

PASTOR GENERAL'S REPORT

TO THE MINISTRY OF THE
WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD



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FROM MINISTERIAL SERVICES

Points to Stress in an Offertory Message

Holy day offerings are a vital part of God's plan and contribute significantly to the work of God's Church. The style, content and delivery of the offertory message should reflect the offering's importance and show reverence for God's commandment. Yet, all too often the offering is preceded by a lackluster "It's time for another offering, so let's all turn to Deuteronomy 16:16 again."

God's commandments should not be taken casually or be made to appear as ritualistic chores. Giving an offering should be viewed as the opportunity and privilege that it is. An offering benefits the giver far more than it benefits God.

Certainly offerings are commanded by God, but this does not always need to be the main point in the offertory. There are many other aspects which can and should be emphasized. Here are a few examples:

- How the offering relates to God's plan. We are to become God. Since God is love, He is a cheerful giver. And since we are to be developing the character of God, we should learn to enjoy the opportunity to give freely and cheerfully.
- The growth and needs of God's Church. Show what tithes and offerings have done and will do in helping to spread the Gospel around the world. Stress teamwork and involvement.
- Putting God first. God gave His only Son so we could be reconciled to God and receive eternal life. Therefore, we should be willing to put God and His work first in our lives, sacrificing as necessary.
- The urgency of completing God's work. God's soon-coming Kingdom is the only hope for mankind. Christ will return after the Gospel has been preached to all the world.
- God's blessings. God is the greatest giver. He has given us everything we have. He is pleased with our generosity and will more than make up for it by blessing us in many ways.

Remember, we are to give meat in due season. When giving an offertory message, emphasize certain aspects of the offering according to the purpose of the holy day. On the Feast of Trumpets, for example, stress the urgency of completing God's end-time work, showing how our commitment and sacrifice is needed more than ever as we look forward to Christ's soon return. During Pentecost, it would be fitting to explain how giving an offering helps us develop godly character in preparation for becoming members of God's Family.

Undoubtedly, you can think of many other lessons and points which would be relevant and stimulating. God's plan is exciting--it is inspiring. This is conveyed when the offertory is delivered with personality, feeling, purpose, joy and contagious excitement!

The speaker's goal should be to inspire and educate God's people, motivating them to do that which is for their benefit and for the good of God's Church. When delivered in a positive, uplifting and encouraging manner, the offertory helps God's people become more thoroughly involved in doing the most important work on earth!

A final note regarding holy day offerings: Although there are reminders every year in The GOOD NEWS regarding the need to prepare for holy day offerings well in advance (see pages 3, 30-31 in this year's Feast issue), it would be good to verbally remind your congregations about their responsibility to God as a holy day season approaches. Our brethren can then reflect on the needs of God's Church, how God has blessed them during the past year, and on what they can realistically give to God when the time comes to write their checks.

Comments From Monthly Church Reports

From the United States

MANSFIELD, OH--JIM HAEFFELE: The brethren appreciate hearing Mr. Armstrong preach on prophecy. It seems it has been quite a number of years since we have heard him dwell specifically on this subject. We hope he will continue to relate events in Europe and update us on prophecy.

QUINCY, WA--GENE WATKINS: Most of the brethren are becoming very interested in prophecy as they hear Mr. Armstrong speak on the subject. We are gearing up here to follow his lead and begin having more Bible studies and sermons on prophecy.

ONTARIO, OR--JEFF MCGOWAN: Because the majority of the congregation is near senior citizen age, health problems seem to dominate the brethren as far as trials are concerned. It is really inspiring to see how God keeps sustaining and healing these brethren so they can continue to serve Him. The resolve of the members and their commitment to God's work is truly inspiring to me, because the tendency for people in their place is to become resentful and begin to flag in their commitment. With more activities in the area, this group has become more dynamic at Church and their personalities have become more outgoing.

GARDEN GROVE, CA--TERRY MATTSON: The church area continues to grow in numbers as well as in a deeper bond of fellowship and love. Many have remarked about how close everyone feels toward each other. It's truly a big family. More and more John 13:35 is being fulfilled. New people coming to services for the first time are saying they have never experienced so much real love from others as they do from those in God's Church! This is having a profound effect in bringing new people along towards baptism and conversion.

From Southern Africa

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA--JOHN WHITE: The Cape Town congregation is very enthusiastic to receive more information from the Ministerial Refreshing Program. Mr. Armstrong's tape on prophecy was a great success and many thought it was one of the best on this subject.

BLOEMFONTEIN, SOUTH AFRICA--SYDNEY HULL: Slow but steady growth is being maintained in this area. Pressure from other churches against our PLAIN TRUTH newsstand effort is increasing. That is a sign that God's work is being done!

PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA--DANIEL BOTHA: A number of members have transferred out of the area due to job problems. In the Pietersburg area finances are becoming a problem for some of our outlying members. Drought still grips the area. Jobs are difficult to come by.

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA--JOHN BARTHOLOMEW: I was able to visit a man who lost contact with us many years ago. He has been struggling all these years to keep his trading store going in the remote mountains of Lesotho, and has faithfully been observing the Sabbath and holy days despite opposition from the entire community and his wife, who left him for six months. There has been a gradual, steady increase in visits, PMS and baptisms in the South Coast area.

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA--ANDRE VAN BELKUM: We continue to receive 5-10 new visit requests each month. These people show a keen desire to attend services, but most have a very superficial knowledge of the truth. They need time to develop. There were three baptisms this month. Newsstand distribution has jumped from 10,000 to 15,000 in one month. This was due to two excellent doors opening--at the Johannesburg Central Station and Jan Smuts Airport. Members are responding exceptionally well to Church activities as a very high percentage attend these functions. Fellowshiping is very evident among members.

--Joe Tkach, Ministerial Services

YOU UPDATEFunding for YOU Activities Discontinued for 1984

Due to the current financial situation of the Youth Programs Department, a decision has been made to discontinue funding of YOU activities for the remainder of the 1984 calendar year. YOU activities may continue as scheduled, but without financial assistance from the National Office. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the YOU Office in Pasadena.

--Kevin O. Dean, YOU

PUBLISHING SERVICES UPDATE

Newsstand Distribution Program Continues to Expand

Exciting things are happening in The PLAIN TRUTH Newsstand Distribution Program! Last week in New York City, 12 high-volume newspaper and magazine distribution outlets opened up to us. Each will be using a single column, three pocket display. Preliminary estimates indicate these outlets will distribute a total of 12,000 magazines each month!

One outlet is located in the very heart of the New York financial district-- on Water Street near the American Express Building. Thousands of prominent businessmen and women will have the opportunity to pick up their own copies of The PLAIN TRUTH. There is also a potential for opening up distribution in another 300 newsstands in the New York area, as funds become available.

An additional 37 Elson's gift shops will begin distribution of The PLAIN TRUTH on October 1. Ten "Book Corner" bookstores in the Boston area have also recently become available for distribution of the magazine.

Member Participation Is Up

Preliminary results of a survey of all local newsstand programs in the United States reveal that there are over 1,500 more members involved than there were at this time last year. Almost 9,000 members are currently involved in the Newsstand, Card Holder, Waiting Room, Brochure, and Library Book Programs.

U.S. Newsstands Increase

The survey also reveals that there are nearly 5,000 more newsstand outlets distributing The PLAIN TRUTH than at this time last year. This brings the total to over 24,000 in the United States alone. Pastors and assistant coordinators report that enthusiasm for the program has never been greater. They also report that they cannot seem to keep the newsstand displays filled. Magazines seem to be "flying off the stands." In just over one month, newsstand coordinators throughout the U.S. have requested their magazine allotments be increased by almost 200,000.

In the past few months, many thousands of newsstand readers have returned reply cards requesting their own subscription to The PLAIN TRUTH. In fact, response has doubled in the last 12 months.

Impact on a New Member

Finally, we would like to share with you a letter received by Mr. Ron Lohr, pastor of the Tampa, Florida Church. It is from a young woman who is now a freshman at Ambassador College. She wrote to Mr. Lohr thanking him and all involved in the Newsstand Program in Tampa for the work they are doing in distributing The PLAIN TRUTH locally. She first came in contact with The PLAIN TRUTH in a laundromat in Tampa. The letter mentions that she was working at a restaurant in Hyde Park, Florida.

It was there that I first came in contact with The PLAIN TRUTH. The cooks who also worked there had been receiving the Spanish

edition of The PLAIN TRUTH for three years. One directed me to where it was displayed in the Howard St. Laundromat, where I picked up my first copy. That is about all I did--pick it up. For some reason, it didn't catch my interest. Approximately a year later, when events in my life were taking a turn for the worse, I began to look in the area laundromats for the PT again.

Later she moved back to Maine, where she and her sister became more and more interested in the Church. They began to attend Bible studies and Church services, and within four months both were baptized.

That was a year and a half ago. We are now "PT reps" ourselves, and I can't help chuckling to myself, as I stock the PTs in our local laundromats, at the memory of me--half-frantic, rummaging through the pile of magazines at a "mat" on Macdill Avenue, searching for the TRUTH! Thank you for having it there--for doing your part, and sacrificing your time and effort!

And thanks to each of you ministers and brethren. Your efforts, ingenuity and ideas for improvement are helping to make the success of this program possible!

--Ray Wright, Publishing Services

UPDATE FROM MAIL PROCESSING

Multiple Thousands Request TRUE CHURCH Booklet

WHERE IS THE TRUE CHURCH? has become the second-most requested booklet in the U.S. this year. Through last week, 359,018 copies have been sent out. The only booklet sent to more readers was THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN IN PROPHECY.

If these requests are an indication of the depth of interest our readers and viewers are showing in the Church, we may see a heavy upsurge in visit requests in the months ahead. A number of letters show that many of these people are more than "just curious" about the identity and location of God's Church. Some mention that they have been actively seeking the true Church for quite a long time. Others found this knowledge new and startling.

Several have written to us describing the booklet's impact on their lives. We have already received a few visit requests as a result. Following are some of the letters we've received:

I just read your booklet called WHERE IS THE TRUE CHURCH? and I found it totally astounding. If what you're saying is true, then this whole nation has been deceived greatly. And I need to make a total rearrangement of my life and how I live. It's unbelievable and leaves me in a state of shock.

D.D. (Petersburg, VA)

It used to be that when our clock radio went off on Sunday mornings, your program was on. That is how I became acquainted with your ministry. I was very much interested in what you had to say.

I had come to a point where I vomited everything I had been spoon-fed about religion, and set out to find my own answers. I looked in all the wrong places--this world's places. I feel like I've been treading water, trying to keep my head above it all, but not finding anything solid to stand on. That is, until I just read your booklet WHERE IS THE TRUE CHURCH? It was like a lifesaver being thrown to me.

Our families, church members, neighbors and friends all hold to traditional Christian values and I realize what it could mean going off in another direction. But God has brought me this far and will give me the courage to do what is right and true. I wish to have a minister of the Worldwide Church of God call on me.

M.F. (Bryant, IN)

We just finished reading WHERE IS THE TRUE CHURCH? Mr. Armstrong, we've been listening to and reading your material over the past several months--always checking out what you say and every so often listening to another man preach, as a comparison. We finally believe you are a man from God. Why we never heard you before I don't know, unless the time wasn't right.

Never have I heard a man speak the way you do, and I gave up ever expecting to hear one years ago. We want to thank you for bringing understanding and hope to this miserable world.

N.O. (Durango, CO)

We are praying always for you. Also, in our opinion, the booklet WHERE IS THE TRUE CHURCH? is some of the best writing you've ever done. Thank you for your tireless efforts in Christ's service.

Mr. & Mrs. W.M. (Stevens, PA)

I have of late become a subscriber to The PLAIN TRUTH. After reading the article "Where Is The True Church?" and others, you have my interest piqued. As you have said, this is a very different view from what I am used to.

I have so many questions about this I could not put them all in a letter. My wife and I are both in our twenties and do not have much of a background in any church. There seems to be so many people today telling so many "truths" it makes it hard to tell what really is true. I have just requested your Bible course in hopes of gaining understanding. I would also like to request anything else that may be of help to us. Thank you for your time and for your help.

B.G. (Russellville, KY)

--Richard Rice, Mail Processing Center

ON THE WORLD SCENE

RELIGION AND POLITICS: RED HOT ISSUE; WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SHAME? Religion has emerged as a big issue in the 1984 U.S. presidential campaign. President Reagan's stands against legalized abortion and the federal ban against prayer in the public schools anger the secularists. Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, a practicing Roman Catholic,

is dogged on the campaign trail by "right-to-life" groups, who lambast her for her contention that while she is "personally" against abortion, that view should not interfere with upholding governmental policy regarding the right of women to have abortions. Both Ms. Ferraro and New York State governor Mario Cuomo have been roundly criticized for their ambivalent positions by the Archbishop of New York.

In general, the issue is not so much one of religion per se as what the moral basis of U.S. society is destined to be: a morality broadly based upon the Judeo-Christian heritage of the country--or one built upon the shifting sands of humanistic moral relativism. President Reagan has reacted angrily to comments from the liberal press who worry about whether his position undermines the guarantees provided for in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The President's response is that the issue is not one of "establishing religion" but rather one of rekindling a sense of religious-based public morality.

Early in the year, an article entitled "Reagan Success: Curbing Social Spending" in the February 2, 1984 LOS ANGELES TIMES analyzed Mr. Reagan's moral agenda:

President Reagan set out in 1981 to return the country to the ideals of an earlier era--a time, he recalled, when government and private charities stood by to help the old and the sick but when able-bodied Americans proudly preferred to get by on their own ambitions and energy.

It was also, he remembered, a time when morality and social values were molded by church and family, not by liberal court decisions or by government regulations that mandated school busing, legalized abortion and outlawed prayer in the schools. Reagan's speeches during the 1980 campaign had hit home with voters who believed that the social programs of the 1960s had promised too much, accomplished too little and spawned problems of their own. And his calls for a return to old-fashioned verities had echoed a growing public concern that society was losing its moral bearings.

The President is persisting in his attack on secular ideals in this campaign as well--to the dismay of the liberal intellectuals. In a speech before the Economic Club of Chicago, the President declared an end to America's "hedonistic heyday" of false values. In the past few decades, he added, "many of us turned away from the enduring values, the faith, the work ethic and the central importance of the family."

During the Republican convention in Dallas, Mr. Reagan appeared before a prayer breakfast. In his speech he said, "Politics and morality are inseparable, and as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related.... We establish no religion in this country nor will we ever.... But we poison our society when we remove its theological underpinnings. We court corruption when we leave it bereft of belief."

The President said religion played a critical role in the abolition of slavery and in other important events in the United States. But he added

that in the 1960s "the climate began to change--we began to make great steps in secularizing our nation and removing religion from its honored place." Those opposing school prayers in the name of tolerance were not tolerant at all, he said.

"Without God there is no virtue..." the President said. "Without God we are mired in the material...without God democracy will not and cannot long endure."

The liberals are most angry that Mr. Reagan has drawn considerable political support from the so-called "religious right"--the more conservative evangelicals and "born again" churches. These fundamentalists were at one time not involved in politics to any great extent. Now they are because the country is on the moral skids and mainline churches have become so liberal that they are more or less swimming with the secular tide. Here are excerpts of an article in NEWSWEEK, Sept. 17, 1984 entitled "Faith, Hope and Votes":

What most appalls the New Religious Rightists is what they perceive to be the breakdown of family life and government hamstrings on parental prerogatives. The key issues on their political agenda--abolition of abortion on demand, aid to religious schools and even organized prayer in public classrooms--are all efforts to restore to parents some of the influence they once enjoyed over their own children's lives, even outside the family circle. Each of these issues is fraught with legal and other implications, and they are not exclusively religious--or limited to conservatives. "There's a widespread perception that values are falling apart," says cultural historian Christopher Lasch, an influential liberal intellectual. "Violence, drugs and rapid social change are all making it hard to raise children as they ought to be raised. The collapse of the public schools, though due to many complicated causes, is also part of the dreary picture because they fail to uphold values and morality. We get no response to all this from the liberal quarter, where these issues are seen, if at all, as merely economic problems."

Also earlier this year, on March 20, 1984, the WALL STREET JOURNAL carried a powerful lead editorial entitled "School Prayer" condemning the moral decay in the country over the past two decades--and organized mainline religion's notable failure in countering it. The fact that this editorial appeared in the leading business daily, rather than in, say, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, says something about the state of religion:

The people mainly responsible for the school-prayer amendment are fundamentalist and evangelical Christians, who were aghast at what became of the moral quality of American society in the years from 1965 onward. The transformation of U.S. social and sexual mores in this period--from a fairly straight-laced tradition to one in which almost no behavior is socially proscribed--is a large and complicated subject. But basically what happened is that the new morality of big cities such as New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco was imposed on the rest of the country by movies, TV, magazines, advertising, music, novelists, playwrights and, through default, by organized religion....

The wave of secularization that rolled across the U.S. in the past 20 years disrupted many patterns of moral behavior among adults and between parents and their children. The assault on established values was fast-moving and often well-packaged. Many Americans, especially parents, badly needed counterarguments and support to restore moral balance to their families and communities. But outside the evangelical and fundamentalist communities, that help never arrived.

The mainline Protestant churches and the American Catholic Church failed to devote sufficient resources to creating a sturdy moral answer to aggressive modern secularism. Oh sure, the church doors are open every Sunday. But unhappily for those who enter, much contemporary American theology has come to be based in this period on a kind of dainty religious mush that has more in common with the sentiments of Rod McKuen and John Lennon than the precepts of Isaiah or St. John.

One can be sure there have been precious few sermons based on Isaiah 1-5 in mainline Protestant churches! According to William Rusher, editor of NATIONAL REVIEW, the U.S. has become, in the public, collective sector, virtually an atheistic society by default. He wrote in a March 23, 1984 syndicated column:

It is only in recent decades that atheist views (often more gently described as "secular") have grown vocal enough and strong enough to insist upon a stricter interpretation of the Constitutional provisions, and to persuade the courts to conform to their view....

The net effect was to drive acknowledgement of God's existence almost totally out of the collective life of the American society--a development, as some noted, that came close to making atheism our state religion by default.

The secularists, however, are dreaming of yet a better, "more exciting" society. Notice this prediction which appeared in an article "The Trend Toward Sexual Diversity" in the LOS ANGELES TIMES of May 11, 1984:

If variety really is the spice of life, get ready for more spice in the adult sexual arena, a Yale University sex expert suggests. Dr. Lorna J. Sarrel, of Yale Health Services, says diversity will be the key feature of adult sexual relationships of the future, and that sex experts also better gird for the trend. Her conclusions are contained in a report marking the 20th anniversary of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States.

Dr. Sarrel and other SIECUS board members contributing to the report also looked at trends among adolescents and the aging. "Adults will cohabit, marry, divorce, remarry, establish informal and complex kinship groups, have monogamous relationships of varying kinds, and have both same-sex and other sex relationships," Dr. Sarrel, assistant clinical professor of social work in psychiatry, said. "In fact, many individuals will experience all of this in a single lifetime."

"The Decline of Shame"

One interesting indicator of America's moral slide is what happened in the fabled "Miss America" contest last year. The winner, Vanessa Williams, was forced to resign when it was revealed that she had consented to allowing pornographic photos be taken of her (about two years previously). The photos were purchased by the publisher of PENTHOUSE magazine, Bob Guccione, who made an enormous profit in running them.

In the September 21, 1984 issue of NATIONAL REVIEW magazine, in an article entitled "The Decline of Shame" author Mona Charen writes of the missing equation in the whole sordid affair--the absence of shame, guilt, and, lo and behold, sin.

Has anyone else noticed that the forced resignation of Vanessa Williams has been variously described as a "flap," a "downfall," and a "personal tragedy," but nowhere as--what it would universally have been called twenty years ago--a scandal? The tone of our national response to this story raises the question: What has become of shame? Is there anything that can still make us blush, or have our sensibilities become too coarsened, our capacity to make moral judgments too muddled?

When the story first broke, the buzz of speculation centered not on how it could be that a woman of Vanessa Williams's dignity could have done what she did, but, instead, on whether or not she would "fight to save her crown." Well-wishers filled her parents' Millwood, New York, home with flowers, telegrams, and letters of encouragement. Outside the hotel where she had scheduled the press conference to announce her decision, supporters carried placards reading, "We love you Vanessa and will always respect you." Respect? Milton Williams, Vanessa's father, explained why he wanted his daughter to fight. Giving up the title, he said, "could be seen as an admission of guilt, of having done something that was wrong and distasteful, and we don't feel she did." No hint of mortification from Dad. When Miss Williams announced that she would indeed resign, the assembled reporters let out a spontaneous groan of sympathy....

Twenty years ago, a nice girl like Vanessa would in all likelihood have been terrified lest her father discover that she had lost her virginity. But today, we are not surprised to see Mr. Williams stubbornly defending behavior that can only be described as obscene. It doesn't strike us as unseemly. We've grown accustomed to "progressive" attitudes about such things.

And, in fact, it's easy to imagine what the response would have been if Mr. Williams's reaction had been more traditional. Suppose he had refused to talk to the press but word had leaked out that he thought his wayward daughter deserved a little trip to the woodshed. Surely the word "puritanical" would have followed him all the rest of his days. Joseph Papp, the Broadway producer, used that very term to characterize the decision of pageant officials to demand that Miss Williams surrender her title. "It's self-righteousness on the part of the pageant," he huffed, "puritanism of the worst kind."...

And while it would be unkind to seek to add to Miss Williams's pain, we should notice that her behavior was never actually condemned by opinion-makers. On the contrary, TV interviewers, editorialists, and others have been at pains to grant Miss Williams a forgiveness she has never requested. Her own stated reason for resigning was the "potential harm to the pageant and the deep division that a bitter fight may cause."

Vanessa Williams acknowledged that she felt embarrassed, but she has not, as yet, shown contrition. The distinction is important. We can feel embarrassed by lots of things that are not inherently shameful: forgetting the name of a colleague just when an introduction is required, leaving a personal letter in the office Xerox machine. But we feel contrite only when we know we were wrong (or, to use another old-fashioned idea, sinful).

Yet this utter lack of contrition didn't trouble Susan Taylor. She wrote in U.S.A. TODAY that "Vanessa Williams should not be held responsible.... I don't think that any of us would want to be held accountable for everything we ever said or did." Miss Taylor doesn't explain who, if not ourselves, should be held accountable for our actions....

If there is unanimity on anything, it is that PENTHOUSE publisher Bob Guccione's behavior was loathsome.... It points up just what a slender reed the law can be if you rely on it to enforce ethics and morals. Mr. Guccione's actions were well within the law. Second, if he were not utterly shameless (another old-fashioned idea), his detestable magazine would not even exist.... His is the moral stature we can expect from a pornographer.... This man doesn't blink at sado-masochistic bestiality. Should we expect him then to blush, to display delicacy of sentiment, at the thought of embarrassing Miss America? "Man," said Mark Twain, "is the only animal that blushes...or needs to." This sorry tale should remind us just how much we need to.

Miss America pageant officials at this year's event (Saturday night, September 15) are hoping that the latest crop of contestants have no skeletons in the closet.

--Gene H. Hogberg, News Bureau