

Passion

for the future

By George O. Wood

The Assemblies of God's Annual Church Ministries Report for 2005 shows we have 315,000 people between the ages of 13 and 17 in our 12,298 U.S. Assemblies of God churches.

Clearly, the future of our Movement — should Jesus tarry — lies with our young people.

How many of them will be serving the Lord 10 years from now? While we can never know the future, we can look at history to give us an idea of what tomorrow will look like.

In the March 2006 issue of *Christianity Today* (pp. 80f.), Dr. Steve Henderson, president of Christian Consulting for Colleges and Ministries, reports on his research and that of other scholars regarding evangelical students who enter nonevangelical public and private colleges and universities. The studies predict that *at least half and possibly more than two-thirds of our young people will step away from the Christian faith while attending a non-Christian college or university.*

However, the falling away percentage of students attending an evangelical school stands at about 5 percent — a vast difference from the faith rejection rate of those attending public and private non-Christian colleges and universities.

Apply this data to the Assemblies of God. Where will our 315,000 Assemblies of

God young people be 10 years from now?

- 315,000 Assemblies of God people from ages 13 to 17 will graduate from high school within the next five years.

- 105,000 of the 315,000 will choose not to go to college or university.

- 210,000 of the 315,000 (two-thirds) will enter one of the 4,000 colleges or universities in the United States.

- 31,500 of the 210,000 (15 percent) will enter one of the 102 schools belonging to the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (an evangelical association for higher education in which many of our Assemblies of God colleges and universities hold membership).

- 178,500 of the 210,000 (85 percent) will enter a public or private non-Christian university.

- About 10,500 (5 percent of the 210,000 college bound) of our Assemblies of God youth will enter an Assemblies of God school of higher education.

- 199,500 of the 210,000 of our young people who enter college will *not* enroll in an Assemblies of God school of higher education (178,500 in non-Christian schools and 21,000 in a non-Assemblies of God, but evangelical school).

If Henderson and other researchers prove correct, between 89,250 (50 percent) and 140,000

(66.7 percent) of the 178,000 Assemblies of God young people who attend a non-Christian public or private university will have left the faith four years after entering college.

On the other hand, if these studies' findings continue as a trend, only 5 percent of our Assemblies of God young people who enter an Assemblies of God college or university will have left the faith by the end of their college experience.

These statistics raise some deeply troubling questions, one of which is this: *"Would we rather lose 5 percent or between one-half to two-thirds of the college-bound young people presently in our youth groups?"*

These statistics make the strongest case possible for encouraging our young people to attend one of the 19 endorsed postsecondary institutes, colleges and universities of the Assemblies of God and marshaling our pastors and churches to stand behind our schools with significant levels of support and prayer.

Let me be as blunt as possible. We are doing a great job evangelizing junior and senior high students. But once past high school, these kids are not only leaving our churches but also the faith ... in droves.

One of our prominent laymen made this statement back in the 1950s before we had brought

ISTOCKPHOTO

Passion for the future

focus to higher education for those not entering the ministry: *"I have supported my church for a long time and very generously; but the thing I would rather give to the church [my own children] than anything else was lost to the church because of their experience in higher education."*

A common misconception among us is that Chi Alpha is adequately reaching our Assemblies of God kids who go to non-Christian colleges and universities. Make no mistake; Chi Alpha is doing a fantastic job in both evangelism and discipleship.

But there are only 214 Chi Alpha chapters on the 4,000 college and university campuses in the United States. That leaves 3,786 college and university campuses (95 percent) that do *not* have a Chi Alpha group. And only about 30 percent of Chi Alpha's students come from Assemblies of God churches. Many from the other 70 percent are won through the evangelistic outreaches led by Chi Alpha.

It is critical to our future that we apply the same kind of forethought to the home front that we have applied in world missions. From the start in our work overseas we understood if there were to be indigenous churches then schools needed to be established for the training of ministers and laity.

A substantial number of our missionaries, supported by our churches, have labored valiantly within the educational context overseas and it has paid off. Today, we have 2,000 Bible schools and extension programs outside the United States with 93,297 students. These young leaders hold the future for the Assemblies

of God in 212 countries.

And, thank God, our churches and pastors have a compassion for those affected by natural disasters. More than \$8.7 million was given for Katrina relief, \$7.7 million for tsunami relief, and \$800,000 for earthquake relief in Pakistan. All these relief efforts have been directed toward those impacted by sudden disasters.

But, there is a quieter disaster set to take place over the next 10 years — the prospect of losing to the faith and to our churches between 89,000 and 140,000 of the 315,000 young people presently aged 13 through 17. These are our children. They have learned in our Sunday schools and children's churches, knelt at our altars, worked to give for BGMC and Speed the Light, and participated in our youth camps and conventions. But they are falling away from the faith once they leave home and enter a hostile-to-the-faith college and university atmosphere. This looming disaster also calls for our compassion and passion.

The March *Christianity Today* cites a quote from Tom Wolfe's book, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, in which her best friend describes the reality of a secular college experience for many students today: *"I guess what I really mean is college is like this four-year period you have when you can try anything — everything — and if it goes wrong, there's no consequences. You know what I mean?"*

Nobody's keeping score! You can do things that if you tried them before you got to college, your family would be crying and pulling their hair out and giving you these now-see-what-you've-gone-and-done looks. ... College is the only time in your life, or your adult life anyway, when you can really experiment, and at a certain point, when you graduate or whatever, everybody's memory like evaporates."

One of the most alarming results of Dr. Henderson's study is that the more conservative the students' denominational background, the greater the change in those students' attitudes and behaviors. That finding bears directly on our Assemblies of God young people. It says our youth are more likely to change values and morals during their years in a non-Christian college or university.

continued on page 18



ISTOCKPHOTO

RELEVANT, RELATIONAL, REFINED

HIGHLY ACADEMIC, DEEPLY COMMITTED, FULLY PENTECOSTAL
For the education and training of the next generation of ministers and missionaries.



IT'S ABOUT THE CALL



DR. GARY DENBOW
D.Min., Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary



DR. CHARLES ESTRIDGE
Ph.D., Baylor University;
D.Min., Reformed
Theological Seminary



REV. JIM VIGIL
D.Min. Candidate,
Trinity Evangelical
Divinity School



REV. DAVID ARNETT
D.Min. Candidate,
Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary



DR. STEVE BADGER
Ph.D., University of
Southern Mississippi



DR. BERL BEST
Ed.D., University of
Arkansas



DR. GEORGE CARSON
Ph.D., St. Louis University



REV. DAN CRABTREE
D.Min. Candidate,
Ashland Theological
Seminary



REV. PAUL CURTIS
D.Min. Candidate,
Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary



DR. PATRICIA ESTRIDGE
Ph.D., Union Institute and
University



REV. STEVE EUTSLER
D.Min. Candidate,
Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary



DR. BETH GRANT
Ph.D., Biola University



DR. FRED HALTOM
D.Min., Western
Evangelical Seminary



DR. RICHARD HAMMAR
J.D., Valparaiso University



DR. CHARLES HARRIS
Ed.D., University of Tulsa



DR. MICHAEL JAFFE
D.Min., Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary



DR. BONNIE JENKINS
Ph.D., University of
Missouri—Columbia



DR. MARK JENKINS
Ph.D., Southwestern
Baptist Theological
Seminary



DR. DONALD JOHNS
Ph.D., St. Louis University



DR. DEBBIE JOHNSON
Ph.D., Capella University



REV. VINCE MEDINA
Ph.D. Candidate,
Concordia Seminary



DR. CAL PINCOMBE
D.Min., Gordon-Conwell
Theological Seminary



DR. JAMES RAITLEY, JR.
D.Th., University of
South Africa



DR. ROB STARNER
Ph.D., Baylor University



DR. LEO THERIOT
Ed.D., Nova Southeastern
University



DR. FAYE TIDWELL
D.Min., Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary



DR. MARK WOOTTON
D.Min., Assemblies of God
Theological Seminary

Passion for the future

What can be done?

We must do a better job with apologetics for our junior and senior high youth. In addition to high-energy programs and emotion-focused responses, our kids need thorough grounding in what we believe, and the underlying reason for why we behave as Christians.

We must maintain personal contact with students who leave our churches for college. It would be well to assign prayer partners in each congregation who will pray daily for students individually and maintain regular contact with them.

We must encourage our college-bound high school students to go and their parents to send them to an endorsed Assemblies of God school. These students need to be in an environment where both peers and faculty are not hostile to Christian and Pentecostal faith and values but deeply supportive

of such. Our parents, who struggle with the costs of our schools, should take to heart this statement from the March issue of *Christianity Today*: “A Christian [and, I add – an Assemblies of God!] education comes with a price. But research suggests that every penny of that price may be worth avoiding the cost of the alternatives.”

It really is a matter of “worth” versus “costs.” How much do we really “save” if we send our children to a secular school where they lose their faith? Is it really worth it?

Our churches must ramp up their prayer and financial support of our endorsed schools. My own practice as a pastor was to give about 15 percent of missions dollars to Assemblies of God higher education. We did this while supporting both world and home missionaries.

In 2005, our Assemblies of God churches and people gave more than \$386 million to AG ministries. Giving 15 percent of \$386 million to our schools would have produced almost \$58 million, driven down the tuition costs and made it possible for thousands more Assemblies of God kids to attend our schools. Instead, only \$7.3 million was given for higher education.

I am not suggesting we lop off 15 percent from our missions giving and redesignate it for higher education. I believe churches

must begin to significantly increase their giving for Assemblies of God higher education while also advancing in support of world and home missions. Our people respond to challenges. When they see the need of support for our schools, they respond just as they do for the needs of world and home missions and disaster relief.

It takes pastoral leadership if that is to happen consistently. Last year, 84 percent of our churches gave nothing to our Assemblies of God colleges and universities. We must begin to change this picture and give our schools far more urgent priority.

Our churches must ramp up their support for Chi Alpha and help this vital campus ministry expand until all of the 4,000 college and university campuses of America have a vibrant Pentecostal Chi Alpha chapter. Chi Alpha missionaries must be viewed as apostles to the secular marketplaces of today, and we need to accelerate our financial and prayer support for these workers in the secular campus mission fields of America.

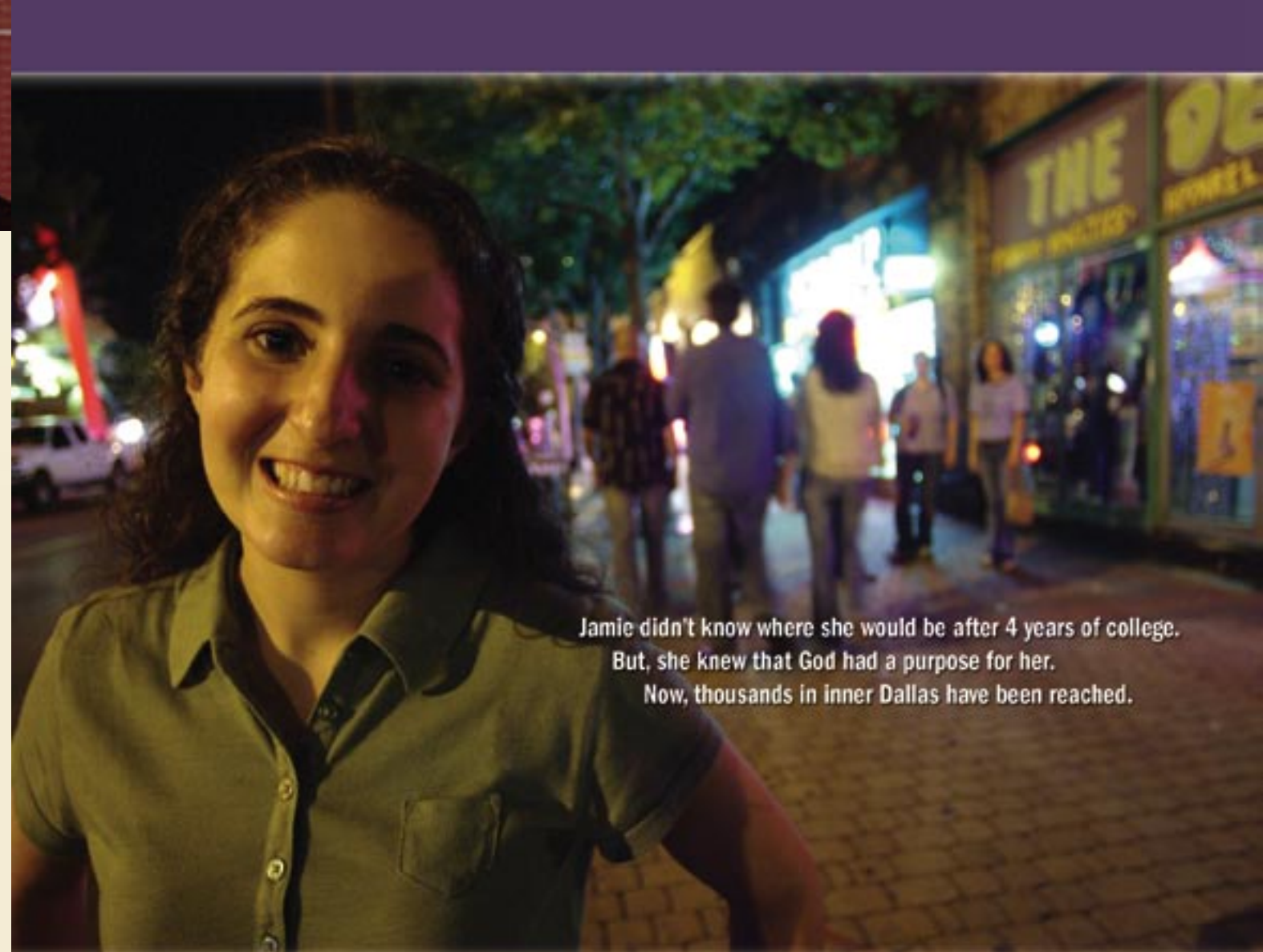
There must be a renewed focus in pastoral leadership, church boards and congregations on conserving the harvest of our present junior and senior high young people. Too often our church board meetings take up the mundane matters of budget, buildings, operations and staff.

What would happen across this Movement if pastors, pastoral staffs and church boards spent a day or two together each year in a prayer and strategy retreat simply dealing with the issue: “What

continued on page 20



ISTOCKPHOTO



Jamie didn't know where she would be after 4 years of college. But, she knew that God had a purpose for her. Now, thousands in inner Dallas have been reached.

What's your purpose?

Church Ministries? Criminal Justice? Business? Counseling?
Education? History? Music? Communication Arts?

Tell us about it at sagu.edu/MyStory

southwestern
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD university

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE

1-888-YES-SAGU • INFO@SAGU.EDU • WWW.SAGU.EDU

Passion for the future

would the Holy Spirit have us do so that 10 years from now our present junior and senior high young people will be serving the Lord?"

Finally, Assemblies of God churches in the vicinity of secular colleges and universities must penetrate into this great mission field. Many of our churches are doing this, but far more remains to be done.

The late Elton Trueblood, noted Christian educator and

conquest of the outlying provinces by the barbarians would force a collapse at the center — Rome itself.

Trueblood believed youth and education are the church's frontier provinces. If the church loses them, life might go on as normal for a while in the church — with worship, programs, preaching, structure and finances intact. But it would only be a matter of time until the church itself collapsed if it lost its young. The empty cathedrals and churches in Europe bear mute testimony to this reality.

The founders of the Assemblies of God recognized this essential truth. One of the five reasons given for the convening of the first General Council in 1914 had to do with youth and education: "We may have a proposition to lay before the body for a general Bible Training School with a literary department for our people."

From the beginning, our Movement recognized the need to prepare the next generation, should Jesus tarry, for Christian service. The late Ralph Riggs, former general superintendent, made this poignant comment back in the mid-1940s regarding the college-age young people of the Assemblies of God: "If they are lost, we are to blame."

My plea is for a new passion for the future — that the prayer of Jesus for His own will be our prayer for the junior and senior high young people in our churches today: "I have not lost one of those you gave me" (John 18:9, NIV). **tpe**

GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P., is general secretary of the Assemblies of God.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

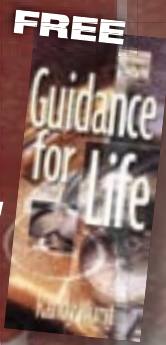
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center



ISTOCKPHOTO

advocate for the Christian college, once compared the state of the church to that of the Roman Empire at the very beginning of its decline.

Trueblood said that when the frontier provinces of Britannia, Gaul and Germanica were lost, life went on in Rome as usual. "After all," Rome thought, "we're safe. Our economy is sound. Let's eat, drink and be glad."

But, the fate of Rome was sealed once it began to lose its frontiers. Life could go on as normal only for a time, and then the

Southeastern professors respect your mind as a gift from God.



Forty-four undergraduate degree programs. Graduate studies. Continuing & adult education. Online programs.

**SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY**

*Gathered in the Spirit.
Equipping for every good work.*

