



## THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY RUTHIE EDGERLY OBERG

John L. Franklin (1910-1999) was orphaned shortly after birth by the death of his mother. Yet even as a young boy he felt that God had called him to missionary service.

While attending Southern California College (now Vanguard University) in the early 1930s, he was filled with the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues.

Franklin believed God was sending him to Guatemala. No AG missionaries had ministered in Guatemala since 1925. Franklin and his new wife, Ella, responded to the call in 1937.

They located five small congregations scattered among the mountains. In 1938, 300 people gathered together to form the first council of the Assemblies of God in

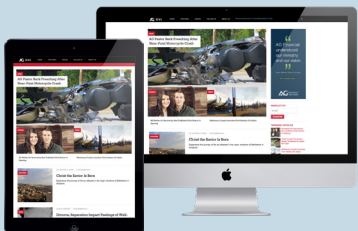
Guatemala. John Franklin was named the first superintendent.

In 1941, Franklin opened a church in Guatemala City. On Good Friday of that year, seven people were filled with the Holy Spirit, sparking a revival. Soon a large evangelistic center was established in Guatemala City.

In 1977, the Franklins retired from full-time ministry. From the five small groups of believers they found in 1937, God had blessed them with 600 established churches, 700 licensed ministers, and 55,000 AG believers.

Read more of Franklin's report, "A Harvest That Rewards the Sacrifice," on pages 6-7 of the April 11, 1942, *Pentecostal Evangel* online at [s2.ag.org/april111942](http://s2.ag.org/april111942).

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SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2019

# AG<sup>®</sup> NEWS

A COLLECTION OF THIS WEEK'S STORIES FROM [NEWS.AG.ORG](http://news.ag.org)



**AG-FOCUSED FILM  
NEARS RELEASE**

**TAKING THE  
COMMUNITY'S PULSE**

**USING ARTS TO  
EVANGELIZE CULTURE**

**NEW CHURCH FINDS  
RECEPTIVE AUDIENCE**





## AG-FOCUSED FILM NEARS RELEASE

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

The film adaptation of the miraculous real-life account of an Assemblies of God youth who resurrected without brain damage despite being dead for more than an hour after drowning, will open in theaters April 17.

*Breakthrough* is based on a book co-authored by Ginger Kolbaba, a regular freelance writer for AG News. AG pastor Samuel Rodriguez is executive producer.

The motion picture is being marketed heavily to church groups. In addition to the compelling storyline, *Breakthrough* is produced by a major studio, 20th Century Fox, and has marquee stars in key roles: Chrissy Metz as Joyce Smith, mother of 14-year-old drowning victim John Smith of suburban St. Louis; Josh Lucas as Joyce's husband, Brian; Topher Grace as AG pastor Jason Noble; and Dennis Haysbert as Dr. Jeremy Garrett, an international hypothermia and drowning expert who guided John's recovery.

For 15 minutes on Jan. 19, 2015, John's lungs filled with raw lake water,

his heart had stopped beating, and he lay motionless at the bottom of a lake. John had been dead for over an hour by the time Joyce cried out to God in the emergency room.

"I believe in a God who can do miracles!" declared Joyce, who attended First Assembly Church in St. Peters, Missouri. "Holy Spirit, I need You right now to come and breathe life back into my son!"

Moments later, John's heartbeat restarted.

Seven days later, physicians removed John's ventilator and moved him out of intensive care. A week after that, he went home, with no neurological damage. Noble, who had been pastor at the church only three months, stayed by John's bedside for nearly the entire ordeal.

The book and the movie to a large degree focus on one woman's faith in the midst of naysayers around her.

"Joyce had spent time with God regularly, praying, studying the Bible,

## NO ONE IS BEYOND REDEMPTION

BY GINGER KOLBABA

A Conway County court declared Paul Pennebaker's drug days over in 2002 as he faced 20 years of incarceration at a high-security prison for manufacturing methamphetamine.

The sentence forced a change in Pennebaker's life. For two decades starting in his early teens, Pennebaker sold meth. After going to prison, his wife divorced him and he lost custody of his two children.

His mother brought him a Bible and Pennebaker began reading and memorizing Scriptures. In 2003, U.S. missionary chaplain Bob C. Holyfield began teaching faith-based seminars in the facility and Pennebaker made a new commitment to serve Jesus.

He garnered the warden's notice, who offered Pennebaker a position at his home: gardening, cleaning, and doing miscellaneous chores. Proving his trustworthiness, Pennebaker soon gained more liberty through work release furloughs.

In October 2016, Holyfield invited Pennebaker to speak at Hattiesville

Family Worship Center, where Holyfield also pastored.

"He's like a walking Bible," says Holyfield.

In May 2017, after serving 15 years, Pennebaker was released from prison because of being a model inmate. He moved to Hattiesville to spend more time with his spiritual mentor, Holyfield.

A church member offered Pennebaker a job at the local rock quarry. Pennebaker has kept up his unto-the-Lord work ethic he adopted in the penitentiary. After less than two years, he is now a supervisor at the quarry.

He has re-established a solid relationship with his two children, now in their 20s; he fills in teaching Sunday School and preaching on occasion. He also has traveled with Holyfield to prisons. Pennebaker is adamant that no inmate is irredeemable.

"If God can't change everybody, He can't change anybody," says Pennebaker, 48. "I'm living proof that there is no such thing as a lost cause."

### THE ABCs OF SALVATION

**ACCEPT** that you are a sinner, and God's punishment for your sin is death and separation from God forever.

**BELIEVE** that Jesus paid God's price for your sin when He died on the cross.

**CONFESS** "Jesus, I believe You are who the Bible and history declares You are – the Son of God. I humble myself and surrender to You. Forgive me. Make me spiritually whole. Change my life. Amen."



## USING ARTS TO EVANGELIZE CULTURE

BY KENNETH C. WALKER

With its gritty, urban-oriented theme of overcoming racial conflict, *Peace on Earth* isn't a traditional Easter play. But when the production premieres on Easter at Hope Center Tabernacle in Jersey City, New Jersey, the message will be the same: Jesus is the only hope for lasting reconciliation with God — and each other.

Hope Center churchgoer Sidney Bowie portrays Craig Harris, an African-American activist who experiences inner struggles between living the way Christ says and the injustice he sees in the world.

"One of the central messages of the play is that the solution to racism is found in the work Christ did on the Cross," says Bowie, who works in merchandising for a major department store chain in New York.

The original production is one of a dozen dramas, musicals, and coffeehouse events hosted annually by the unusual church. Its drama ministry became so well known after opening in 2000 that founding pastors Mario González and Leigh Piatt-González later

decided to align Calvary AG's name with Hope Center Arts.

The church has an average of 650 at Sunday services for Anglo and Hispanic congregations and at its satellite campus in Hackettstown.

In Jersey City, congregants meet in the Hope Center for the Visual and Performing Arts, which opened in 2008. It includes an art gallery, classrooms for arts instruction, and the 500-seat theater that is home to three Sunday services.

"Art influences culture," Mario González says. "We use this to the best of our ability to get people out of darkness and into cultural freedom and intimacy with Jesus."

Hope Center's contingent of actors, singers, musicians, and other performers is something Leigh, whose primary job is directing the arts center, believes can be replicated in church bodies elsewhere.

"The most important thing is to make sure they have a balanced Christian worldview," Leigh says. "Our approach artistically is to say what God would want us to say."

## NEW CHURCH FINDS RECEPTIVE AUDIENCE

BY ERIC TIAN SAY

For most of his life, Powell Noojin considered faith a crutch for weak people. But the Daphne, Alabama, attorney's spiritual beliefs were rocked after he reluctantly came to a flourishing AG congregation, which has witnessed hundreds make salvation commitments recently.

Noojin, 39, became a Christian on Super Bowl Sunday 2017 — in part after he overheard pastor Chad R. Stafford tell a man working on the church's baseball field that the facility was open to the entire community.

"This church was spending money on people and projects that mattered," Noojin says. "It was a group of people who were doing good in the community."

Noojin is among more than 275 people who have recently come to faith in Jesus at Coastal Church, which draws an average of 1,918 people for weekly services.

"The spiritual desperation of our area has attributed much toward our growth," says the 44-year-old Stafford, who grew up in Daphne.

Coastal is active in community response to local crises. In March 2018, when the bus of a school band from McKinney, Texas, went off a ravine in the area, emergency workers and the sheriff's office sent the students to Coastal.

In one afternoon Coastal Church adherents raised over \$25,000 in gift cards from local residents to help the students get back home.

## COUPLE OPERATE RESCUE STATION

BY ERIC TIAN SAY

Transient residents in one of the most depressed areas of Orlando, Florida, have found a haven for their souls in a nontraditional church started by a lay minister couple who saw a dire community need.

Nine years ago, Paul and Jessie Downey launched One Church Fairvilla. The couple owned a business in a neighborhood where hundreds of homeless and low-income residents lived.

Brenda Alwine, 56, and her three children lived in a mobile home park populated by a number of registered sex offenders. Alwine slept days so she could stay awake nights to ensure that no one harmed her kids. Their trailer was in rough shape, with broken windows, doors that wouldn't lock, a leaky roof, and unsafe electrical outlets.

After some searching, the Downeys located a much nicer mobile home park. With donations from friends, relatives, and congregants, One Church Fairvilla purchased the family a mobile home for \$4,600. Volunteers worked together to complete an extreme makeover of the dwelling.

"I don't know what would have happened to us if this church hadn't come along," Alwine says. "One Church Fairvilla gave us a home, a safe place to live. We are connected for life."

The church meets on Saturdays, drawing anywhere from 20 to 75 people who are served a hot meal.

# THE DOUBLE LIFE DILEMMA

BY DAN VAN VEEN

She was in the pew nearly every Sunday, but this young woman had a secret her Radiant Church family would never believe.

In 2015, Alyssa Ortiz graduated from high school in Surprise, Arizona. After attending college for a year, she returned home and got a job.

But on weekends, she began drinking and partying, yet still attending church.

After wrecking her car, losing her job, and paying fines, she believed money would solve her problems. She started applying at clubs. Soon a club offered her a job, stripping. Her Radiant Church family didn't have any idea.

Ortiz worked at the club for the next two years. Yet on Sundays, she was at church.

"I grew deeper and deeper into the club lifestyle," she admits. "I began doing drugs — cocaine, acid, ecstasy. I didn't want to even acknowledge what was happening to me."

But then Caden Metcalf, a pastor and Radiant College director at Radiant Church, asked her about attending the Southwestern Assemblies of God University extension that was opening at the church in fall 2018. *Her? Bible school? If he only knew . . .*

Yet something kept drawing her back. When her mom invited her to go with her to a women's conference, Alyssa agreed. The conference was a turning point.

"I really loved what [the minister] had to say," she says. "I started listening to

her podcasts and evaluating my life . . . , but I was still working at the club."

"I kept asking her about going to college," Metcalf says, but then adds with a laugh, "I noticed she started to avoid me."

But then, one night, a video sermon concluded with a prayer of salvation.



"I remember saying the prayer out loud and thinking, *I think I just got saved . . . it really did happen!*" Ortiz recalls. "It was really just a different feeling for me. I felt more empowered, more dedicated, more sure God was more than just in my head . . . He was in my life now — forever!"

Ortiz quit the club and took a full class load at Radiant College to study for an associate degree in Bible. She explains that she's studying the Bible so she can more effectively communicate, witness, and share her testimony.

and getting to know God's character," Kolbaba says. "So when that unexpected moment came, everything she needed was already in place."

Although John came back to life, many on the medical team, as well as some of the boy's friends and relatives, thought the resurrection would be a short one. But Joyce didn't waver; she didn't believe her son would die a second death.

"When she saw the pulse and the heartbeat, everything else in her mind was a done deal," says Kolbaba, 51. "God had brought John back to life; his body just needed to catch up."

For the most part, the movie follows

the book closely.

"The movie is appealing in that it's not a sermon," says Noble, who earlier served as national children's ministry director for the AG. "It's designed to reach people who are far from God."

Noble, 44, pastored First Assembly for 3½ years and now is working full time to promote the movie to churchgoers. He also has been appearing with John and Joyce at various speaking events. And Noble has authored his own just-released book, *Breakthrough to Your Miracle*.

John Smith will be attending North Central University in Minneapolis this fall.

## TAKING THE COMMUNITY'S PULSE

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

Kenny A. Maness has been leading Paris First Assembly in Arkansas for 26 years.

Paris has many of the troubles associated with rural America: generational poverty, drug abuse, shuttered businesses. But First Assembly has bucked the trend of declining rural churches by, in part, plugging people into life groups.

The church also has grown to 450 from 125, in part by emphasizing student and children's ministries. While Maness has been at Paris First Assembly, 30 people from the congregation have gone on to serve in ministry church plants or revitalization efforts.

County judges recently started court-ordering drug and alcohol defendants to attend Christ-centered support

group classes at the church. Judges also are requiring offenders to take newly implemented anger management parenting classes at Paris First Assembly.

Another area where the church is thriving is with teenagers. Keith Bullock has been the full-time student pastor for almost three years, although Maness led him to the Lord 18 years ago when he was 24. Bullock, who has a dozen volunteers assisting him, also has enlisted some senior citizens in the church to pray and fast for kids who attend.

"You really have to earn their trust," Bullock says of the youth. "Many are from dysfunctional homes with uninvolved parents. Several have attempted suicide."