

DECEMBER 2012

# Horizons



A SON IS GIVEN



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and

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# editorial

## Communication Requires Two

The 21st century has been accompanied with incredible advances in communication. Most of us make and receive calls by wireless cellular phone; some even via video! We text, tweet and more. Many of the “futuristic” methods written into the Dick Tracy cartoons 50+ years ago have been equaled and some have been superseded!

This generation has the opportunity to see who is calling, texting, emailing, or tweeting. We have the ability to ignore the other party’s desire to communicate with us by allowing a phone call to go to our voicemail box. Similarly we may ignore a text, email or tweet, by allowing the message to remain in our “in box.” It may remain there temporarily while we compose our thoughts, or we may send it to the “trash bin in the sky” and permanently avoid it if we so choose. Some even have the convenience of sending a message that the communication has been heard or read when the recipient fully intends to ignore it. This allows the sender to “think” there is interest when actually there is not.

As a society, we seem so consumed with our sense of being overburdened and our desire for anonymity that we rely upon these techniques far too much. We are creating an image of welcoming communication, while the reality is the opposite. This may not be purely ethical, but what a powerful convenience it is!

Unfortunately, this penchant for ignoring the communication of others has also become the norm in our congregations as well. Not long ago, I was asked by a staff member of one of our supporting congregations to provide information about Mission Services. I was a bit puzzled, because that very information had already been sent via email and the U.S. Postal Service. A friend who leads another ministry recently told me they had received a similar request from

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another congregation. My friend was also frustrated, because their ministry also sends monthly thank you letters, and had sent repeated requests to be allowed to visit the congregation in person. In both cases, it became apparent that attempts to communicate with the local missions ministry had been ignored.

Communication requires one party to offer information, but it also requires the recipient to read it and share it with everyone who might be interested. If a missionary or ministry does not send regular letters of thanks or updates in some fashion, there will be no communication. If the individual or congregation decides they are too busy to read or consider information sent, there will be no communication.

Missionaries and ministry leaders must not assume information sent is also information read. We must not allow ourselves to believe that simply because we have shared something via mail, email, Twitter, Facebook or our website we have communicated with a supporter. Congregational leaders must make sure that those responsible for handling missions information are actually reading it and sharing it with others! We cannot allow ourselves to believe that simply because someone has been given the responsibility that the task is being accomplished. You think about that!

# Horizons

December 2012

No. 1181 • Vol. 61, No. 10

HORIZONS is a mission-oriented magazine of the undenominational fellowship of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Mission Services, as publisher of HORIZONS magazine, publishes articles written by field missionaries rather than staff writers. We believe this offers a clear image of the variety of opinions that exists between missionaries within the historical Restoration Movement.

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Web Site: [www.missionservices.org](http://www.missionservices.org)

U.S. Subscriptions:  
\$20.00 for 1 year  
\$36.00 for 2 years

Bundle rates:  
5 copies @ \$95.00/year  
10 copies @ \$170.00/year  
15 copies @ \$220.00/year  
Additional copies: \$14.00 each

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May you have a Merry Christmas  
and a Blessed New Year!

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# coming events

# 2013

## May 20-21

### **Eubanks Institute for Missions (EIM) Conference**

Johnson University, Knoxville, Tennessee

Focus: Bible Translation

Contact information: Gerald Mattingly

865-251-2349 / gmattingly@johnsonu.edu

## JULY 9-12

### **North American Christian Convention**

Louisville, Kentucky

Theme: "Victorious"

President: Matt Proctor

Contact information: North American Christian Convention

513-772-9970 / [www.gotonacc.org](http://www.gotonacc.org)

## JULY 21-27

### **2013 Lake James School of Missions**

Angola, Indiana

Contact information: Kent Shady, Program Chairman

260-824-2132 / [kdshady@adamswells.com](mailto:kdshady@adamswells.com)

## NOVEMBER 14-17

### **International Conference on Missions**

Kansas City

Contact information: David Empson

317-539-4231 / [david@nmc-windows.org](mailto:david@nmc-windows.org)

## NOVEMBER 15-17

### **Eastern Christian Conference**

Hershey Convention Center, Hershey, Pennsylvania

President: Don Hamilton

Contact information: Eastern Christian Conference

410-836-6102 / [info@easterncc.com](mailto:info@easterncc.com)

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# Christmas Defines God & Our Mission



by  
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**W**hat is the mission of the church, and how do we best carry out that mission once we understand it and accept it?

Those seem like such simple questions! After all, did Jesus not explain it to the disciples in the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and his charge to them just before his ascension (Acts 1:6-8)? Both may be patently true and obvious, but there is no shortage of discussion, debate, and differences when congregational leaders gather to express and exchange opinions in person, via the Internet or in print.

The Christmas season can help us understand the mission of the church, the one to whom the mission belongs and the fullness of it. Certainly, the precise elements of how it is fulfilled vary from congregation to congregation. Each body of believers must carry out its mission in the context of its cultural milieu and its population. While the specifics may vary, there will be an obvious commonality when it's based upon biblical truth and principle.

## ***1. The mission belongs to God, and he is greater than our reasoning.***

If we do not get this one point right, we are destined for shipwreck and ruin of our faith and our mission will lack both direction and strength. Since man appeared on the earth, we have wrestled with the questions of who am I and how did the world get here. Thousands of years later, we continue to struggle with the concept of the origin of the species. We propose theories ranging from a) an evolutionary process requiring ages of time, or b) masses of gas colliding with earth's creation as the result, to c) the entire universe appearing instantly at the singular command of God. This is a worthy discussion, but the reality is...no individual knows. ALL proposals are theory. We offer them from any and every perspective because WE, the human inhabitants of earth, want to be able to understand how and why we exist. Unfortunately the human brain, far greater than the most advanced computer, is simply insufficient for the task of fully understanding the nature, power and scope of God.

Not long ago, I was involved in an online discussion forum with the central question being, "When does life begin?" For some, this discussion seems unnecessary at best because they hold a firm and unwavering belief that it begins at conception. Some involved in that discussion held a vastly different belief. One individual proposed that life could not possibly begin at conception. He explained his premise in the following fashion. He began with the fact that many times the female human body spontaneously miscarries. He then noted the popularly held position among Christians is that such innocent children will be in heaven. His conclusion was that these positions were mutually exclusive, because heaven would then be filled with infants possessing neither personality nor capability of reasoning. To him this would be tragic.

In fairness, I do not know if this individual was stating a firm belief or simply seeking to create discussion, because I was not able to remain involved in the exchange. It is not my desire to pass judgment upon his motives. My concern is that any of us would have such a small image of the God whom we serve to believe that God must leave these little ones in such a sad state in heaven. The God of creation is far beyond our capability of reason and is perfectly able to translate such a miscarried baby into heaven with fully developed reasoning and personality.

Christmas is a perfect opportunity to realize just how great God is. If any of us were to have been given the responsibility of planning the salvation of man, I hardly believe that we would have conceived the idea of God taking flesh upon himself. We would never have thought it best for God to take the form of a baby with his appearance onto the scene in such humble and mundane circumstances. Christmas indeed defines God's wisdom and power. The mission of the church belongs to him, and our response is to accept it with great honor and humility. We need not fret that there is much within our life and mission that we do not understand. When we are able to see His greatness in the story of Christmas, we are freed from the weight and burden of making it fit into our thought process and allowed to simply fulfill this mission in all our energy.

## ***2. God's purpose demands we go beyond ourselves.***

When Adam and Eve sinned they hid from God as they heard his gentle rustle while searching for them. Our ancestors understood the greatness of God and their own limitations, and they hid from him in fear. While hiding, their fear grew with the sound of Him walking ever closer in the garden. Much to their surprise, God did not stand at a distance and yell at them for their disobedience. God had every right to do so. After all, could they not keep even one singular command? No, God went beyond himself and sought Adam and Eve though their sin separated them from him in a manner he never desired.

Many years later, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his long awaited son Isaac. I cannot imagine the terror that grew inside Abraham the closer they got to the land of Moriah and the place God had chosen for this encounter. Can we imag-

ine his hand trembling and his grip weakening upon the knife even though Abraham was acting in total obedience to God's direction (Genesis 22:10)? What Abraham did not know was that God had already arrived to meet them. Abraham and Sarah sinned when they did not trust God and concocted the plan for Hagar to have a baby with Abraham. Neither Abraham nor Sarah knew that the people of earth would be dealing with the consequences of their sin centuries later, but they both knew they had sinned.

Though God would have been justified in allowing Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he did not. God went beyond himself to go ahead of them and provide a sacrifice with a ram caught in a nearby thicket.

The Christmas story demonstrates clearly, how our mission is to go beyond ourselves in telling the world of God's grace. The Christmas story shows that God loves us enough to take upon himself the punishment for our sin. When all of humanity was weak and could do nothing to save ourselves from the power of sin, God came in the person and presence of Jesus. God did not yell from the great distance and divide, but went beyond himself that we may sense the gentle touch of a nail scared hand. God did not allow the chasm that our sin created to permanently separate us from him, but he came in the person of Jesus that we might hear him in the soft sound of sandaled feet.

Our mission is to likewise go beyond ourselves to every tongue, tribe and nation so they may know that God loves them and is actively seeking their return to fellowship with him in spite of their disobedience. Going beyond ourselves calls us to overcome all obstacles. We must not surrender to our fear. We must not stand by and believe that others deserve eternal punishment for the wrong they have done. We must refuse the temptation to stand at a distance and yell at a disobedient world. We must act as God did in the Christmas story. We must go in the form of sinful flesh telling a sinful world where we found forgiveness for the sin that is in us.





### *3. God's mission reaches beyond simple evangelism.*

As a young boy, I remember messages and lessons in the church decrying the weaknesses of “the social gospel.” I grew up within a denomination that ever so gradually adopted the cries for social justice and liberal political causes. I observed how blind devotion to liberal politics may lead to “liberal” theological positions. When our minister learned that I was being led to a life in ministry, he suggested that I forsake the schools of our denomination in favor of those affiliated with Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

Knowing how seductive a purely social gospel can be, I have to confront my own fears when I look carefully at the Christmas story and its ramifications on the mission of the church. Looking back at the proclamation of the angels to the shepherds is enlightening, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

The mission to which we have been called by God is to introduce peace among God's people. Without doubt, the peace God intends for His people is first the peace that accompanies the forgiveness of sin. If sin remains to divide us from the one who created us and loves us most, there can be no peace in life. Satan reigns where sin's guilt resides. The first element of peace is to break Satan's grip upon us.

However, God also wants peace for us that restores our lives to what he intended. Remember the early days of creation? Remember how God told Adam and Eve that they could enjoy the wonder of His creation? That is what God wants for us now. God's desire is to bless us and restore what He created. Ours is not a mission that claims to remove all of the consequences of sin. It is a mission to restore wholeness to life. Only God can remove sin's consequences, but our mission includes introducing the world to the present realities of the “I am's” of Jesus. What God does charge us to do is to demonstrate to all mankind that he wants to bless all of life.

I am encouraged to see new efforts and initiatives being taken to teach impoverished people how they can start a small business, how they can become better farmers, and better providers for their families. For too long, we have proclaimed the gospel, but with that we perpetuated dependency upon the wealth of America. It is good that we established schools, but we did little or nothing to help create jobs. It so encouraging to see missionaries and ministries help people see how God can move in their every day existence and free them from the depression and hopelessness of poverty. May we double and triple those efforts.

What is our mission? How are we to fulfill it? Look at the Christmas story. May that be our guide.

## focus on

# Prayer Needs & Praises

### Africa

- Scott & Annelle Price (Tanzania) request prayer as they establish “Business as Mission” enterprises to reach lives with the good news.
- Paul & Marilyn Douglass (Sudan) request prayer for peace in that country. Pray the new government will protect and lead with justice and integrity.
- Bob & Connie Sheffler (Grassroots Leadership Development) give praise for Christian leaders ministering in the face of political unrest and major financial difficulties.

### Europe

- Shannon Haynie (Ukraine) requests prayer for the progress of Bible Translation into the Crimean Tatar language.
- Scott LaRue (Russia) asks us to pray for open doors and that more church planters will become a part of a movement among Russian speakers.

### Asia

- Al & Rhonda Juve (Japan) give praise for new connections with Japanese families and international students.
- Dr. David Filbeck gives praise for graduates of Lanna Theological Center whose graduates have been instrumental in establishing house churches with over 7,000 members.
- Rodger & Dixie Shewmaker (Philippines) give praise for 25 years of ministry to the Filipino people.
- Saleem Massey (Pakistan) requests prayer for the Pakistani people suffering from high inflation, electricity shortages, joblessness, and the constant threat of terror attacks.
- Beverley Kalnin (Myanmar) requests prayer for that country as there is much warfare and food is becoming scarce. Pray for God’s intervention for peace and safety.

## Global

- Good News Productions asks us to pray as they begin to translate *The Global Gospel Project* into the top 25 languages of the world by the year 2015. This is a series of 88 stories on the life of Christ. (If interested in viewing these, go to [www.themissionsnetwork.com](http://www.themissionsnetwork.com))

## U.S.

- Please be in prayer for Mark Huddleston currently undergoing treatment for stage 3 colon cancer.
- Phil & Kathy Banta (NMSI-Hispanic) ask for prayers as they train, disciple, and encourage Hispanics in sharing their faith with family and friends.
- Pray for Arizona Reservation Ministries as they seek team members to fill the following positions:
  - ~ mechanic
  - ~ church bus driver
  - ~ children's ministers
  - ~ youth ministers
  - ~ construction supervisor
  - ~ bookkeeper
  - ~ work team cook/host
  - ~ office worker

## Team Expansion

- Pray for unity, peace, and grace for the church which Brian Rotert and family are helping to plant in Ancona, Italy.
- Pray for Z & A as they work to translate the Bible for Crimean Tatars.
- Pray for good health for SS so she can return to eastern Europe in the near future.
- Join J & S in eastern Europe in praying for Adolf and the Northside kids who are "adopting" him.
- Pray for Marcus VanDorn (Italy) as he visits family, friends, and supporters in the US during a period of home service.
- Join C & I (eastern Europe) in praying for their efforts in reaching college students.
- Praise God for giving Carla Williams, Creative Arts Writer at International Services, exceptional skill in wording the stories of unreached peoples and the harvest workers reaching out to them.



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