

THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY GLENN W. GOHR

This year the Assemblies of God is celebrating the centennial of Hispanic churches, which trace their roots back to a convention in Kingsville, Texas, in January 1918, organized by Isabel Flores and Henry C. Ball.

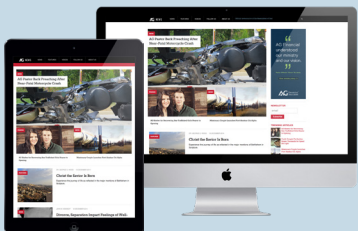
From 1918-25, Hispanics were organized as the Latin American Conference, a part of the Texas District. Mexico (mostly border communities) was included with this original conference in 1918. Puerto Rico was organized as a conference under Juan Lugo in 1921 and eventually became a district of its own. Cuba united with the Latin American Conference in 1923. In 1926, El Salvador and Guatemala united with the Latin American Conference. These are each separate fields of

ministry today.

The Latin American Conference became the Latin American District in 1929 and was officially chartered on Jan. 4, 1930, by H. C. Ball, Demetrio Bazan, and G. V. Flores. On the same date, Mexico received autonomy to form its own Latin council. Ball was the first superintendent of the Latin American District. After leading Hispanics for more than 20 years, he withdrew his name as superintendent in 1939, and Demetrio Bazan was elected as the second superintendent.

Now there are 14 Hispanic districts in the U.S., with 378,790 adherents among the Hispanic districts. The AG Hispanic Centennial will be held Aug. 1-3 in Houston.

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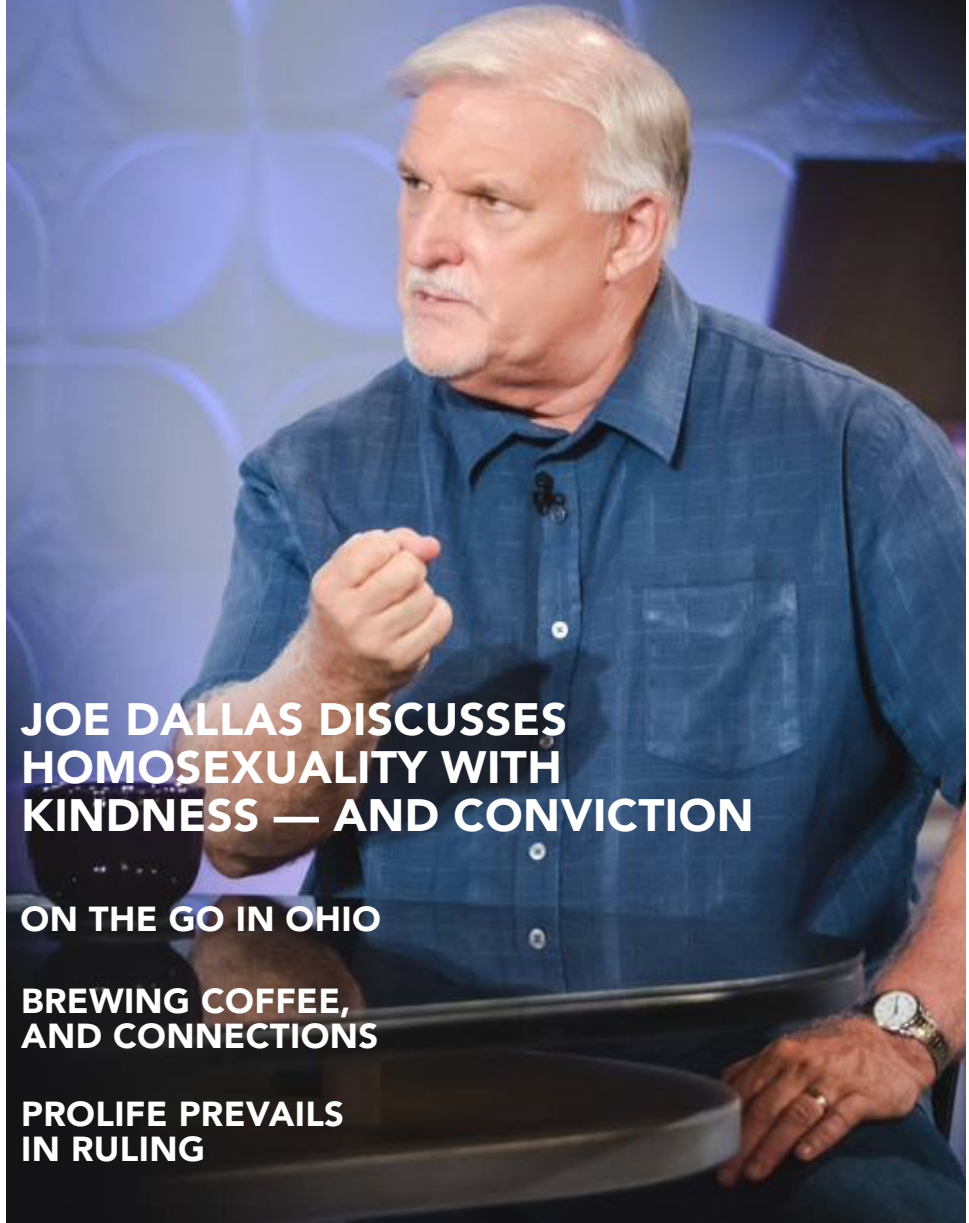
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AG NEWS

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JOE DALLAS DISCUSSES HOMOSEXUALITY WITH KINDNESS — AND CONVICTION

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

In a more innocent era, 8-year-old Joe Dallas gave little thought to going to a movie theater by himself. Although his mother warned him in 1963 that men in that section of the city would “want” him, the boy didn’t comprehend the darker sexual meaning.

Indeed, a friendly and charming man began chatting with Joe in the lobby as he waited to watch a motion picture. The man, who quickly gained Joe’s trust, followed him into a restroom stall and sexually abused him for 30 minutes. Over the next couple of years, the man regularly repeated the abuse, and introduced Joe to other pedophiles, who also molested the boy.

“I was a hungry boy,” Dallas says. “When people are hungry, they are inclined to accept things they normally wouldn’t.”

The experiences and the accompanying pornography that the abusers showed Joe set him on a destructive path of sexual fantasies. He

began regularly visiting pornographic shops, engaged in clandestine relationships with men he met in gay bars, and committed adultery with a friend’s wife, who aborted the baby they conceived together. All the while he faced an inner turmoil, yielding to same-sex desires, yet simultaneously sensing the inherent wrongness of them.

The Metropolitan Community Church, a pro-homosexual denomination, taught Dallas that he didn’t need to relinquish his faith or his rebellious sexual behavior. But by 1984, Dallas realized his life revolved around a lie he had embraced that kept him out of God’s will. He repented, found a new circle of godly friends, gained insights from a solid Christian counselor, and found emotional healing at an evangelical church.

His return to the fold didn’t involve deliverance, but rather discipleship.

“I had to learn to crucify the flesh when my lust kicked in and to

PROLIFE PREVAILS IN RULING

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

A U.S. Supreme Court decision Tuesday struck down a California law that coerced pregnancy care centers into providing free advertising for abortion centers. Justices ruled 5-4 in *National Institute of Family Life Advocates v. Becerra* (NIFLA) that pregnancy care centers aren’t subject to government-compelled speech promoting abortion.

NIFLA sued to protest 2015 California legislation that specifically targeted prolife pregnancy centers, forcing them to offer free advertising for the abortion industry. The law — the California Reproductive Freedom, Accountability, Comprehensive Care, and Transparency (FACT) Act — required licensed medical centers that give free, prolife help to pregnant women to also post a disclosure declaring that California supplies free or low-cost abortions. The announcement required pregnancy care centers to list a phone number for a county office that referred women to Planned Parenthood and other abortionists.



“The State requires primarily prolife pregnancy centers to promote the State’s own preferred message advertising abortions,” Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in a concurring opinion. “This compels individuals to contradict their most deeply held beliefs, beliefs grounded in basic philosophical, ethical, or religious precepts, or all of these.”

The FACT Act demanded that pregnancy care clinics post notices for free abortions in the waiting room. The law required facilities in some counties to spell out the announcement in as many as 13 languages. At nonmedical facilities, the proclamations needed to be displayed prominently at the entrance and in the waiting area, on a sheet at least 8½-by-11 inches high, in 48-point type.

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.”



ON THE GO IN OHIO

BY ASHLEY B. GRANT

Filling hearts by filling bellies is the mission for OHgo co-founders Kendra Faulkner and Christine Boesch. Born of a dream from two women who serve together at Faith Memorial Church of Sandusky, Ohio, OHgo is reaching some of the Buckeye State's most needy and vulnerable families by delivering goods right to their neighborhoods. Faith Memorial has been a purposeful partner of OHgo.

Faulkner and Boesch have long been community advocates. But they came to realize a large swath of the population didn't benefit from free events such as vacation Bible school or fall festivals simply because of transportation or distance. That is when they decided to "go."

"The key to our effectiveness is making sure everything we offer is mobile in an effort to reach a very underserved area," says Boesch.

"We've also discovered that when we set up outside of residents' homes, walls are immediately dissolved."

After its launch in 2015, the OHgo mission caught on like wildfire around Erie County. OHgo has plans to continue the exponential growth already experienced. Since December 2016, OHgo has added a mobile food pantry, which serves approximately 1,000 people free groceries up to three times a month.

Also since then, Faulkner and Boesch have increased their yearly book distribution by 1,000 books and delivered 2,700 additional boxes through their "Project Happy Christmas" program.

With such a large expansion of their operation, Faulkner and Boesch rely heavily on volunteers and on the residents themselves to pull off these events.

RIDING THE WAVE

BY ERIC TIAN SAY

Upper Room Church in Pensacola Beach, Florida, has used sand and surf as a springboard for a thriving Pentecostal congregation.

Nathan F. Pooley, 31, and his wife, Kaitlyn, started a beach outreach to surfers in 2012 to create an avenue to reach people who did not fit the traditional church model.

The gathering evolved into a church. Today, Upper Room, which still meets in its original former restaurant venue, averages 300 regulars in worship.

The meeting place for Upper Room has been remodeled to accommodate more worshippers, as well as to add a children's area and coffee shop. The congregation consists mostly of millennials and young families.

More than 100 people have made salvation decisions since the church started.

"We have seen drug addicts delivered, marriages restored, and people find their God-given purpose," Pooley says. "The biggest miracle we have seen is the harvest."

Pooley, who became a Christian at 17, often visited the beach and loved to surf while growing up.

"I remember watching the more experienced surfers and wishing I could just speak to them," Pooley says. "Now, I have the privilege of not only surfing and being friends with these people, but also serving them."

CALL TO WORSHIP

BY DEANN ALFORD

Chris G. Cole played all-night jam sessions on electric guitar as he grew up in Palm Desert, California. He was young and skeptical of organized religion.

Two years after marrying Ashton in 2009, the Coles moved to Texas, and Ashton suggested they go to church. Skeptical and not wanting to spend time searching, Cole suggested one located adjacent to their downtown Fort Worth apartment: 7 City Church. Cole's internet search uncovered a video of pastor Stephen C. Blandino, whose simple, straightforward message intrigued him.

"He said if you want to affect your world, you have to affect what's immediately around you in the culture," Cole says of the pastor's message. "That shifted my attitude." Cole decided to give the church a shot.

Eventually Cole agreed to a request to play lead electric guitar on the church worship team. He found new purpose as a musician facilitating others as they come to Christ.

"A third of our congregation hadn't been in church for up to two years prior to attending 7 City, and many had never been to church," says Blandino. "As they continue to attend, many have come to faith in Christ."

"From here on out, my musical ability is going to be used for God," Cole says.



BREWING COFFEE, AND CONNECTIONS

BY ANA PIERCE ELLIOTT

Nate J. and Sharon R. Grenier didn't even drink coffee when they felt God's tug on their hearts to open a shop selling the caffeinated brew.

The two had been working in children's ministries in Pennsylvania when they sensed the Lord persistently urging them to go elsewhere. After six months of fighting the Holy Spirit, they resigned.

"We just felt this longing to go out and meet people and be part of a community," Nate says. "It threw us for a massive loop when we said goodbye to our dream jobs (in children's ministry) to say yes to something we knew nothing about."

Along that journey, God confirmed the call as the Greniers met with another young couple at a coffee shop.

"They brought up this five-second blip of how it would be really neat to have a coffee shop that was a real resource to the community," Sharon says. As the Greniers left the shop, the

idea began percolating in their hearts. Soon they reached out to mentors to determine how they might undertake such a project.

As the Greniers shared their idea, various missionaries immediately understood.

"I was introduced to this idea of missional living," says Nate. "I knew a lot of people wouldn't go to a church, but they would go to a coffee shop. In that setting, we could be the hands and feet of Jesus."

Through a series of small steps and miracles, Nate and Sharon, both 31 at the time, opened the first Coffee Connections brick-and-mortar location in May 2016 in Hilliard, Ohio.

Coffee Connections has recruited volunteers to help clean city parks, serve hot chocolate, and even get plugged in with the local school system. The Greniers have been able to put on puppet shows for kids and provide a regular "mom's coffee break."

abstain from wrong actions," Dallas says. "With a robust prayer life and applying myself to reading the Word, temptations of the old nature became less and less."

Dallas, and his wife, Renee, have been married for 31 years. Since 1992, the couple have attended Newport Mesa Church in Costa Mesa, California. Dallas serves on the board of elders.

Dallas and his wife also are on the board of ReStory Ministries, a ministry endorsed by the Assemblies of God that equips local churches in addressing homosexuality and gender identity issues in a compassionate, yet biblical, way.

While various liberal denominations

affirm LGBT relationships, evangelical church bodies often are reticent to say anything. For Dallas, the silence is reminiscent of the confused emotions he experienced four decades ago.

"As a result of finding little guidance or encouragement, we keep losing people," Dallas says. "There are too many backslidden AG believers who grew up in our churches, who have gone to Christian universities, and who have even been our ministers, that have finally given up and given in to their feelings."

ReStory Ministries is designed to help churches plug the glaring lack of resources gap for those who want to repent of homosexuality.

BOOMING IN BISMARCK

BY ANA ELLIOTT

In Bismarck, North Dakota, Evangel Church is approaching 2,500 weekly attendees. Pastor Josh D. Skjoldal, 32, focuses attention on adults in their 20s and 30s.

"You can really build something on the back of young families," says Skjoldal, who has been pastor since 2015. Evangel Church considers young families — young mothers in particular — in all its ministry efforts.

The church has invested in a cutting-edge kids facility, with a major emphasis on security. For the future, Evangel is looking to open an eatery that contains a "play café" within so mothers can connect with others and still be within arm's reach of their children.

Skjoldal believes a church must offer tangibles to attract those who don't yet have a personal relationship with Christ. Some have attended Evangel simply because it's a place where someone will watch their kids for an hour and a half.

"We get people in the door by making it convenient for their family," Skjoldal says. "We have to get them in the door before we ask them to shed their own convenience to pick up their cross and follow Jesus."

Skjoldal has taken other opportunities to get the message out, including doing devotions on Facebook Live. He notes Evangel Church has grown in part by streaming services over the internet.