

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009
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May 10, 2018

Dear Brethren,

In a period of less than 12 months we lost three pastors unexpectedly to death—Todd Carey, Manuel Quijano and Norman Julag-ay. All three represented the very best in Christian leadership. While we are familiar with the scripture that man's allotted time is 70 years (Psalm 90:10) with a possibility for more, none of these men reached this age. Of course the point of the verse in Psalm 90 is that even if we reach this age, life is still fleeting and "passes quickly" (World English Bible).

During our recent leadership conference in Santiago, Chile, I was reminded of these three pastors and how difficult it has been to replace them. We were very blessed to have a fine elder in Peru who could take on the responsibility of pastor. But we currently have no one in the Philippines who can assume Mr. Julag-ay's role as pastor, and in Mr. Carey's case, we have asked the neighboring pastors in the area to take on additional responsibilities.

We still have a number of needs in the United States, but the need for leadership in the international work is truly at a crisis point. Our church attendance is evenly divided between the U.S. and areas outside the U.S., but we are woefully lacking in the number of ministers outside the U.S. Approximately 75 percent of our COGWA ministry live in the U.S., while only 25 percent live outside the U.S. This creates situations where we have no local pastor or elder in many congregations. In fact, in some cases we have no resident pastor for an entire country, even though we have congregations. We strongly desire that every congregation should have a local pastor and, whenever possible, elders (Titus 1:5).

Each of the three pastors who died in the past year was humble, self-sacrificing and extremely dedicated. When a crisis came to the Church in 1995, they stood strong and firm, refusing to compromise God's law. Then in 2010 each understood the issues and the challenges of the day, and each was instrumental in the beginning of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, in his own area. How do we replace these men? Where will we find new pastors with the same dedication? By the end of 2017, it became abundantly clear that while we had a good leadership development program in the U.S., we urgently needed a new program for training men and women in areas outside the U.S.

With this in mind, in November of 2017 the International Leadership Program was developed to prepare leadership for the future. Last month, during the weekend of April 28-29, we held our third leadership conference since we initiated this program in March. This time it was held in Chile, where we had 90 in attendance—pastors, elders, deacons, deaconesses, leaders and wives from throughout South America.

We launched this program with two goals in mind: to connect each region with headquarters for the promotion of unity, and to provide leadership training for international congregations. It is clear that this conference was an amazing success! In our first three weekends in Guatemala, Mexico and Chile, 160 men and women were in attendance, all either current leaders or being considered for future leadership roles.

During our trip to Chile, Sharron and I also had the opportunity to visit the congregations in the southern part of the country. We traveled with Mr. and Mrs. Leon Walker and Mr. and Mrs. Saul Langarica. On Monday, April 30, we flew to Puerto Montt to visit with the brethren in that region. Tuesday, we held a Bible study for 30 members in Osorno, and the next night we held a Bible study for 60 people in Temuco. What a pleasure it was to spend two evenings with these wonderful brethren!

Our congregation in Santiago has an attendance of 350 people, but there are 150 additional brethren attending congregations in southern Chile. Puerto Montt is considered the “end of the trail” for the country of Chile. South of the city you basically only find islands, fjords and glaciers. From Puerto Montt we traveled 350 kilometers north to Temuco, stopping off in Osorno, which is about halfway between. The weather was a bit cold, but we enjoyed landscapes very similar to Oregon and Alaska. The natural beauty was breathtaking!

We returned to Texas on Friday, May 4, filled with excitement and enthusiasm. The brethren we met are evidence that there is great promise for the future. The quality of leadership and the enthusiasm for the future were overwhelming evidence of the health of the Church in South America.

Now we are planning new conferences and classes in all regions of the world. We are planning to go to the Philippines/Asia, New Zealand/Australia, Southern Africa, Central Africa, French Africa, U.K./Europe, and the Caribbean. In each location our goal will be the same—to encourage leadership development. We hope to visit all these regions over the next 18 months. Our plans are extremely ambitious, but absolutely necessary.

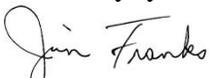
This trip emphasized to us once again that the Church of God is composed of those whom God has called in all regions of the world. We saw firsthand enthusiasm, love and dedication in each congregation, among the older members and among the youth. It was truly inspiring!

In John 21 Jesus Christ told Peter to “feed My lambs,” “tend My sheep” and “feed My sheep” (verses 15-19). Relationships built on love and respect for one another—this describes the connections between disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the world (John 13:35). There are no national boundaries or racial divides within the Church of God. We are all part of that one body.

Please pray that our efforts will be successful. In one sense, there is a transition taking place in the Church of God. As leaders age and retire or become incapacitated, there must be others who are willing and capable of stepping into new roles. We are preaching the gospel to the world primarily over the Internet, and we are developing new leaders in all regions of the world to care for those whom God may choose to call. God has given us the resources, now we must use those resources to further the gospel while never neglecting the care for the brethren.

The news from around the world is dark and foreboding, but the opportunities within the Church are very exciting. In an old Bible that I bought almost 50 years ago when I entered Ambassador College I wrote a statement from one of my classes: “The end result of your part in God’s work depends on God and the power of His Spirit. . . . But work as though it all depended on you!”

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,


Jim Franks