



THIS WEEK IN AG HISTORY

BY DARRIN RODGERS

"Is it possible to maintain calm and serenity in the midst of the world-shaking storms that are raging today?"

Melvin Hodges (1909-1988), an Assemblies of God missionary to Central America, posed this question in 1944 in the *Pentecostal Evangel*. The Second World War was on everyone's mind.

How should the Christian respond to such conflict? Hodges encouraged believers to exhibit "calmness and steadfastness." Believers will stay "on a true course regardless of the storms that rage," according to Hodges, if they have faith in the promises of God and submit to God's will.

Significantly, Hodges also admonished readers to reject the

racism that had permeated vast segments of the world. According to Hodges, blaming people groups or nations "is a false diagnosis of the ills of this sick world." Instead, he identified the world's woes as being rooted in "the evil nature of all unregenerate mankind."

Hodges believed that racial hatred and God's love were incompatible, and that Christians must not assign blame for social problems to racial or cultural groups. This wise counsel continues to be true today.

Read "Call to Calmness and Steadfastness" by Melvin Hodges on page 8 of the Sept. 23, 1944, issue of the *Pentecostal Evangel* online at s2.ag.org/sept231944a.

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AG NEWS

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



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COLLEGE BELIEF STRUGGLES FORGE FAITH

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

Students grappling with their faith is a normal and even healthy process during their years at an evangelical college or university, according to a new two-part study conducted by a Southeastern University assistant professor.

"The findings are not surprising," says Jennifer L. Carter, who for the past year has taught leadership courses to doctoral students at the AG school. "Christian students are going to doubt their beliefs; it doesn't mean they are walking away from the Lord."

The results, published in *Christian Higher Education*, are based on the doctoral dissertation Carter wrote focusing on the patterns and predictors of undergraduate students' levels of spiritual struggle at 136 institutions.

The research investigated topics such as how students wrestle with feeling disillusioned about their religious upbringing; struggle to understand evil, suffering, and death; feel angry or distant from God; and disagree with family members about religious matters.

In her studies, Carter discovered that first-year students on evangelical campuses typically carry a belief system

they acquired during adolescence primarily from family members, but also pastors and other mentors such as coaches. Some parents assume their child's faith won't be challenged at a four-year Christian school, but Carter says students must be allowed to develop their own faith and express doubts if their belief system is going to mature.

The analyses found that usually first-year collegians are firm in their theological viewpoints. However, by the junior year, after repeatedly being exposed to new ideas, they have many questions, particularly if in that span they have experienced a life-changing event such as depression, a serious illness, death of a loved one, or their parents' divorcing.

Multiple studies indicate that a slim minority of evangelical students who express doubts about God and faith end up leaving Christianity.

"Personal faith is rarely a matter of discussion at secular schools," says Carol A. Taylor, president of Evangel University. "If it is, it often is in a negative way."

Taylor notes that an evangelical

SAFETY MEASURES MATTER

BY DAN VAN VEEN *(This article contains graphic content.)*

Chris, a freshman at North Central University in Minneapolis, began volunteering on Sunday nights at a local church. One evening, John, a volunteer in another ministry, asked her for some help bringing in birthday party supplies from his car.

Chris agreed to help.

But when she got to his car, John knocked her unconscious and stuffed her in to the trunk. After church, he drove Chris to a local park.

"I remember waking up at one point. . . I clearly remember the peace of God was present," she says. "I felt the Lord telling me people were praying."

Chris recalls waking up at another place in the park. She was on the ground with John next to her feet. Her ankles hurt. John claimed he was tying her feet together — he wasn't.

As dawn approached, John confessed he was a Satan worshipper. He believed Satan had told him to take a virgin, cut off her feet, throw her body into the Mississippi River, and only then he would be "free."

"He was not tying my feet together,

he was trying to cut them off," Chris reveals. But even though the knife could still cut through wood, it stopped working on Chris.

Inexplicably, John took her to a hospital. Chris took months to recover, but God miraculously restored her body and mind. John was arrested and sentenced to a mental hospital.

Chris learned that church leaders had done nothing to protect their congregation from predators. John had recently been released from prison.

"When someone is a volunteer, there's an immediate sense of safety and trust," Chris says, "but if volunteers aren't vetted, that trust could easily be misplaced."

Chris recommends the safety guidelines that AG Legal Counsel Richard Hammar espouses, including conducting a national background check. See s2.ag.org/safety for tips.

Today, Chris is known as Dr. Chris Corbett, the Chair of the School of Ministry and Theology at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida.

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."



STICKING THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

In 2004, Joe Kenna's breathing became shallow and heavy. His skin turned blue and he wouldn't respond to his wife, Marianne. After being rushed to a St. Louis hospital, Joe appeared lifeless in the emergency room. He had lapsed into a diabetic coma and suffered cardiac arrest.

A doctor emerged with news that Joe had been placed on life support. But friends and family filled the waiting room to pray. And Joe began his journey back to life. Four days later, Joe came out of the coma. After another two weeks hospitalized, Joe went home.

Yet problems remained. For instance, Joe couldn't remember the names of familiar friends, streets, or buildings.

"We went to a small church, but I really couldn't put names with faces," says Joe, who in three months returned to his information technology job. "I had to write everything down to remember. I started to drink as a coping mechanism because I had so many problems

remembering things."

Mari found booze hidden in the basement, in the garage, and in the bushes. Joe turned surly when confronted. Mari began to wonder why God didn't allow her husband to remain dead in the emergency room.

She had lessons to learn about trusting God. Joe's car went off a 50-foot embankment and wedged between a boulder and tree; Joe climbed out through a back window, unscathed.

After more than two years of his wife's prayers, Joe received counseling and stopped drinking. Today the Kennas have been married for 33 years, overcoming multiple ordeals, including two of their children born with hearing loss.

The Kennas are staff missionaries with Calvary Commission, an AG ministry based in Lindale, Texas, providing a place where former inmates eat, learn, work, and live in an effort to stay out of prison in the future.

SOBER HOUSE OFFERS HOPE

BY MARY J. YERKES

Kari Rutman, a former alcohol abuser and opioid overdose survivor, recently opened Risen Recovery, a sober house in Farmington, Minnesota, for women transitioning from addiction treatment to independent living.

Residents in the home must attend counseling, addiction recovery meetings, and participate in an evangelical church. Rutman, who attends Southland City Church in nearby Rosemount, lost her mother and a brother to drug overdoses.

"I struggled with addiction for many years," explains Rutman, 34, who also lost her possessions and children due to her addictions. After spending time in jail and completing a mandated treatment program, Rutman got clean and sober.

"Although I was sober, I was still broken, depressed, and wanted to die," Rutman says. "Even when I eliminated the chemicals, there was a huge void. Jesus was the answer."

Southland City Church provided \$10,000 in seed money to fund Risen Recovery, which allows women to gain the skills they need to succeed in life, while allowing them to spend time with their children as they transition to independent living. Rutman has since reunited with her children, 17-year-old Alexis and 3-year-old Jack.

A donor put down a large deposit toward the purchase of a home, located just a few miles away from Southland City Church.

REVITALIZING IN URBAN FRESNO

BY JOEL KILPATRICK

Fresno is the fifth largest city in California and one of the most poverty- and gang-afflicted areas in the U.S. But when Cornerstone Church began to grow in the 1980s, pastor Jim Franklin deliberately chose not to move it to the suburbs.

"We decided to move further into the city," says Franklin, 62. "We said we need to embed ourselves deeper."

That meant staying in one of the highest-crime areas in Fresno — and viewing it as an opportunity. Cornerstone purchased an historic 1,500-seat theater and began buying properties strategically around it. The investment in the area brought land values up, and then the church sold and rented some of the properties to entities it wanted as neighbors: a charter school, new condos, and apartments.

Partnering with local police, Cornerstone goes to locations where gang shootings occur and holds block parties to reclaim the spots for residents.

"We put up bounce houses, give away food, offer face painting, have a band," Franklin says. "We want people to know that these neighborhoods don't belong to the violent; they belong to the residents."

The other key has been addressing poverty through Feeding Fresno, which began in a closet and is now a multimillion-dollar operation supplying food to nearly 60 other churches, nonprofits, and local universities.



KINGDOM INVESTORS SUPPORT MISSIONS

BY JOEL KILPATRICK

After businessowner George E. Warren became a Christian at Cornerstone Church in 1985, he started a group called Kingdom Investors made up of Christians and non-Christians interested in supporting a variety of missionary and compassion projects around the world. In 17 years, the group has raised and donated \$2.8 million in partnership with Cornerstone.

"We saw a niche for businesspeople who wanted to support humanitarian works, who may not go to our church, but believed in what we do and wanted to be part," says Cornerstone pastor Mark A. Lehmann.

Kingdom Investors' first meeting in 2002 drew 10 local businesspeople, many of them Warren's competitors in the commercial heating and air conditioning industry around Washington, D.C. The organization donates 100 percent of donations to projects, and has thrived by allaying the concerns businesspeople have about accountability and effectiveness.

Warren runs the ministry essentially single-handedly, with Cornerstone

handling the minimal administration it requires. Kingdom Investors now raises more than \$300,000 annually, mostly from non-Christian businesspeople.

"We believe strongly that God wants us to engage people who aren't engaged yet," Lehmann says. "Many of them have come to faith. They get involved and see the good that's happening."

Kingdom Investors prints a booklet every year with projects that can be supported, such as a center for street kids in the Philippines, a feeding program at a Calcutta church, disaster relief in the U.S., Adult & Teen Challenge, local pregnancy centers, anti-human trafficking organizations, orphanages, and a ministry-related coffee shop in Moldova.

The organization works frequently with Convoy of Hope to send food, sewing machines, and farm equipment to impoverished villages in places like Indonesia and Africa. Kingdom Investors also holds local food-packing parties to assemble bags for distribution in Haiti and at domestic community outreaches.

university such as Evangel creates an atmosphere both inside and outside the classroom where honest spiritual discussions at a deep level are welcomed in multiple platforms.

Carter found that students who received such assistance in trying to resolve their religious struggle experienced fewer negative impacts and came out better prepared to handle future conflicts of faith.

"Positive coping behaviors that can assist students with resolving struggle include receiving God's forgiveness, acknowledging doubt as a normal part of religious belief, acknowledging one's human limitations, finding commonalities with individuals with

whom one has religious conflict, and resolving that one may never have an answer for why he or she experienced a crisis that induced struggle," Carter wrote in her dissertation.

"If we're doing our part as educators, we're growing their critical thinking skills," says Carter.

Taylor says it's preferable for Christian students dealing with questions of faith to be in an environment with men and women — faculty, staff, and students — who embrace and nurture faith rather than those who don't.

Carter discovered that female students reported higher levels of religious struggle than male peers.

RELUCTANT MEGACHURCH PASTOR

BY DEANN ALFORD

Born and raised in church, Iris Nanette Torres Padilla graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with aspirations of attending law school and becoming the island's first woman Supreme Court justice.

But the Lord changed her heart. In 2002, Torres became lead pastor of El Caballero de la Cruz. The church, in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, has a weekly attendance of 2,700.

The church includes a primary and secondary school and a television station, Encuentrovisión, channel 64, which reaches the entire island. In addition, the church operates El Caballero de la Cruz Theological Center. In 2016 El Caballero de la Cruz became an AG cooperative church and

this year it is in the process of affiliating with the Fellowship.

Torres believes what most distinguishes the church is its missions outreach, especially to youth, both within Puerto Rico and throughout South America. El Caballero de la Cruz has planted two daughter churches and opened a children's home in Paraguay.

Torres understands that the key to reaching the Puerto Rico of tomorrow is reaching the youth of today. To communicate with the next generation, she believes speaking and understanding their language is essential for the gospel message to become rooted. That's why the church places priority on getting the youth on mission trips.