



THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY DARRIN J. RODGERS

Early Bulgarian Pentecostals witnessed great growth while enduring great persecution. Nicholas Nikoloff was intimately familiar with the subject. He served as general superintendent of the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches in Bulgaria from 1928 until 1931, when he moved to the United States.

"The striking thing in Bulgaria is the great spiritual hunger of the villagers," Nikoloff stated, "... some of the believers have a real gift of healing."

Bulgarians fanned the Pentecostal flame by publishing two periodicals and numerous tracts. A number of Bulgarian young people received formal theological education at a Pentecostal Bible school in Danzig, and others took local evening Bible courses.

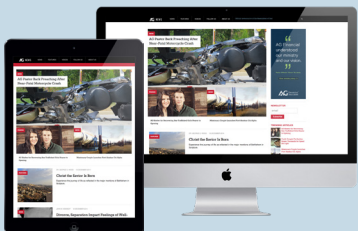
This Pentecostal progress attracted the attention of government officials and local religious leaders, who tried to quash the growing movement.

Nikoloff recounted, "The believers were severely persecuted. Some were imprisoned. Many of them were arrested, taken through the streets and people made fun of them. Others were forbidden to even pray in their own homes, and threatened severely by certain local authorities."

Despite these difficulties, by World War II, Pentecostals constituted the majority of Protestants in Bulgaria.



Read Nicholas Nikoloff's article, "The Signs Follow in Bulgaria," on page 6 of the July 9, 1932, issue of the *Pentecostal Evangel* online at s2.ag.org/july91932.

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AG[®] NEWS

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



**OKLAHOMA
GOVERNOR'S
IMPROBABLE RISE**

**BRUSHING UP ON
SCRIPTURE**

**SHOW SPOTLIGHTS
MISSIONARIES**

**CHURCH FORGIVES
\$1.8M IN DEBTS**



KEVIN STITT'S IMPROBABLE RISE

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

He has a background as a successful businessman. He never ran for public office before. He emerged victorious from a crowded primary field. He has nonconformist governing practices. He is a Republican.

Certainly there are multiple parallels in the ascent of Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt and another politician on the national stage. However, Stitt attends an AG church and has no qualms about testifying to the role God plays in his daily life.

"I'm really driven by faith," Stitt tells AG News. "If we just rely on the Lord and commit our ways to Him, He is going to direct our steps."

In 2000, Stitt started Gateway Mortgage Group with only "a thousand dollars and a computer." The company now has 1,200 employees and originates loans in 41 states with a portfolio exceeding \$16 billion.

Last summer in a 10-candidate primary field in which no one garnered enough votes to snag the nomination outright, Stitt finished second to popular Oklahoma City Mayor Mike Cornett. But in a runoff two months later, Stitt defeated Cornett 55% to 45%.

Stitt, despite low name recognition, came out of nowhere to nab the nomination. In the November general election, against Democrat Drew Edmondson, Stitt won handily, 54% to 42%. He assumed office in January.

"I 100 percent attribute the victory to God," says Stitt, 46. "I'm humbled and thankful God is allowing me to be a part of His plan in Oklahoma. Tons of people across the state are praying for me."

He believes his newcomer status is beneficial to governing. He views issues differently than lawmakers who have been in the statehouse for years; he doesn't have political favors to repay;

F.R.E.E. INTERNATIONAL AIDED BY STL

BY DAN VAN VEEN

Recently, Michael and Denise Bartel's ministry, F.R.E.E. International, was selected by Speed the Light (STL), the AG's Youth missions program that focuses on meeting the transportation and communication needs of missionaries, as a STL special project.

The Bartels, who serve as U.S. missionaries with Intercultural Ministries, base F.R.E.E. International — an anti-trafficking ministry — out of Las Vegas, with a second mobile command center in the Gulf region. The ministry also has 16 additional missionaries and workers serving throughout the country.

The mobile command centers are 48-foot-long trailers pulled by powerful pick-up trucks. Michael Bartel explains that the trailers are multifunctional, offering a broad range of resources, from medical and dental to mentoring services and assisting law enforcement with search and rescue missions.

Although the command centers are ideal for large areas, on inner-city narrow streets, logistical problems arise. "It's tough to respond quickly with a 48-foot trailer and truck," Bartel says. "We

needed a smaller version of the units to allow us to be more nimble when we get a call or attempt to provide services in cramped neighborhoods."

STL, which has assisted F.R.E.E. International with the purchase of its first two mobile command centers, recognized the need and the opportunity for the ministry to increase its effectiveness.

"Currently they're raising funds for us to buy two medical units, two scaled-down command centers, and three smaller and more nimble rapid response vehicles along with an 18-foot outreach trailer," Bartel says. "All of the vehicles will come with the latest facial recognition technology to assist us in identifying and rescuing missing and exploited children."

Eric Hoffman, Speed the Light national director, says STL is honored to partner with a vital ministry such as F.R.E.E. International.

"Sex trafficking is the fastest growing market in our nation and it is directly impacting this generation of young people," Hoffman says.

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."



SHOW SPOTLIGHTS MISSIONARIES

BY DAN VAN VEEN

It was supposed to be a documentary. At least that's what Kelly and Alisa Ward, AG U.S. missionaries with Missionary Church Planters and Developers, were led to believe. But when TV star Mike Rowe showed up during the filming, they realized they had been misled.

Rowe is an American television host and narrator. His latest endeavor is a series produced for Facebook, called *Returning the Favor*. Rowe travels the country finding people doing good for others and then he does something good for them.

In 2011, the Wards began Sole Mission — a ministry that works with churches to provide new shoes to school children. They give away thousands of shoes a year with support of individuals, churches, Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge, and Speed the Light.

When Rowe's producers heard about Sole Mission, they wanted to know more, ultimately paying the Wards a visit at their Conroe, Texas, office and warehouse.

"They lied to us," Kelly says with a laugh. "They said they were from a small documentary company and heard about us, so they were considering doing a documentary on us to help us with exposure."

Shortly after the visit, the Wards received a call informing them that a film crew would arrive on March 5th to document their ministry. With the help of a church, they set up a shoe distribution at a local preschool. Then Alisa noticed that Mike Rowe was just feet from her.

"I realized right then, things were much different than we thought," she says.

At the end of three days of filming, Rowe surprised the Wards with a Sole Mission-themed parade float surrounded by dozens of family members, friends, and supporters cheering for the Wards.

At that point, Rowe revealed that Sole Mission was going to be featured on *Returning the Favor*. He then presented them a donation of 10,000 pairs of socks from Bombas and 1,000 pairs of shoes from PLAE for Sole Mission — a gift valued at over \$200,000. In addition, Rowe gave the Wards a check for \$25,000.

"God has just blown us away!" Alisa says. "I can't imagine what He's going to do next."

Watch the show online at s2.ag.org/rtfwards.

CHURCH FORGIVES \$1.8M IN DEBTS

BY DAN VAN VEEN

Last week, 1,899 families in western Michigan received a letter from RIP Medical Debt letting them know that their medical debts have been forgiven — totally paid off — through a gift by Grand Rapids First (AG) of Wyoming, Michigan.

The debt the church paid off exceeds \$1.8 million, but through a partnership with RIP Medical Debt, the church only paid \$15,000. RIP Medical Debt is a nonprofit organization that purchases medical debt from collection agencies for a penny — or less — on the dollar.

Executive pastor Doug Tuttle says the church does not know what families were selected for having their medical bills paid off, only RIP Medical Debt does. What the church does know is that those benefiting from the gift live at or below the poverty line or have medical debts that exceed a predetermined ratio to their income and live in four western Michigan counties.

According to Tuttle, lead pastors Sam and Brenda Rijkogel have developed a heart within the church that embraces the theme, "Find a need, fill the need." This generous-heart mindset has resulted in the church being heavily involved in missions and in meeting community needs.

"We hope that what we've done will inspire other churches, corporations, and individuals to do this," Tuttle says.

EVANGEL PLANS CBC VOCATIONAL CENTER

BY PAUL LOGSDON

At a special meeting in June 2019, the Board of Trustees of Evangel University approved a resolution to establish The CBC Center for Vocational Ministry.

"The purpose of the center, as a living legacy of Central Bible College, is to enhance the training of ministers and missionaries for the 21st century across all areas of pastoral, chaplaincy, and missionary service from undergraduate through doctoral level programs," said Carol A. Taylor, president of the Springfield, Missouri, university.

The CBC Center will be led by Timothy Hager, dean of the seminary and vice president of Evangel University. A formal dedication will be held at Homecoming this fall.

"The Center will seek the counsel of AG ministry leaders to ensure that all of our ministry degree programs remain relevant in meeting the needs of equipping today's ministers and missionaries," said Taylor.

"This will be done," she continued, "through advisory group meetings, inviting ministry leaders to engage with current students, expanding internship opportunities, and hosting various seminars that will be open to all ministry leaders and students."

Today there are 674 vocational ministry-focused students currently enrolled in one of 10 undergraduate programs, six masters degrees, and four doctoral degrees at Evangel and AGTS.



INSTILLING HOPE ALONG THE BORDER

BY DEANN ALFORD

Cynthia was among 18 children living in a house she shared with her parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins in a hardscrabble barrio of Peñitas, Texas, a community of 5,000 less than 500 feet from the U.S. border with Mexico.

Maricela H. Hernandez knows Cynthia's area well. The director of Flames of Fire Bible School visits families and hears their struggles, often involving their immigration status — and living in fear and uncertainty.

Hernandez invited Cynthia and her extended family to Family Christian Assembly, where her husband, Rafael Hernandez Jr., pastors. She also got the word to the family about the summer feeding program funded by the local school district and held at the church for children and youth through age 18. Apart from serving the free meals, the church conducts vacation Bible school.

In the feeding program's 12 years, Hernandez has watched small children

grow up. She's seen the Lord move in countless hearts. Earlier participants, such as Cynthia, have become adolescents and young adults, even as new kids connect with the program.

Many not only have come to know Christ as Savior, but also plugged into the church and become active in the Texas Gulf Hispanic District youth movement. As a 9-year-old girl, Cynthia, her siblings, and cousins began taking part.

"We went for the food and to be with our friends," says Cynthia, now 15. She started going to the VBS, then youth services, and then the district's youth convention, where she made a commitment to serve the Lord completely. Cynthia learned to play the keyboard. She and others from the program are now part of the church praise and worship team. This summer, Cynthia is taking Bible classes at Flames of Fire.

he didn't know any lobbyists before coming into office; he's not afraid to work with the opposing party on legislation; people he has picked to run state agencies aren't the typical political appointees.

Another factor in Stitt's favor is his calm demeanor.

"I don't get too worked up about things," Stitt says. "Some people in the flesh try to outmaneuver God, try to control situations. But we can't outthink God. God is a thousand steps ahead of us."

Stitt and his wife, Sarah, have attended Woodlake Assembly of God in Tulsa for three years. The Stitts, who have been married 21 years, have three sons

and three daughters, ages 5 to 18.

The new governor attends church most every week, although the family will move to the capital Oklahoma City before the fall school term begins.

Lead pastor Jamie S. Austin, who has led the congregation of 950 for a decade, says Stitt is faithful, down to earth, and laid-back.

"He's almost too normal to be true," says Austin, 43. Soon after Stitt started attending the church, he asked Austin if he could pray over his new office. Austin agreed, unaware until his arrival at the new site that Stitt not only owned the building but the company.

"He's a humble guy," Austin says. "But he's unashamed about his faith."

BRUSHING UP ON SCRIPTURE

BY CINDY J. THOMAS

Most AG adherents associate the Bible Fact-Pak with children's ministry or Junior Bible Quiz. With experience as a youth pastor, district youth director, and district children's director, Pastor Jeff E. Kennedy certainly became familiar with the program.

But in 2015, after Kennedy became lead pastor of SouthGate Church in South Bend, Indiana, he realized not just children needed to improve their biblical literacy. He didn't believe the Sunday morning sermon allowed adequate time for developing thorough knowledge of the Bible.

Kennedy saw the solution as the Fact-Pak. It had potential to help develop goals such as response to worship, boldness in faith, and biblical fluency,

not just for children, but for the entire congregation. Kennedy also wanted to encourage close family atmosphere opportunities for adults, teens, and children to interact around the shared content. The church launched the program with adults and teens in 2017, and with children shortly afterward.

Each family is given a Fact-Pak. Because reviewing the entire set of 576 questions could be overwhelming, every two months Elevate Kids Director Kayla Pierce uses the question generator tool to spotlight 25 examples of varying difficulty.

Each new set is featured as a church bulletin insert, and parents receive games based on the questions to engage with their children.