christian tradition, ordination holds deep significance for both the church and the individual minister. It serves as a formal and public recognition that a person has been tested, affirmed, and authorized for spiritual leadership and service.

Ordination also establishes accountability and clarity of role, helping protect both the minister and the congregation by affirming biblical and ethical standards. In many Christian denominations, ordination is required for administering sacraments such as Holy Communion and baptism, as well as officiating weddings and funerals.

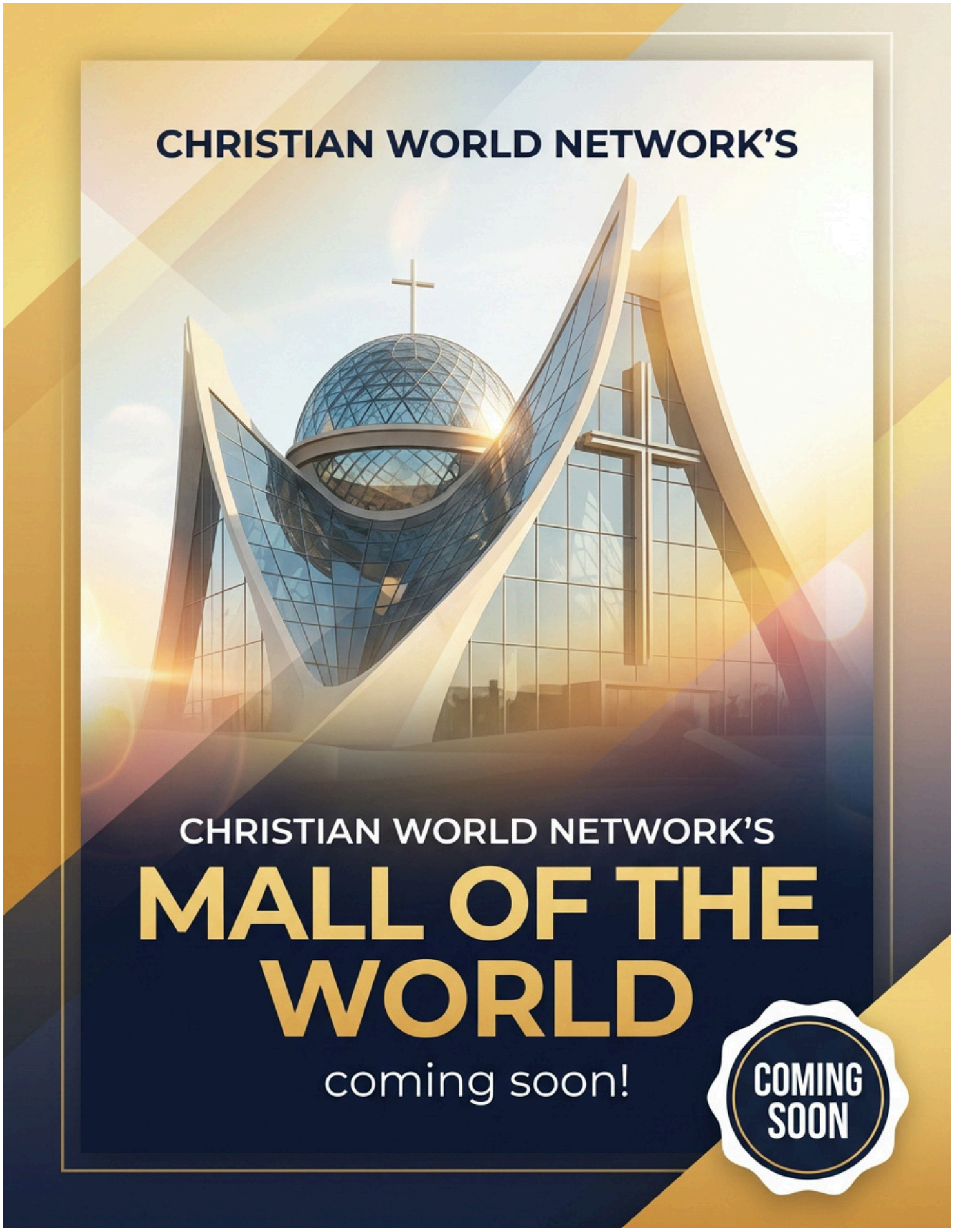
Life Church, Life College, and Seminary are affiliated with the International Circle Of Faith, a Christian world network that includes ministries such as Life Press Christian publishing, ICOF Chaplains, and worldwide missions outreach.

If you are interested in becoming Ordained, becoming a Chaplain, starting a Christian K-12 School, Christian College, or obtaining Private Accreditation or Institutional Validation for these schools.

If you need to publish a Christian book. If you would like to earn a Christian degree, earn a High School diploma, or have previous degrees validated, please contact me at: jloshsecurekc@gmail.com.
Dr Stephen R Barnhart at inspectorbarnhart@gmail.com
Dr Christipher Campbell at drcampbell@aahea.org, drcampbellohio@gmail.com, or Dr Bernie Wade at berniewade1212@gmail.com, and we will be happy to serve you.



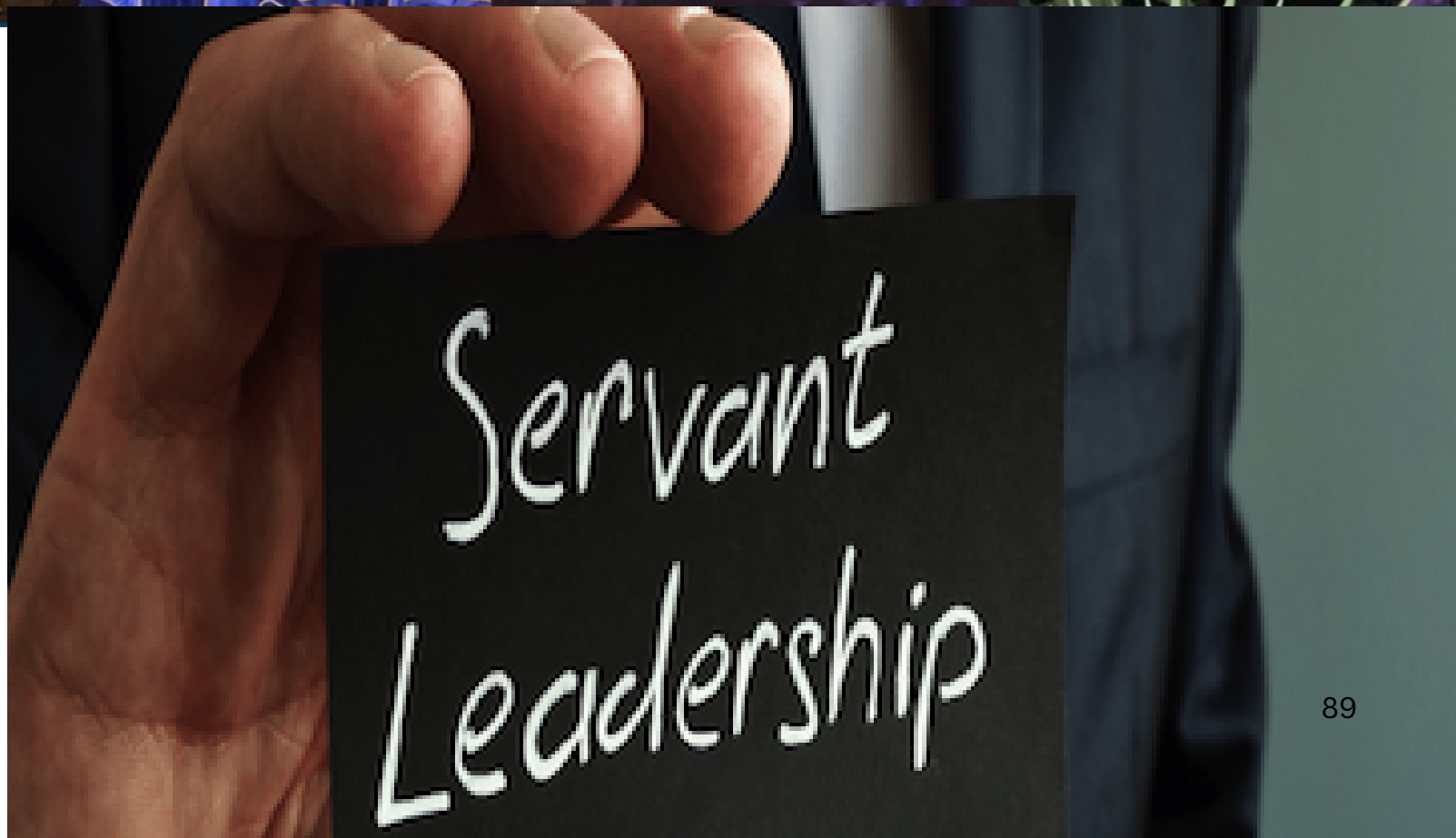
John W. Losh II is the AAHEA Administrative Assistant/Chief News Correspondent, International Circle of Faith Associate Chaplain, Contributing Writer, and Education Board Member Secretary/Chief News Correspondent, Birland Global Foundation


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JUNE 2026 Calendar

Full 2026 Welcome Booklet

JUNE

June 7

1 PM FIRST SUNDAY – MC Rebecca Goins

- **Opening Prayer –** Blanca Wade
- **Scripture Reading –** Beth Beasley
- **Worship –** Hands of Praise
- **Special –** Hans Reynolds
- **This is my Bible**
- **Exhortation –** Elizabeth Goins
- **Speaker –** Barney Phillips
- **Lord's Supper**
- **Prayer/Giving –** Ministry Team
- **Announcements**

June 13 – Youth Outing – At Hugo's House – Time TBA

June 14 - Youth & Children Classes – 11:30 AM

1 PM FRIENDS & FAMILY SUNDAY – MC Rebecca Goins

- **Opening Prayer –** Elijah Wade
- **Scripture Reading –** Daisy Wade
- **Worship –** Life Worship
- **Special –** Colton & Carson Reynolds
- **This is my Bible**
- **Speaker –** Bernie & Blanca Wade
- **Prayer/Giving –** Ministry Team
- **Announcements**
- **Dinner in Life Center**

June 21

FATHER's DAY – LIFE CHURCH PICNIC

- **Opening Prayer –** Isabella Wade
- **Scripture Reading –** Elizabeth Wade
- **Worship –** Life Worship
- **Special –** Hugo/Bernie/Elijah
- **This is my Bible**
- **Exhortation –** Bishop Wade
- **Speaker –** Keith Fanza
- **Prayer/Giving –** Ministry Team
- **Announcements**

JUNE 25th – JULY 4th Annual Fireworks Tent Sale

June 28 – No Classes for Youth and Children

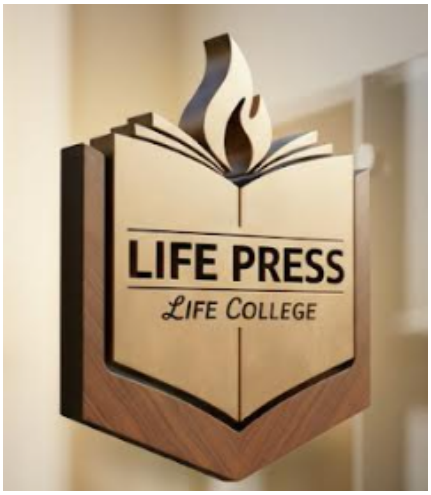
1 PM YOUTH SUNDAY at Fireworks Tent

OUTREACH & WORSHIP



JUNE 2026 Calendar

Full 2026 Welcome Booklet





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When Mercy Became the Measure

How Jesus revealed the true heart of the law by touching the excluded, healing the wounded, and making love the test of holiness.



There are moments in the Gospels when Jesus does more than teach a lesson. He rearranges the moral furniture of the room.

He does not merely answer questions. He exposes motives. He does not simply heal bodies. He restores people to the community. He does not treat the law as something to discard, but neither does He allow it to become a cold instrument in the hands of those who have forgotten its purpose.

This is one of the great tensions in the ministry of Jesus: He honors the law while confronting the ways people use it to wound, exclude, shame, and control.

In His day, purity was not a casual religious idea. It shaped social life, worship life, family life, and public reputation. To be considered *“clean”* or *“unclean”* could determine whether a person belonged inside the community or was forced to live at the margins. Those marked as impure were often not only physically isolated but also emotionally and spiritually condemned.

Jesus stepped directly into that world.

And everywhere He went, He revealed that holiness was never meant to become heartlessness.
The religious leaders of His time often measured righteousness by visible separation: who avoided the unclean, who kept ritual boundaries, who obeyed Sabbath restrictions, who refused the company of sinners. But Jesus measured righteousness by something deeper. He looked at Mercy. He looked at compassion. He looked at the heart.

That is why His treatment of the leper in Mark 1 is so striking. A man considered unclean comes to Jesus and begs to be made whole. By the standards of the time, this man was dangerous to touch. His condition made him socially untouchable, religiously restricted, and publicly humiliated.

But Jesus does not step away.

He reaches out His hand.



That touch matters. Jesus could have healed the man with a word from a distance. He had the authority to do so. But instead, He touched the very person others were trained to avoid. In that moment, Jesus did not become contaminated by the man's uncleanness. The man was overtaken by Christ's wholeness.

That is the gospel in motion.

Where fear says, *"Stay away,"* love says, *"Be made whole."*

Where religion without mercy says, "You do not belong," Jesus says, "Be restored."

The same pattern appears in His meals with tax collectors and sinners. The scandal was not merely that Jesus spoke kindly to questionable people. The scandal was that He sat with them, ate with them, listened to them, and welcomed them into the possibility of transformation.

When criticized for this, Jesus replied, ***"They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick"*** **(Mark 2:17).** In other words, the physician does not stand at a distance from sickness. He moves toward it.

This was not a moral compromise. It was redemptive courage.

Jesus did not bless sin, but He refused to abandon sinners. He did not erase holiness, but He relocated it from external performance to inward transformation. He showed that purity is not proven by avoiding broken people. Purity is revealed by carrying the love of God into broken places without losing the heart of God.

The Sabbath controversies make the same point. The Sabbath was given as a gift, a day of rest, worship, restoration, and sacred rhythm. But under layers of rigid interpretation, the gift had become a burden.



When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, His critics saw a violation. Jesus saw a person in need of mercy.

His words still ring with clarity: ***"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath"*** **(Mark 2:27)**.

That statement is not a rejection of sacred law. It is a recovery of sacred purpose. God's commands were not given to crush the human spirit. They were given to order life toward worship, dignity, justice, mercy, and flourishing.

Jesus fulfilled the law by revealing its heart.

This is why the law of love is not sentimental. It is demanding. It requires more than rule-keeping. It requires spiritual maturity.

It calls us to examine not only what we obey, but why we obey. It asks whether our faith makes us more compassionate or merely more correct. It asks whether our convictions draw people toward healing or push wounded people farther into shame.

Jesus summarized the life of faith with stunning simplicity: love God and love your neighbor. On these two commandments, He said, "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). Paul echoes this same truth when he writes, ***"Love is the fulfilling of the law"*** **(Romans 13:10**).

That is the measure.

Not love as vague approval. Not love as moral laziness. Not love as a refusal to tell the truth. But love is the holy power that seeks the good of another before it seeks the comfort of the self.

The church today must hear this again.

Every generation is tempted to turn faith into boundary management. We decide who is in, who is out, who is acceptable, who is suspicious, who is too messy, too wounded, too different, too complicated, or too far gone. But Jesus keeps walking toward the people others avoid.

He touches the leper.

He eats with the sinner.

He heals on the Sabbath.

He restores the broken.

He reminds the righteous that mercy is not a threat to holiness. Mercy is what holiness looks like when it moves through the world with the heart of God.

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The law of love does not lower the standard of faith. It raises it. It calls us beyond public appearance into private integrity, beyond ritual correctness into lived compassion, beyond separation into redemptive presence.

If we follow Jesus, we cannot use God's law as a weapon against the very people God desires to heal.

We must become communities where truth and mercy are not enemies. Where holiness and welcome can stand together. Where the wounded are not hidden away but invited toward restoration. Where the measure of faithfulness is not how many people we exclude, but how clearly we embody the love of Christ.

Because in the kingdom Jesus proclaimed, mercy is not the exception to the law.

Mercy is the law brought to life.



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CHURCH SERVICES
IS A BLESSING,
BECAUSE LISTENING TO THE
WORD OF GOD
WILL HELP YOU GROW IN FAITH.

WELCOME TO THE BIRLAND WORLD FOUNDATION

by John W Losh II

SHOWCASING



'This area is widely considered terra nullius —land that is not officially claimed by any recognized nation.'

It's often said—sometimes jokingly—that everyone dreams of starting their own country. For the past fifteen years, however, one organization has been working to turn that idea into a humanitarian reality.

Birland is associated with the 2,060 km² desert territory of Bir Tawil, a region located between Egypt and Sudan. This area is widely considered terra nullius—land that is not officially claimed by any recognized nation. Within this unique context, Birland presents itself as the "First Humanitarian Country," with a mission centered on dignity, identity, and opportunity for stateless and underserved populations.

Key Aspects of Birland

Location

Birland is situated in Bir Tawil, a landlocked region bordered by Egypt to the north and Sudan to the south. The area has been identified by its organizers as having potential for agriculture, mining, and development initiatives.

Founding and Government

Birland was founded in 2015 by H.R.M. King Emir A. Haiyawi. His royal title was conferred by H.I.M. King Denis Okafor of the Ezeigbo Ohanaeze Kingdom in Ghana. The organizational structure includes ministers, advisors, and international collaborators.

King Emir A. Haiyawi, who grew up in Europe, has long held a passion for humanitarian causes. After learning about Bir Tawil and observing the difficult living conditions of nomadic inhabitants—many

lacking basic documentation, education, and access to water, he committed to establishing a humanitarian-focused nation. His vision is not political sovereignty, but rather creating a supportive and dignified environment for stateless individuals.

One moment that deeply impacted him was a message reportedly left behind by inhabitants: “Don’t leave without us, Birland.” This became a driving force behind his mission.

Status

Birland is considered a micronation and is not recognized as a sovereign state by the United Nations or neighboring countries.

Initiatives

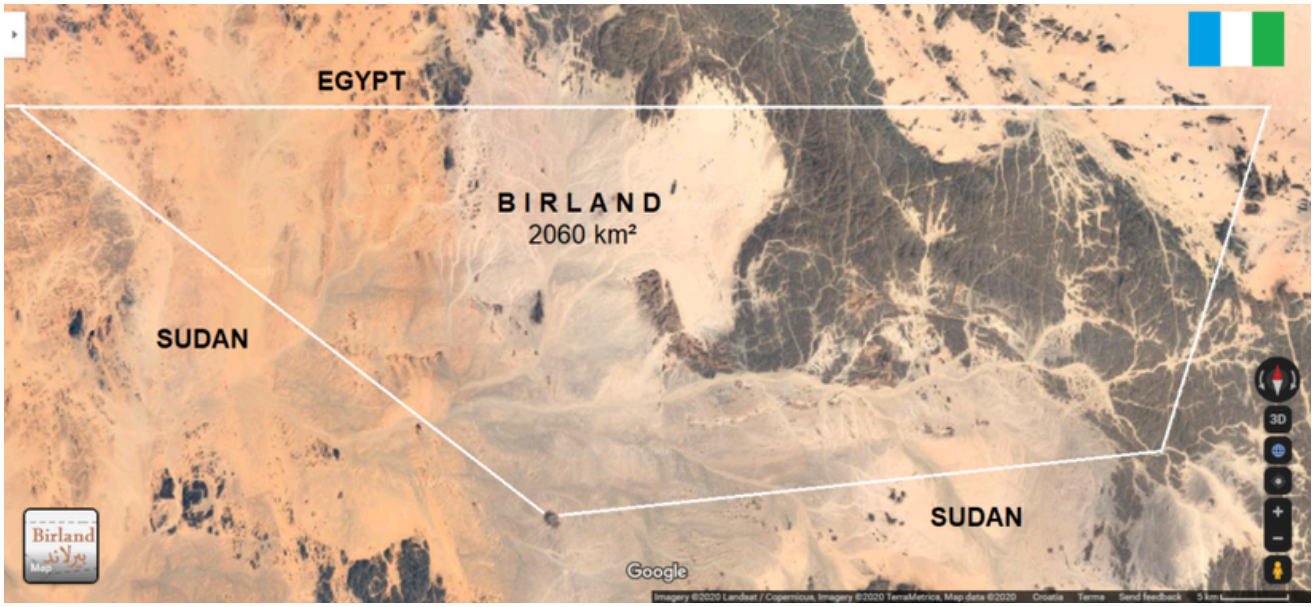
Among its forward-looking initiatives, Birland has explored the development of a digital currency aimed at fostering economic empowerment and participation.

International Relations and Leadership

The Birland State reports formal documentation related to leadership appointments, including the coronation of Queen Eden Soriano Trinidad.

The Significance of Bir Tawil

Bir Tawil remains one of the few places on Earth not claimed by any country. Both Egypt and Sudan renounce sovereignty over it, as doing so would weaken their respective claims to the more strategically valuable Hala'ib Triangle. This has led to Bir Tawil often being referred to as a modern *“no man’s land.”*





Leadership and Advisory Contributions

In 2024, Dr. Stephen R. Barnhart of the American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation (AAHEA) was approached by Queen Eden Trinidad for his expertise in international relations. Recognized for his work in international security, higher education, and business, Dr. Barnhart now serves as a consultant to the Birland Project and President of the Birland Global Foundation.

The Birland Global Foundation serves as the charitable arm of the organization, supporting initiatives through donations, digital citizenship programs, educational opportunities, business recognition awards, and humanitarian services.

Dr. Barnhart brings extensive international experience to this role. In 2024, he was appointed Goodwill Ambassador on Education by the Government of Zambia. He has also served as a representative to the United States and the United Nations for the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom in Uganda. Additional roles include Chief Constable for IPSP and consultant to Mondialpol Police, both based in Rome, Italy.



J**ohn W. Losh II is the** AAHEA Administrative Assistant, Chief News Correspondent, ICOF Associate Chaplain Secretary & Chief News Correspondent, Birland Global Foundation

Note

This writer is honored to have been appointed by Dr. Barnhart as Secretary and Chief News Correspondent for the Birland Global Foundation and to be listed among its founding directors. This role complements ongoing service with the American Association for Higher Education and the International Circle of Faith.


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