

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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July 4, 2019

Dear Brethren,

I am writing this letter while traveling in Africa, having just completed the latest International Leadership Program weekend seminar in Kigali, Rwanda. This program is unique and, to my knowledge, totally different from anything we have done previously in the Church. Its origin goes back to November of 2017, when discussions took place between Church administrators and Leon Walker, international liaison for the Church of God, a Worldwide Association.

A serious need had been accentuated by the deaths of three church pastors in a period of 18 months. Two of them pastored congregations outside the U.S. How to replace these men and others who, because of age or health, will retire was and is a major challenge. In fact, it is possibly our most serious challenge. We had already developed several leadership programs in the United States, but there was no program that specifically addressed international congregations. Of all the elders in COGWA, 75 percent live and serve congregations in the U.S. That leaves 25 percent outside the U.S., but 50 percent of our membership attend these non-U.S. congregations.

We began the new program by organizing international congregations into 10 regions: (1) Central America, (2) Mexico, (3) South America, (4) New Zealand and Australia, (5) the Philippines and Asia, (6) West Africa, (7) Central Africa, (8) southern Africa, (9) the Caribbean and (10) Great Britain and Europe. After our discussion in November 2017, we committed the time and resources to travel to all 10 of these areas in a period of 18 months to conduct weekend seminars on leadership. Those considered leaders or future leaders in the local congregations were invited by their pastors and regional directors to attend these special classes.

So far, we have conducted seven of these weekends, including the most recent meetings in Rwanda, with three more to go. Approximately 300 people have attended these classes to date. By the time we finish all 10, we anticipate an attendance of 500 people—all leaders or future leaders of the Church outside the U.S. We will continue working with these individuals, providing more specialized training over time. Leadership development in the Church of God is never ending. Once someone attends a weekend, he (along with his wife) is expected to complete a series of seven online classes. Another requirement will be to view the Foundation Institute classes on our fundamental beliefs. Once an individual successfully completes all three—(1) the weekend seminars, (2) seven follow-up classes, and (3) the 24 classes on our fundamental beliefs—he will receive a certificate of completion.

The apostle Paul gave clear instruction in Titus about appointing elders in every city (Titus 1:5). When you read Timothy and Titus, you can see how deeply involved and concerned Paul was for the development of new leaders for the Church.

None of us knows when Jesus Christ will return to this earth. We can all watch as world conditions deteriorate and compare what we see with Scripture, but none of us can be absolutely certain of God's timing. Are we to the point that it is "as the days of Noah were" (Matthew 24:37)? We can

only read the Scriptures and imagine how bad it must have been in Noah's day, but God clearly knows what it was like and how our day compares to that day and how close we are to the end.

Since we can't know the day or the hour for Christ's return (verse 36), we must work as though it is imminent. We are specifically told that the servant who is "so doing" (verse 46) right up until the day of Christ's return will be blessed. We are committed to proclaiming the gospel to all parts of the world and to caring for those whom God has called and will call in the future.

The work of God is not a selfish work. God has enriched the lives of a relatively small group of people by revealing the truth to them, but billions have not been so blessed. It is not only for us that we should desire the return of Jesus Christ. The world today is filled with poverty, hunger, violence and death. Probably the most-often-quoted scripture in the Bible is found in John 3:16, where we read, "For God so loved *the world*." God does not love just us. The return of Christ is not for us alone! The whole world desperately needs redemption.

Being in Rwanda this past week reminded me of my first visit back in 2012. Mr. Meeker and I were in Rwanda in April of that year, which was during the anniversary of the genocide that killed upwards of 900,000 people in about 100 days. The Rwandan genocide began in April of 1994 and lasted until July. Many people were hacked to death with machetes or beaten to death with clubs and rocks during this 100-day period. Throughout Rwanda, memorials have been established in a desire to make sure people do not forget what happened.

Rwanda has moved on from that time, and it was easy to see the improvement in the economy and the positive spirit and feeling about the future when compared to my first trip. It was a joy to once again see our brethren and experience a wonderful Sabbath with all of them. The congregations in this part of the world are growing, and in spite of ongoing poverty, their attitude is positive.

We have three more regions where we will conduct leadership weekends: Johannesburg, South Africa, in late July; Runaway Bay, Jamaica, in early August; and Great Britain (in an area just north of London) in late August. Please pray that there will be good fruit borne from this program and that God will send more laborers into the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,



Jim Franks