

THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

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

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December 16, 2007

Twenty-Five Years Later — Reflect and Refocus

This has been such an exciting year. Twenty-five years as a church is historic, especially considering the short existence of our worldwide fellowship of churches. We should all be proud of God's church here in Chicago and feel the sense that God is working powerfully through all of us to build up His kingdom. As we come to the end of 2007, it's a great time to reflect and refocus. As shepherds of the Chicago Church of Christ, we feel that this practice is essential.

Reflection brings us to the fact that, today, we are a solid church of nearly 2,000 disciples with ministry centers throughout Chicagoland, each composed of authentic disciples loving God and loving their neighbors. There's a bright light that goes out from the Chicago Church, and it is a light that shines in our homes, at our places of work, at the marketplace and on our high school and college campuses. And we have a vision that helps us to see beyond the present and into 2017, a practical vision that will establish ministry centers within a 30-minute drive of everyone living in the Chicagoland area. For this to take place, we must remain true to God and fix our hearts and our minds on Jesus. And there is no better time to begin doing this than at this very moment and throughout the upcoming holiday season.

Reflection also brings us to the realization that we are not growing in every way we desire. Even with our ongoing attempts to attain this exciting vision, it is obvious that we have a long way to go. To get where we desire to go, it is clear that we need each and every one of us to be unified, acting together as the body of Christ to accomplish His will. And we need the encouragement and togetherness with one another to keep our hearts from worldliness. **(Heb 3:13)** Traditionally, we have discussions on how to stay faithful to God throughout the holidays. In actuality, these discussions should occur regularly throughout the year. And we, the elders of the Chicago Church of Christ, are determined to keep us on track with God, encouraging each of us to accept His call to go anywhere, do anything,

give up everything and become whatever He bids us to be. We must help one another to resist the worldly environment in which we are typically surrounded, as we are constantly being prodded to conform to numerous ungodly influences. Truly, God desires us to be transformed by the constant renewing of our hearts and minds! **(Rom 12:1-2)**

We are also committed to helping the church refocus and recommit on a regular basis. We don't want to lose sight of our shortcomings; not to be discouraged and faithless because of those shortcomings, but rather to allow God to change us and assist us in determining our next step. We

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must desire to continually improve our efforts as a body of believers so that every disciple can gain the ultimate prize—the opportunity to give God glory continually

when we are finally at home with Him in heaven.

We are truly encouraged that, in 2007, there were eight disciples in our number who “made it” to their heavenly home—Betty Plaia, Ernest Carthan, Edward Montgomery, Francis Huffman, Lydia Davis, Nina Granger, Corine Huff and Gayloyd Smith. We can only imagine them cheering us on as we are seeking the same outcome for our lives and for our loved ones around us. **(Hebrews 12:1)** We encourage you—even admonish you—to stay faithful to God, to walk and talk with Him every day, to study the Scriptures daily, to stay close to the family of God and to share the faith you have with both the lost and the saved so that you can continue to grow in Christ and one day make it to your home in heaven with Jesus.

We wish each and every one of you the very best in this holiday season. Let's keep the season real by keeping it focused on Jesus. Let's enjoy our families and be the light of God. And let's live in the peace that comes from being thankful for all that we have.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Elders:

Jeff Balsom, Randy Harris, Jim Lefler and Todd Fink

Arrivals and Departures

The following is an excerpt from the book, The Revealer, written by Curt Simmons. In this portion of the book, Curt discusses some of the stark contrasts between the birth and death of Jesus Christ. As Christmas approaches, it is good to be reminded how both of these amazing events were crucial in bringing about our redemption.

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” (John 1:14)

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

“He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

On His arrival, Jesus cried out and was comforted by the response of his mother and father. He was touched. He was held. He was sung to softly. He was fed. At His departure, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He was taunted. He was harassed. He was shouted at harshly. He was fed to the ferocious wolves in sheep’s clothing.

On His arrival, Jesus was clothed from head to toe to keep warm and comfortable. At His departure, Jesus was stripped of His last item of clothing, left to die in the cold and in complete shame.

On His arrival, Jesus was completely dependent upon others to protect Him from the cruel forces of the outside world. At His departure, Jesus chose to lay down His life and expose Himself to the cruel forces of the outside world.

On His arrival, Jesus slept comfortably in the hay of a manger created for His protection. At His departure, Jesus hung in torture on the wood of a crucifix created for His execution.

On His arrival, a star appeared and brightened the night sky, announcing His birth. At His departure, darkness came over the land and hid the afternoon sun, announcing His death.

On His arrival, shepherds were overcome with joy when they laid eyes on the beautiful baby boy in a manger. At His departure, family and friends were overwhelmed with grief when they laid eyes on the bruised, beaten and bloodied body of Jesus hanging on a cross.

On His arrival, Mary watched Jesus sleep and wondered with great faith about what was ahead. At His departure,

Mary watched Jesus cry out in unbearable pain and wondered with great doubt about what was ahead.

On His arrival, the child was given the name Jesus, Savior of the world. At His departure, Jesus was given the name deceiver, seducer of the people.

On His arrival, many fell to their knees and worshipped Him. At His departure, many stood stiff-necked and waylaid Him.

On His arrival, wise men opened their treasures and gave to Him. At His departure, foolish men closed their hearts and took from Him.

On His arrival, angels were loud and jubilant as they announced His birth. At His departure, angels were silent as they analyzed His death.

On His arrival, many admirers spread the word that the true Messiah was finally here. At His departure, many enemies spread the word that the false Messiah was finally gone.

On His arrival, many who heard about Jesus were amazed. At His departure, many who heard about Jesus were appalled.

On His arrival, those nearby marveled at His precious hands and feet. At His departure, those nearby made fun of Him while nails were being pierced through His hands and feet.

On His arrival, Jesus was offered milk in the embrace of a mother who would raise Him from birth. At His departure, Jesus was offered wine vinegar in the torture of the cross, awaiting His Father who would raise Him from death.

On His arrival, Mary held Jesus close, sighed and kissed His forehead. At His departure, Mary watched Jesus from a distance and sobbed while blood poured from His forehead.

On His arrival, God became flesh and dwelt among us. At His departure, God became sin and reached out to us.

On His arrival, God said, “Let it begin.” At His departure, Jesus said, “It is finished.”

On His arrival, Jesus began His earthly battle against the devil. At His departure, Jesus declared His eternal victory over the devil.

On His arrival, God said to the world, “Introducing, my Son.” At His departure, God said to the world, “Imitate my Son.”

“ . . . and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 2:21)

Reviews and Previews

Upcoming Congregational Events

The following congregational events are scheduled for the first few months of 2008.

January 19	HOPE Service Projects
January 20	Semi-Congregational Worship Services
February 2	Worship Concert & CD Recording
February 9	Midwest Teen Winter Blast
February 16	Single Sisters Appreciation Night
February 22	Women's Gospel Night
February 23	Men's Addiction Workshop
February 23	Teen Devotional
February 29	Bridge Ministry Campus Devotional
March 1	Kingdom Kids Workshop
March 8	House Church Leaders' Meeting
March 8	Campus Graduates Devotional
March 23	Easter Musical
March 28	Bridge Ministry Campus Devotional
March 29	Women's Addiction/Co-dependency Workshop
April 6	Spanish Worship Service
April 11-12	Bible Jubilee
April 25	Campus Graduation Celebration
April 26	Teen Devotional
April 27	Singles Worship

Through Water & Fire

The Chicago Church of Christ 25th Anniversary Compilation CD is available for purchase after this morning's worship service. It features 12 original songs, hundreds of photos and other historical material. The cost is \$15. Special thanks to Steve Pederson for all his work in bringing this encouraging project to completion.

Bruce and Robyn Williams

It is both an honor and a privilege to welcome back Bruce and Robyn Williams to Chicago. Bruce and Robyn led the Chicago Church of Christ from 1989-1991, and were instrumental in being used by God to help grow and strengthen the church during their time here. In addition to the great fellowship we look forward to having with them during their brief stay here, we are excited that Bruce will be delivering the message to us this morning. Bruce and Robyn are currently serving in the full-time ministry in the Los Angeles Church of Christ.

Booktable

Please take a moment before and after our service this morning to check out all the great items available at the booktable. There are a large quantity of Bibles, books and other spiritual materials that would be ideal for either giving to someone as a Christmas gift, helping to keep you focused on your spiritual journey during the upcoming holiday season or getting you off to a great start for 2008. A new book by Curt Simmons, *The Brotherhood of Believers*, has just been released and is available for \$12. The book takes an inside look at spiritual life in the first-century church as recorded in the book of Acts.

Welcome New Baptisms!

Chicago

- William Biancucci

North

- Steve Lucas

Greater Westland

- Janelle Chevalier
- Franchesca Zaccaro

New Disciples Today Website

The Disciples Today website has a new look and new features! Please take a moment to visit the new site at www.disciplestoday.com.

- ✦ **Eight Languages** — You can translate any page on the site into one of eight languages.
- ✦ **Search - Google Powered** — Search the entire site for any article by title, author, subject or location. Each article links you to similar articles by continent or topic.
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Ministry Directory

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 Anton & Sharon Ivy(708) 798-9077
 Jeremy Lefler.....(773) 427-2070
 Steve & Tricia Staten.....(773) 327-3960

2 Central Ministry Center

Dave & Kathy Eastman(630) 297-3862
 Tony & Melanie Singh(630) 416-6906

3 DeKalb Church of Christ

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 Chris & Meegan Zillman.....(815) 756-4091

4 Greater Westland Ministry Ctr.

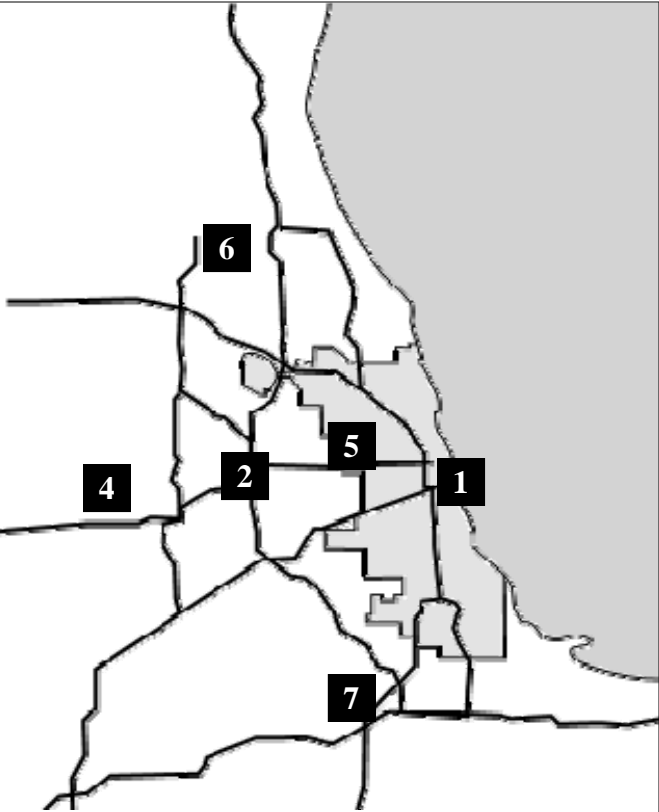
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5 Metro Ministry Center

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 Tom & Carol Nuelle(773) 775-9612

6 North Suburban Ministry Center

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 Jim & Virginia Lefler(847) 543-9750
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