

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Dear Brethren,

This will be my last member letter until after the Feast of Tabernacles. I am sure you are as amazed as I am by that statement! Where has the summer gone—where has the *year* gone? We are in the month of September, just two weeks until the Feast of Trumpets and a month until the Feast of Tabernacles. I am excited about this year's Feast, but as is often the case, I wish I had more time to prepare. There never seems to be enough time!

As we approach the next festival season, when four holy days occur within one month, we need to take stock of events in the world and events in our own lives. The main news item here in the United States has been Hurricane Harvey, the horrific storm that hit the Texas and Louisiana coast. More than 700 Church members live in this region, and we give God thanks that none suffered injuries and only a few sustained property damage. When you look at the magnitude of this storm and consider that brethren are scattered throughout the area, to know that everyone is okay with little property damage is amazing from a human level. But it is the outcome we expect from our prayers.

We are deeply saddened, of course, by the loss of life along with tremendous property losses. In the city of Houston alone, it is estimated (they're still counting) that 156,000 homes were damaged. It is being called a "1,000-year flood," which means the chances of such an event occurring in any given year is 0.1 percent. Or, put another way, the odds of this type of flood *not occurring* in any given year is 99.9 percent. This storm produced the worst single flooding disaster in the history of the United States.

Please continue to pray for the brethren who did sustain damage, as they must focus on getting everything cleaned up before leaving for the Feast. I also encourage all of us to pray for the people in this region who have been devastated by the loss of homes and especially pray for comfort for those who lost loved ones. The death toll is now at least 70. The Church has been helping members financially from our assistance fund virtually from the time Harvey came ashore in Rockport, Texas, and many members have individually volunteered to help in their communities with cleanup and care for those who have been displaced.

The media coverage of heartwarming stories about people helping people has led many to hope that this disaster will erase much of the hatred we have seen of late and actually help bring Americans closer together. The governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, declared Sunday, Sept. 3, as a day of prayer. President Trump made a similar announcement a couple of days later. Encouraging people to pray is a good thing and not something to be taken lightly! But this nation is deeply divided. Just prior to these announcements, an appeals court upheld the firing of a high school football coach for praying with his team prior to a game. Yet we recently saw front-page pictures in major newspapers of President Trump and his cabinet praying together in the Oval Office!

As Christians, what should we make of all this? Certainly we are conflicted—we want to see this nation come together, putting aside bitterness and anger. But when a nation rejects God, we know that will not happen. The Bible speaks of an angry spirit—stimulating anger, hatred, division and evil—at work in the world. Prophecy is very clear as to what will happen to this country because of its sins. Immorality and the fracturing of the family structure continue to eat away at the fabric of society. We have gone too far into sin as a nation to see this reversed without divine intervention. No political party or politician, no matter how well-meaning, can turn this tide. People helping others in times of crisis is wonderful, but it's not enough to reverse the consequences of sin.

A lot of money will pour into Houston, and within a reasonable period of time, life will return to some sense of normalcy. Of course, life may never be “normal” again for those who lost loved ones or had their homes destroyed. But once Houston is no longer in the news, the headlines and stories filled with bitterness, hatred and anger will once again dominate. This isn't pessimism, it's the reality of human nature under the influence of the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

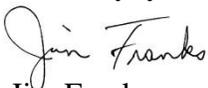
In the midst of all this we will soon be celebrating the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day (the Last Great Day). I hope and pray that during this year's Feast we will see the contrast between God's solution and man's solution to the world's problems. God's solution—the only solution—is for Christ to return, remove Satan from the scene and set up His world-ruling government. We will emphasize these events as the meaning behind the upcoming holy days.

With recent events, this year's Feast takes on added significance. Even as I write this letter, a potential political crisis is looming in Kenya. The Kenyan Supreme Court just nullified a recent presidential election and ordered a new election within 60 days. This is the first time the election of a sitting president has been overturned in all of Africa. As I write, no one knows what the reaction will be in the streets of the cities. We have 130 brethren in Kenya who are preparing for the Feast of Tabernacles. But Kenya is not the only place where there is a threat of violence. Please pray for all the Feast sites and the protection of God's people everywhere.

While government leaders' declaration of a day of prayer is good, we know that as Christians we must, as the apostle Paul wrote, “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). He said he prayed for the members “night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3). We know that the work of God moves forward on its knees, and prayer is an important part of what we do. We also know that the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails [accomplishes] much” (James 5:16).

With the holy days upon us, please be safe and enjoy the “best Feast ever.” In our minds, let's leave this divided and violent world behind and pray for peace at each and every one of our Festival sites. We must never take this peace for granted in a world where there is so much violence and division. The prayers of God's people are effective and should continue without ceasing, night and day!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,


Jim Franks