



THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

Connecting Chicago disciples with each other, the Midwest and the world

www.chicagochurch.org

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25 Years of Glory

Reflections on the Diverse Culture of the Chicago Church of Christ

In this, the 25th year of the Chicago Church of Christ, we are taking a look at the past, the present and the future of this miraculous church which God has built. In this and future bulletins, we will spend time being reminded of many great triumphs in the Lord. We will share the current stories of victory through perseverance, and we will talk about plans for the years to come. In short, we will look at what God has done, what God is doing and what God will do in His church here in Chicago. We will also spend time focusing on specific things we can and must do as disciples to keep our spiritual fervor for the Lord and continue running the Christian race until we cross the finish line. **(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)** Today's article will focus on one of the amazing characteristics of God's church here in Chicago, one which we can be very thankful for and one which we must continue to foster if God is going to be able to bless us in the future.

One of the most remarkable things about God is how He chooses to get His mission accomplished. He doesn't wage war as the world does, nor does He look at man's outward appearance. As the prophet Samuel reminded David's father, Jesse, about God's strategy for selecting a new king for the nation of Israel, let us also be reminded of this all-important truth: *The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.* **(1 Samuel 16:7)** And only one individual in the history of mankind has ever lived out that truth to perfection—Jesus Christ. In this article, I will share a few thoughts concerning how Jesus practiced this critical truth in regard to the selection of His twelve apostles and in His efforts to spread God's word during the early days of His public ministry.

In setting forth His public ministry, Jesus began in Galilee. What surely would have been a surprise to many people, Jesus didn't go to Jerusalem where the chief priests and

elders resided. Nor did He choose any of his original twelve disciples from Herod's court where He likely would have found the noble and powerful. Instead, He walked along the Sea of Galilee to gather a group of men and women to change the world—an area overrun with Gentiles, where the inhabitants were mostly unrefined and whose speech was often far from proper. Because of the mixture of Gentile culture, the dialect of Galilee was even unique. It was said about the Galileans that their accent gave them away. **(Mark 26:73)**

Galilee was also known for its diversity. Because of its coastal setting, its location on Eastern caravan routes and the incredibly fertile land surrounding it, this area of Palestine was a mix of cultures. As trading flourished, people from different lands influenced the Galileans. Though it was not known as a highly educated region, it was filled with the experiences of those from

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lands abroad and the people's varied beliefs and practices. It is here, with these blue-collar, hard-working people, that Jesus chose the men who would eventually spread the gospel that still saves men and women today! *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.* **(1 Corinthians 1:27)** I can only speak for myself, but I am so grateful that God chose the foolish and the weak! (Amen for fools and weaklings like me!)

It is obvious from the very beginning that Jesus' plan involved reaching all people, not just a select few. If He had chosen His first disciples in Jerusalem, perhaps the Gentiles would never have made it. If He had started with the noble and powerful of the world, perhaps the common folks would never have gotten a chance or, even worse, thought they didn't deserve a chance. I believe this "foolish to the world" plan of Jesus gives a glimpse into God's wonderful plan to save as many as possible. I

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Member Article: God is Always Present

The following article is by Mari Amaya, a member of the Metro Region. Mari was baptized on February 27, 1995. Mari and her husband, Fredy, have two children and lead a house church in the Metro North Sector of the region.

One of the reasons I'm excited to share these thoughts with you is because I have always wanted to tell the world what God has done with me—how He has brought me from one of the smaller places on Earth to a place where things are different from what I thought I knew about life.

I was born in a very small town in Mexico, with no electricity or running water. Out of 12 children born in my family, six died of illness shortly after they were born. There were many times when food wasn't available at our home. But we overcame those times. As I was growing up, I often used to wonder if there was something better. When I say I wanted something better, I do not mean only material things, but also in regard to a family. I always saw my family fighting, especially my parents. Home was not a safe place—at least I didn't feel safe or secure there. From a very early age, my father would beat me, sometimes to the point where I would bleed. Besides the physical abuse within our home, I faced sexual abuse outside our home, beginning at the age of six.

Perhaps you can relate to some of what I am sharing. Perhaps you cannot. Although all of us are different, I believe God allows us to go through similar things so that we can identify with one another, and also so we can help comfort each others' hearts. As I share these things, I don't want to make you feel pity for me. On the contrary, I would like for you to see how powerful God is and how He was present through all that I suffered.

I recall those years of hunger. I now see how my heart was being trained so I could learn to be content no matter what my circumstance. I remember being at school and waiting until my classmates would throw away what they didn't want so that I could pick it out of the garbage and eat it. I don't know if you have experienced hunger like that, but it is amazing what you will do when you're really hungry.

I can literally say that God brought me through the desert. That is why I love reading the Old Testament. It reveals to me how, in everything, God was present. He was leading me through each day and each night. It is incredible how God's love and faithfulness does endure forever. Now I can say that I am thankful that I grew up in a dysfunctional family, for if I had not, perhaps I would have never proclaimed Jesus as Lord. I questioned Him often while growing up, not knowing what He was preparing for me.

In 1992, I immigrated to the United States to help my sister with her two kids. After riding in a car for almost five days, I was finally in America. The dream of many

others was beginning to be mine. But within a short time, my dream turned into a nightmare. I was put into a situation where I was abused. Things got worse and worse, until one day I couldn't take it any more.

It was a Sunday evening in January. It was cold and snowy, but I had to go out to do laundry. As I was walking, I was crying out to God. I remember telling Him that if He really exists, then why had He made me go through all of this pain and suffering? I said, "Show me that you exist." That same night, as I was going to exchange some coins to do my laundry, a lady approached me, introduced herself and invited me to her church. As she was talking, I started laughing. She asked me why I was laughing, but I couldn't explain. The next Sunday when she picked me up for church, she asked me again why I had laughed. I told her that I laughed because I was scared. I explained that right before she invited me to church, I had asked God to show me that He is real. And He surely did! Even now as I think about it, I tremble.

Sometimes when people are going through difficult times, it is hard to see that God is there and that He exists. Just think about it. When it is cloudy, we might not see the sun for days. But that obviously doesn't mean that the sun does not exist. Oh yes, the sun exists. It has been shining all the time, but the clouds have been preventing it from showing you how beautiful and bright it actually is. The same thing happens when we are going through trouble. We do not see God when we are sad or when we are suffering. We tend to focus on only what we are feeling, so we question God's existence. But perhaps in those times, we are being trained for righteousness.

Many times I found myself in situations where I felt like there was no other way to live. When you were little, perhaps people asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up. Maybe you said a doctor, an engineer or a firefighter. No one ever asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I did not know of such titles. I only knew what I saw—you get married at 13, you're a hard worker, you're almost a slave to your husband and you usually get beat by him. I saw bitterness, pain and no hope. I'm glad that, although I did not dare to dream, God was dreaming for me. Because of God's dream, none of what I saw while I was growing up is now a part of my life.

As God takes His time to shape us in the way that seems best to Him, to us it may be painful and very unpleasant. At times it doesn't seem fair. But life isn't always fair. Fair or unfair, I was being shaped by God all those years. And He isn't done yet. He is still working on me, and I am thankful for that. I thank God for how much He has done for me and how He has not given up in taking the time to shape me in the way He knows is best. (**Jeremiah 18:3-4**)

Reviews and Previews



Mother-Daughter Retreat

The 2007 Mother/Daughter Retreat is a weekend of fun and bonding with one of the most special relationships of your life—your mother or daughter. The weekend is designed to strengthen the bond between moms and their daughters through interactive activities like craft-making and games, and devotional times to glean from God's word. This memorable event will be held at the lovely DoubleTree Guest Suites in Downers Grove on March 24-25. Registration has now begun! Mothers and daughters can register at the registration table at church.

2007 Youth Camp

Registration for the 2007 Youth Camps will begin this week. The camp schedule is a little later in the summer this year to better accommodate students attending summer school. Camp sessions are as follows (grade ranges are as of Fall 2007):

- Discover (5th-7th Grade) — July 15-21
- Explore (8th-10th Grade) — July 29-August 4
- Quest (10th Grade-Graduates) — July 29-August 4
- Expedition (11th Grade-Graduates) — June 17-24

The cost of the camp is \$325 per session (\$375 for the Expedition Camp). A \$100 deposit (\$200 Expedition) will secure a spot for your child. Complete information and registration forms are available on our website, www.chicagochurch.org.

Metro Region Bernadette Aguilar

Bernadette (Bernie) Aguilar remembers well the day she was first introduced to the Chicago Church of Christ. It was the summer of 1986, and she was in the park for a hospital picnic hosted by Mercy Hospital, where she worked.

"This brother came by and said, 'I'm doing a survey. Would you mind if I ask you a question?'" Bernie recalls. She also vividly remembers the question he asked her: "If you could ask God one question, what would it be?"

"I exploded," Bernie said. "Here I was, a single mom with one child in the stroller and another walking beside me. I thought, I would ask God, 'What's up with this?'" Being a single mother was not in her plans, so she wondered why God would have allowed it to happen. "I think I kind of scared the brother," she says of her response.

Even though Bernie doesn't remember the name of the man who first reached out to her, she does remember that he said he would have a sister call her soon. That sister was Robin Weidner. "Robin would call me and come over and help me with the kids," Bernie remembers. "I couldn't believe it. I thought, is this lady crazy? I would even lie to her about what time I had to be up or get the kids up, because I thought she would back away. But she still was there all the time." Bernie eventually agreed to study the Bible with Robin and Toni Caruso.

Bernie says it was the love of the disciples and the friendships she found in the church that finally melted

her heart and opened her to God's word. She also credits friendships and the commitment to always being open with her life as two of the biggest things that have helped her to stay faithful for the past 20 years. "Growing up, I had been taught that nobody needs to know your business," she explains. "But (in the church) I have learned that nothing is a secret. It doesn't have to be a secret. You don't have to be ashamed because no one is there to judge you." Bernie also added that she has had so much help in raising her girls. "Statistically, they would not be where they are now," she said. "But it doesn't have to be what the world says."

Today, that little baby in the stroller and the toddler walking alongside are strong, beautiful, faithful disciples of Jesus. Janel, now 24, is a graduate of Kendall College and is a disciple in the Metro Region. Dominique, now 20, is a student at UIC and is a disciple in the Chicago Region. On that fateful summer day, Bernie asked God, "Why?" Now, 20 years later, as she sees the great blessings God has poured into her life, she can hear God's answer: "Because I know the plans I have for you." Only our God can take what seems like a difficult situation and turn it into a dream come true.

**Conversion
Corner**

Welcome New Baptisms!

Central

- Jessica Mandujano

Metro

- Mario Gebka

25 Years of Glory (Cont.)

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believe Paul put it best with these words written to the church in Corinth: *Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings* (**1 Corinthians 9:19-23**) This was the heart of Jesus throughout His entire life on Earth, and it is the exact same kind of heart He spent three years training His disciples to possess as well. And those of us who are disciples of Jesus today must do anything and everything we can to imitate His amazing heart.

After 18 years as a disciple, I look around the auditorium during our congregational events, as well as our Sunday worship services in the Metro Region, and I am still in awe of the diverse cultures that make up God's church. It is truly a thing of beauty! In the Metro region alone, there are disciples from Sri Lanka, Russia, the Philippines, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America, Nigeria, South Africa, India, Poland and more. During one of our Sunday services some time ago, we had disciples from different nations share the words "Jesus is Lord" in their native languages. It was an experience I pray I never forget!

As people visit the church for the first time, one of the questions that many of them eventually ask is, "How did you get this diverse group of people to worship together like this?" After a big smile, the answer is simple—the cross of Christ! (**Ephesians 2:11-18, 3:10**)

Many great men and women have fought, and are still fighting, for social change along racial and cultural lines. Men like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were incredibly instrumental in creating change on a broad scale. Where we live, where we work and even where we eat have all been affected by these changes. And as a man of color, I am grateful for these and many other social changes. But as a disciple, I realize that real and lasting change comes only from the inside.

When I think of the way Jesus was able to bring together a rag-tag group of eleven Galileans and one Judean, I

wonder how difficult it must have been for the disciples to let go of their prejudices and preconceptions toward one another and toward those around them. How were these men able to remain unified in a way that they could represent Christ to the whole world? Similarly, how can disciples today overcome our own preconceived notions and cultural biases so that we, too, can represent Christ to the whole world? The answer lies at the cross of Calvary. The cross—the life-giving, life-saving cross—is what truly brings us together from the heart. But it wasn't only at the cross that Jesus displayed His love for all mankind. He modeled that godly quality throughout His entire life, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day! The disciples of Jesus, while in His presence, were constantly being taught and shown the importance of this spiritual quality. We, too, must look to Jesus as our model for overcoming our pride, prejudice and preconceptions toward other people. It is only then that we can continue to be a church of all colors and all kinds!

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The United States is often referred to as a melting pot. Actually, I believe the country is more of a tossed salad, with many different flavors in each forkful. In a salad, the ingredients maintain their original shape and appearance. They do not change once they enter the salad. So if you don't like tomatoes, it's quite easy to take them out. Or if you only like cucumbers, you can pick them out and only eat them if you so choose.

In the Chicago Church of Christ, however, because of the example of Christ and the ultimate sacrifice we see at the cross of Christ, we become a true melting pot, made up of many different ingredients, but one wonderful flavor. And that flavor is Christ! As each new ingredient is added, it will bring something new and exciting to the pot, but it also will be melted and transformed into the one big pot. You cannot separate ingredients. They are bonded. They are one. And as more people become disciples and are added to the Chicago Church in the days ahead, they will bring with them their unique heritage and culture, but they also will be melted and transformed into the image of Christ, keeping us one, big happy family that remains under the leadership and loving guidance of God.

Darren Gauthier
Evangelist, Metro Region