



THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY DARRIN J. RODGERS

Colonel Harland Sanders (1890-1980) was known for founding the iconic restaurant chain, Kentucky Fried Chicken. After he accepted Christ at age 75 in an Assemblies of God church in Louisville, Kentucky, the news of his conversion spread quickly. During the last 15 years of his life, Sanders shared his Christian testimony countless times. Fifty years ago, the *Pentecostal Evangel* featured his story.

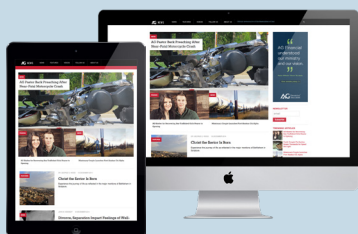
It wasn't always easy for Sanders. He experienced a difficult childhood and left home at age 13, joining the military in 1906. Following his 1907 honorable discharge, Sanders held several short-term jobs. In 1930, he started a restaurant. His cooking became

a sensation and, in 1952, he began franchising his secret "Kentucky Fried Chicken" recipe.

In 1965, a stranger invited him to services at Evangel Tabernacle AG in Louisville. Sanders visited the church and asked the pastor if God could assure him that he would go to heaven, and whether God could deliver him from his habit of cursing. The pastor responded affirmatively on both counts and led Sanders in a prayer to accept Christ. Sanders became a faithful member of Evangel Tabernacle.

Read the article, "Colonel Sanders Begins a New Life," on page 14 of the May 12, 1968, issue of the *Pentecostal Evangel* online at s2.ag.org/may121968.

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A VISION FOR PENNSYLVANIA

BY CHRISTINE TEMPLE

Saji Varghese and Mathew James didn't lack a passion for ministry, but they still needed the right visa to stay in the U.S. to pursue their calling as church planting pastors.

Assemblies of God churches became part of the solution in answering the prayers of the men from India last spring by donating funds to help them obtain religious worker visas. Leaders from the PennDel Ministry Network, which covers Pennsylvania and Delaware, agreed to sponsor the pastors for the R-1 Visa, which allows them to support their families while doing full-time ministry.

Varghese, 45, and James, 42, came to California on student visas from India nearly a decade ago to continue their biblical studies. The two didn't know each other in their home country, but became friends as students. Initially, neither pastor planned to remain in the States after completing his studies.

"When I came here, I was planning

on going back, but God gave a clear vision to start a church," says Varghese.

James says he felt a similar calling, and he planted Harvest International Church in Philadelphia with help from the Church Multiplication Network. Upon his suggestion, Varghese launched New Life Indian Church in Pittsburgh. However, because of the visa status, neither could receive compensation for his ministry.

"They've made tremendous sacrifices to minister here in the States," says Tom E. Rees, PennDel church planting director. PennDel never had sponsored a minister to receive an R-1 Visa before. The process requires an established religious organization to ensure that the applicant can be supported financially through ministry. Churches rallied to support the pastors upon hearing their powerful testimonies of how they became Christians.

In his mid-20s, James worked as a chemical engineer in Bahrain when an accident left him exposed to

PASSING THE TORCH INTERNALLY

BY KENNETH C. WALKER

When Rock of Grace Family Ministries launched a search for a new pastor, the northeastern Ohio congregation didn't have to look far. Jordan M. Biel, 34, had been sitting in the pew for 26 years.

Last December, the AG church commissioned its former youth pastor and worship leader for the office formerly occupied by his father, Mark L. Biel, 68, who came to the Kinsman Township congregation in 1992.

Rock of Grace isn't the only Ohio Ministry Network congregation following a family-transition model to a new pastor. In January, David A. Yarbrough, 41, became pastor at New Life AG in Geneva, replacing his father-in-law, Harry J. Pishcura, 65.

Superintendent John R. Wootton says several other Ohio churches are preparing for similar moves. He admires outgoing pastors who chose to initiate the transition before their retirement years.

"These senior pastors made the proactive decision to hand over



the baton when they still have the resources of health and vitality to help the new pastors," Wootton says.

To allow his son to get established, for the first six weeks of 2018 Mark Biel took a sabbatical. He returned as a part-time associate with the title of pastor emeritus.

Mark Biel says the yearlong transition to his son is part of an orderly, mentoring-style process that the church follows in general, whether that involves pastors, deacons, trustees, or other offices.

Wootton says the primary advantage of generational transfers is continuity for the church's sake.

"When approached with humility and intentionality, it's a win-win for the church and its mission," Wootton 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."



CHURCH BROADENS ETHNIC MIX

BY DEANN ALFORD

After 33 years as music pastor of Bethesda Community Church in Fort Worth, Texas, J. Daniel Smith became senior pastor of 850 congregants.

Except for a couple of African-American families and a few Hispanics, the solid core of attendees were Anglos with the median age in the 50s. But that demographic didn't reflect the urban population.

"I thought we needed to look more like the demographic of the city for today, and heaven for tomorrow," says Smith, 63. "We weren't forsaking the church we had been, but rather opening it up for other communities."

God has even provided a pastor for each language that now holds a Sunday service at Bethesda.

Will Aplicano joined the staff as Hispanic pastor. Israel Alfany became the French-speaking pastor. Recently, the church installed Joseph Boomenyo as pastor for Swahili-speakers.

"We are complementing each other very well," says Boomenyo, 43. "We see the presence of God in our diversity of language. But we speak

about one subject: Jesus, who serves all regardless of color, language, and background."

A Korean group meets at Bethesda on Sunday afternoons. Burmese Christians in Fort Worth with AG roots also needed a place to worship. Together, the non-English language congregations' average attendance is 400, less than four years after they first began. Between various language services, plus children's church, Bethesda's five auditoriums remain a flurry of activity each Sunday. Combined attendance now hovers around 1,400.

Smith says the traditional English-speaking congregation has embraced the changes.

"People have chosen to be engaged with other cultures," Smith says.

Corporately, the various language groups hold worship services together. Sometimes just one of the language bodies, such as the French-speakers, join the English service. Baptismal services and Communion are conducted together.

"GOD, WE NEED RAIN TODAY"

BY KRISTEL ORTIZ

Following is testimony from an AGWM team member serving in a highly sensitive region in West Africa.

Every weekend that I can, I visit my Muslim friend's farm, deep in the West African brush. Each time we are together, I move our conversation closer to the gospel. It's not easy though, because we do not speak the same language. I am trying hard to learn his language and am getting better.

One day, as he was getting ready to pray, I asked if I could pray with him.



He agreed. I stood next to him and prayed (in his language) just loud enough

for him to hear the words, "Our Heavenly Father . . . in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Amen."

Later that day, we visited a neighboring village. The village chief told us, "We need rain badly." My Muslim friend pointed to me, "He can pray to God." So, the village chief asked me to pray for rain and for it to rain today. I did.

I prayed all the way back to the farm and kept praying. I prayed, "We need rain today!" Later, I heard thunder — then came lots and lots of rain! I can't wait to visit that village again.

STEP-BY-STEP GIVING LESSONS

BY MARY J. YERKES

Lakeview AG in Oregon is a small church of about 50 people located in a rural town, one of the most remote communities in the Lower 48. But when Pastor Joel N. Morris convinced congregants to support missions, giving to the church also increased, and the church paid off its property earlier than scheduled.

When Morris became pastor five years ago, the church didn't support any missionaries regularly. But that changed quickly. Morris began small, urging congregants to designate \$5 a month for missions. He promoted missions giving weekly with a story, a missionary newsletter, or a passage of Scripture. He also brought in missionaries to speak about the importance of sponsoring missions.

After a year, Morris asked churchgoers to give \$10 a month to missions. The year after, he urged people to give \$20 monthly.

"We provided weekly progress updates," says Morris. "By establishing goals and reaching them for several years, our people had a measure of success under their belts, which laid a foundation for achieving a new and more difficult goal."

With three years of missions giving growth, Morris eyed paying off the church mortgage in the same manner: setting goals, providing weekly updates, and celebrating wins.

In the past five years, Lakeview AG has given more than \$33,000 to missions and paid off a \$32,000 mortgage.

U.S. MAPS MINISTRY — A VIEW FROM THE NORTHWEST

BY DAN VAN VEEN

For U.S. missionary Joe Filancia, U.S. MAPS ministry is what he lives and breathes. Filancia first started serving at the U.S. MAPS national office in Springfield, Missouri, in 1990, and since 1999, he has served as the U.S. MAPS Northwest regional coordinator.

A vital arm of U.S. MAPS is the RV Volunteers. These volunteers, who often are retirees, travel to churches or ministries to either repair, rebuild, or totally construct churches and other facilities.

Filancia's Northwest region only includes six states, but the territory it spans is massive, as it covers Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska.

The most challenging of the states for MAPS RVers to bring their talents to in the Northwest region is Alaska. It's an extended drive to the Land of the Midnight Sun — one way from Seattle to Anchorage is a road trip of 2,265 miles.

Yet despite the challenges, Filancia says that every other year, RVers caravan to Alaska for a June through August construction effort. As RVers drive toward Anchorage, they make stops along the way, assisting AG churches and ministries with construction needs.

In 2017, Filancia says, the RVers completed 13 different projects



in Alaska, spending a few days at some places and weeks at others to complete the tasks. From ramps and sidewalks to sheet rock and renovations, the RVers did it.

Bill Welch, Alaska Ministry Network superintendent, says most if not all of the AG churches built in Alaska have been done with volunteer labor. "Over the years, MAPS RVers have saved us hundreds of thousands of dollars — if not more."

This year, RVers and MAPS volunteers are flying into the remote village of Fort Yukon to build Fort Yukon AG a new church/ministry center, where for the first time they will have indoor plumbing!

Billy Thomas, senior director of U.S. MAPS, explains that the MAPS program isn't limited to construction, but has opportunities for people to use a wide variety of skills.

Thomas states: "The goal of U.S. MAPS is to provide a place of ministry for every person that desires to fulfill their specific call to ministry."

dangerously high levels of radioactive materials. His co-workers died instantly, and doctors told James he had cancer and would die within months.

"I started reading the Bible and I heard a voice say, *If you believe in me I am going to heal you,*" James says. He accepted Jesus as Savior, and within days the cancer disappeared.

Varghese's father had been a communist activist, but C.V. Abraham, an AG minister, came to his village and preached the gospel to an expectant teenage Varghese.

Churches in the PennDel network donated more than \$60,000 to the R-1 Project to allow Varghese and James

to receive the religious worker visas. The funds also will be used for future pastors seeking the visa status.

Through the R-1 Project, the network already has sponsored another pastor's visa process. Reginald Nesamoni is currently ministering at Harvest International Church.

"God is bringing people from around the world into our backyard and it's a great opportunity to reach people for the gospel," Rees says.

Services at both New Life Indian Church and Harvest International Church are conducted in Malayalam and English. Indians, Pakistanis, and Ukrainians worship at Harvest.

DISTRICT EMBRACES SPEED THE LIGHT

BY DAN VAN VEEN

Giving to Speed the Light (STL), the National Youth Ministries missions program that provides transportation and communication tools for missionaries, hit a 10-year high last year as \$9,417,143.41 was raised nationwide. Remarkably, the Minnesota district was responsible for more than 15 percent of the giving total.

Kirby St. John, the Minnesota district youth director, says that this is the third consecutive year for the district to break the \$1 million barrier. He explains that giving to STL has become a part of the district culture, as the Holy Spirit has inspired churches, youth groups, and individuals in remarkable ways — including Sam Ballinger, a

young man who attends River Valley Church in Apple Valley.

Soon after a 2014 youth rally, where Ballinger said God called him to be an entrepreneur, a multimillionaire businessman took Ballinger under his wing and began to mentor him. Several more multimillionaires would also speak into his young life.

With the help of his mentors, Ballinger launched a T-shirt business (Silver Lining) when he was 14. In his first two years, Ballinger sold nearly \$150,000 in merchandise, resulting in more than \$25,000 to STL.

"I've always believed God could use me and many other people to raise billions of dollars for His kingdom," Ballinger says.