

#### THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY GLENN W. GOHR

In 1969, the work of AG missionaries Mark and Gladys Bliss was prospering in Iran. AG churches were growing and Mark was helping to establish a Bible school in Tehran.

On Oct. 25, 1969, they decided to travel six hours with Iranian national Haik Hovsepian-Mehr and his family to Gorgan, where a new church was being established.

Mark was driving with his daughters Karen (13) and Debbie (11) in the front seat. Gladys and 3-year-old Mark Jr. were in the back along with the Hovsepians and their 3-month-old son, Joseph.

Suddenly, Mark was momentarily blinded when an oncoming vehicle did not dim its lights. Unknown to him, a slow-moving tractor-trailer with no lights was in the darkness in front of them.

Mark Jr., Karen, Debbie, and Joseph died in the a wreck. The four adults spent months recovering in a local hospital.

Years later Mark reflected on the remarkable growth of the Church in Iran, stating, "After the tragedy, we prayed saying, 'We have planted three seeds for the sake of the harvest in Iran.' Today, we are seeing that harvest."

Charles Greenaway reported on the accident and the Bliss' faith in, "I Have Planted Three Seeds," on pages 8-9 of the March 1, 1970, issue of the Pentecostal Evangel online at s2.ag.org/ mar11970.

Read the full versions of these stories on news.ag.org



NEWS FOR, ABOUT, AND FROM THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

CONNECT WITH US ON

FACEBOOK TWITTER

RSS AND OUR WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER

VISIT NEWS.AG.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION.





### NOT SUCH A GRAVEYARD AFTER ALL

Hayden Boles invited Chris Rhinehart to church. Rhinehart said yes to his coworker, though he didn't actually intend to follow through with checking out Radiant Church in Tampa, Florida.

When Sunday morning came around, "I texted him that I wasn't feeling up to it," says the 27-year-old Rhinehart — who had stepped inside a church only twice in his life.

Rhinehart, a certified public accountant originally from New York, had a happy, healthy upbringing in an unchurched family before moving to Tampa three years earlier. Life seemed fine.

His work colleague's persistent reply to his text surprised him: Just check it out once. You have to come!

The two barely knew each other. But Rhinehart consented to go.

"I didn't realize what I had been missing until I found Radiant, Jesus, and God," Rhinehart says. A few months later, at the end of Radiant lead pastor Aaron Burke's message, Rhinehart responded to the altar call.

In the early 2010s, Burke, 35, and his wife, Katie, lived in Pensacola, Florida, where he served as a youth pastor at Brownsville Church. Meanwhile, the couple sensed a calling to reach those who wanted nothing to do with church. They learned the 2010 U.S. Religion Census designated Tampa as the nation's second most unchurched city (behind Portland, Oregon.)

"The pastors in the surrounding communities called it a graveyard for church plants," Burke says. "The churches that catch on don't sustain."

They knew no one in Tampa, yet in 2013 the Burkes with their 6-month-old daughter, Lily, moved in with Katie's parents in Lakeland and began to build a team.

As a meeting place for services, Burke rented a second-run movie theater that

### MENTORING NOVICE CHURCH LEADERS

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

Although he has been involved in ministry for a quarter century, Brian K. Herring remembers the early days when he had so much to learn. Like many ministers, Herring started out as a youth pastor, and he gladly accepted the advice of older clergy who spoke into his life. Now, at 43, Herring is passing some of the wisdom he's gleaned along to younger ministers.

For the past couple of years, Herring has been lead pastor of Harrison Faith Church in Arkansas, where he started out as youth pastor in 2006. These days Herring also is informally mentoring five young men in three states, checking in with them weekly or monthly about how ministry and life are going. Through phone calls and video chats, Herring spends up to an hour listening and providing feedback.

His list of mentees over the years includes Caleb Hester, who now is

youth and worship pastor at Harrison Faith Church. Hester, who has known Herring since childhood, says hourly weekly input during his college years proved invaluable.

"We've gone from mentoring to coaching to friendship," says Hester, 26. "When Brian speaks, his words carry a lot of weight because he's poured into my life."

Jay Juarez, 25, met Herring while serving as youth pastor in Tyler, Texas. For a full week, Juarez visited Herring in Arkansas and shadowed him, seeing how he functioned as a pastor.

"Wherever he went, I went with him," remembers Juarez, who now serves as youth pastor at Midland First Assembly in Texas. "He came alongside me, giving me information and ideas to help with youth ministry. He assured me that God has His hand on me."

#### 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."



#### **GOSPEL LEGACY CONTINUES**

BY DEANN ALFORD

The former Kingsboro Congregational Church, founded in 1793, is the oldest church in Gloversville, New York; its building, constructed in 1838, remains the community's oldest structure. Elisha Yale, its famed pastor born the same year the church started, launched a ministry school and led revivals.

The church became Presbyterian in 1853. By the time Kingsboro AG bought the historic property in 1986, the building itself was crumbling. With few congregants, the church's coffers barely supported daily expenses. Maintenance went by the wayside.

By the time Matthew Splittgerber became its pastor in 1998, the congregation had a weekly attendance of only 12. The church building's four spires were gone; pigeons flew through the side of the steeple, itself on the verge of toppling. The church took in \$25,000 annually, but needed \$40,000 just to fix the steeple.

"God provided (the money) within a year," Splittgerber says. That repair transformed the community's perception of the church. In 2014, after Splittgerber stepped down from leading the Kingsboro church, John H. Proske became "maintenance pastor" on Sundays and Wednesdays. New ministries launched, including a Wednesday night meals and evangelism program.

Today, Kingsboro AG has grown from a congregation of 20 to a multigenerational/multiethnic one of 40. Those in the youth group of 14 come from non-Christian homes; they connected to the church when friends invited them to barbecues and other events for teenagers. New Christians are among the nine most recent adherents of the church.

The church's outreach programs meet needs in Gloversville, among the poorest cities in New York.

Many residents receive government assistance. Wednesdays are

Compassion Night, which features a free community dinner followed by a family Bible study and kids church. The church "compassion closet" provides diapers, cleaning supplies, and other necessities.

# **BGMC: 70 YEARS OF MISSIONS MINISTRY**

BY DAN VAN VEEN

It began in 1949 when former missionary Hart Armstrong proposed creating a program called Boys & Girls Missionary Crusade (BGMC) to help raise money for translating gospel literature and getting it to the mission field. It took off from there.

BGMC was officially launched 70 years ago at the 1949 General Council, with the first offering received raising a modest \$9.25.

"It's amazing to think back to that first offering and those initial years of BGMC and how far we've come today," says David Boyd, national BGMC director. "This past year alone, BGMC raised more than \$8.5 million, for a total of more than \$158 million raised since 1949."

In 2007, BGMC became Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge to better communicate what BGMC was all about and to encourage kids to personally take on the challenge of helping missionaries.

Key components of BGMC include reaching children for Christ, creating hearts of compassion within children, and exposing children to missions and the possibility of one day being called by God into missions.

David Boyd challenges churches to recognize the 70th anniversary of BGMC — in children's church and the adult service — and what it has meant to missionaries around the world, on BGMC Sunday, March 10.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S URBAN TRIBES

BY AGWM COMMUNICATIONS

In May 2018, Greg and Sarah Owens and their two children, Abby and Caleb, arrived in Durban, South Africa, to help establish Northplace Church Durban — a new church plant begun in February.

Northplace Church Durban is one component of "Urban Tribes," an AGWM ministry focus aimed at Africa's fast-growing urbanization. The major African cities have blended cultures and tribes, mixing them across a variety of economic scales. They are forming new "urban tribes" that are shaping Africa's cities and the continent at large.

In response to this social phenomenon, a wave of AGWM missionaries like the Owenses are engaging these new "tribes."

Greg and Sarah report that since its inception a year ago, Northplace Church now averages 140 attendees weekly, and has seen a 108 people receive Jesus as Savior and 54 baptized in water.

One young man who found Jesus at Northplace is from the Zulu tribe.

"He recently brought in his prayer beads that he used to pray to his ancestors," Greg and Sarah write. "He said God wanted him to get rid of the beads because now he is serving Jesus and doesn't need them anymore!"

In October 2018, Northplace moved to a new building in Umhlanga, one of Durban's fastest growing suburbs.

4 5



## CLASSMATES ARE STRANGERS NO MORE BY PETER K. JOHNSON

Marvin J. Miller, pastor of Wellington First Assembly (WFA) in Kansas, had no idea that his mentoring ministry would link him to Matthew R. Maestas, a fellow student whom he never met while attending the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. They both graduated from the school in 2016.

After traveling different paths, the two met for the first time a year later. Maestas, 38, needed additional pastoral experience to fulfill a requirement to become an endorsed military chaplain. He responded to an advertisement to join WFA's pastoral team with a \$400 monthly stipend. Maestas needed to support his wife, Melissa, and their three children.

Miller and his wife, Teresa, joined WFA in 2014 to revitalize the then-82-year-old church about to close. The few remaining congregants determined to sacrifice with Miller, 49. Miller is a bivocational pastor who teaches

mathematics full time in public school. Miller invited Maestas to come on board for mentoring in preaching, organizing, and personal care ministry.

Maestas sharpened his preaching via video, taping sermons for regular critiquing sessions with Miller at the local Starbucks. He also assisted the men's Bible study and conducted parenting classes. In May 2018, Maestas enrolled in the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) internship program at the Wesley Medical Center in Wichita. Gaining experience ministering to terminally ill patients has enhanced his chaplaincy credentials.

On Jan. 29, Maestas took his oath as a commissioned U.S. Navy chaplain and officer, lieutenant junior grade. He will report to the U.S. Navy Officer Development School in Newport, Rhode Island, this month. After this training, he will join Coronado Navy Base in San Diego for shore duty.

reeked of popcorn and carpet stains.

Scent machines masked the smell.

Burke's feet stuck to the floor goopy with syrup from spilled soda pop.

After a Facebook ad, postal mailer, and word of mouth campaign, the first service in September 2013 had 348 in attendance. At the end of the message, 30 received Christ as Savior. By that December, Radiant added a second service; by the following Easter, a third. That entailed renting space across the hall to run a video feed. Eventually the church leased the entire building, took over five of its theaters, knocked out walls to enlarge a main auditorium, while reserving one for kids church. Today, Radiant subcontracts the remaining two theaters to a company that now shows

first-run films and pays half the church's rent.

Radiant has received funds from the Church Multiplication Network for an additional campus in a high school 10 minutes from the original site. Last September, Radiant launched a third campus in St. Petersburg. Among all the locations, Radiant holds eight weekend services, with 3,100 in attendance.

By 2018, Radiant Church had become the 13th fastest-growing church in the country, according to *Outreach* magazine.

That's no surprise to Chris Rhinehart.

"There was a miracle in my life, finding the Lord," Rhinehart says. "I was yanked out of a gutter I didn't even know I was a part of."

## TREASURING WOMEN AND GOD'S WORD BY DARLA KNOTH

Six Wednesday nights each in spring and fall, Bethel Church in Temple, Texas, hosts 150 to 200 guests for coffee, fellowship, and discipleship as they gather to study God's Word.

Bethel Women's leaders present studies with an established teaching team that includes ReGina Johnston, ministries and discipleship pastor and wife of senior pastor Elwyn Johnston, plus Bible study coordinator Jina McAfee. Additional teachers, ranging in age from teens to senior citizens, prepare studies, presenting the Word with a variety of styles and experiences.

When Bethel Women create a study, the team produces a book with student pages to correspond with teaching sessions and daily devotions, using the S.O.A.P. method: Scripture, observation, application, and prayer. Scripture becomes the focus of home study and group times. The goal is to spur women to desire to spend time with God every day after the study ends.

"We know when the storm comes, the Word will hold them," McAfee says. "We know women are called to purpose and enabled as they hear from God."

Women train as facilitators before leading tables of eight to 10 women. As they are discipled, they become disciplers. Facilitators invite their friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors to join them at a table.

6