

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009
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January 4, 2018

Dear Brethren,

It seems strange writing *2018*, especially when I can't imagine what happened to 2017! This past year was a very active one for the Church, and my schedule reflected that as well. I made several international trips to visit the brethren in different parts of the world—beginning the year with a trip to Ghana in January, followed by a trip to Central America for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. After Unleavened Bread, I flew to Lima, Peru, to visit with the Quijano family after the death of Manuel Quijano, our pastor in Peru. It was a very emotional trip.

In July Sharron and I spent almost three weeks visiting South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. In November we traveled to four countries in South America—Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Peru. This was my first trip to the cities of Montevideo, Uruguay, and Buenos Aires and Bahía Blanca, Argentina.

On these church visits in 2017, I was able to see approximately 2,000 brethren outside the U.S. and another 1,000 in the U.S. That is almost 30 percent of our worldwide attendance. American Airlines even sent a nice note informing me that I flew enough miles to circle the globe three times, another indication it was a busy year!

Of course, I was not alone. We have others who traveled the world serving God's people in 2017: David Baker, traveling in Asia (including the Philippines) and Australia; Leon and Reba Walker, in Latin America, as well as other parts of the world as the international liaison for the Church; Tom Clark, in Ghana and Nigeria (in addition to his U.S. pastoral responsibilities); Tim Waddle, in Kenya; Arnold Hampton, in the Caribbean; Joel Meeker, in the French-speaking regions of Africa, Europe, Canada and the Caribbean; and Doug Johnson, in Canada (in addition to his U.S. pastoral responsibilities). Of course, all of these men are supported by their wives who occasionally travel with them. It is a team effort.

It has been very encouraging to me to receive thank-you notes and emails from many in these areas following my visits. While I have been very happy to visit members and always feel that I gain more than I give, I have come to realize how important a ministerial visit is to the brethren in some of these more remote areas. It is easy to feel alone when your connection to the Church is via weekly webcasts, literature and videos. There is something special about interacting with people in person.

This was expressed to me when we visited Montevideo, Uruguay, with Mr. and Mrs. Walker and Saul and Carmen Langarica in November. Mr. Langarica, who lives in Santiago, Chile, is the pastor for this group, but he can only travel to Uruguay twice a year. The rest of the time the members are left to connect to services via the Internet. It was truly a special occasion for the 18 of us who gathered there for a Bible study followed by a wonderful meal of Uruguayan beef.

I write all of this to make you aware of perhaps the most critical need in the Church today—ministerial and pastoral leadership. In our 2018 strategic plan we identified three fundamental

issues that must be addressed: facilities development (our new office building), international leadership training and the expansion of our media efforts. All three of these are critical to the Church, but none is greater than the need for ministerial leadership.

In Matthew 9:36 Jesus Christ became emotional when He saw a body of people without a shepherd: “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” Spiritual leadership is extremely important, so much so that Christ told His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (verses 37-38).

This next year we are launching an ambitious leadership development program for areas outside the United States. In the U.S. we have several programs to develop men for the full-time ministry, the Focused Mentoring Program, for instance. But in 2018 we will conduct our first international leadership development seminars since COGWA began in 2010. Our plan is to focus first on Latin America. We will begin in Central America with a conference in Guatemala in March, and from there we will go to Mexico, also in March, and to Chile in April. These conferences will involve leadership training seminars conducted by the COGWA administration, along with Mr. Walker. Our plan is to combine the experience and knowledge of the four COGWA administrators along with Mr. Walker to develop future leaders throughout Latin America. From there, our plans are to move to other regions of the world with the same training program.

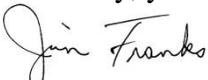
The apostle Paul instructed Titus to “appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). These instructions were given almost 2,000 years ago, but it is still our goal today to provide shepherds for the brethren, even in remote areas. The spiritual value of having the opportunity to attend services or meet regularly with a pastor cannot be overestimated.

We expect to see great accomplishments this next year in the work of the Church. We plan to complete the new office building, expand all areas of media, and train new leaders around the world. We are one body, and our goal is to make sure no one feels cut off, but that everyone has the opportunity to be in contact with a pastor or elder on a regular basis. We continue to request—as Christ requested—that you “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” This is *His harvest* not ours, but we all must participate. We are in this together.

On Dec. 23, 2017, we completed seven years as the Church of God, a Worldwide Association. As we look back over the past seven years, we see God’s hand in blessing our efforts. One longtime employee of the Church who has worked for more than 40 years with the finances of the Church said it this way, “God has blessed us beyond our wildest dreams.” We have faced many formidable challenges since we began in December of 2010, but God has always provided a way forward.

Thank you for your generosity, your prayers and your support for this work. I look forward to visiting many more of you in this coming year!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,


Jim Franks