

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.” Jeremiah 23:5.

the

OLIVE BRANCH

DECEMBER 2006-JANUARY 2007

THIS ISSUE

CONVENTION TIME

Bro. James Smith, the region's new overseer, encouraged spiritual perfection at the recent Ministers Convention.

MEET UNIONTOWN

The Church of God at Uniontown, PA is one of the largest in the U.S. Learn more about its mission and pastor.

CONTACT US



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Preparing God's People: Part 1

Many Church members are dismayed at the progress of the Church in these last days. It seems to have fallen short of how many have anticipated the work would go forth. This series of sermons seeks to remind us that the Lord does indeed have a plan and will execute it for the last days. The Church will play a pivotal role in that plan. Indeed, it will be at the vortex of God's last days tornado that shall sweep over this world. We are warned in 1 Peter 4:17-18:

- 17 *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*
- 18 *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

This passage from 1 Peter contains several golden nuggets that in turn will be examined during the next few sermons. This first sermon focuses on the theme: *“the time is come that judgment must begin at the*

house of God.” We generally think of judgment in terms of one being brought before a magistrate to be convicted and punished. But judgment



Regional Overseer James Smith

also can carry the connotation of a remedy being applied to correct what is deficient or lacking, or to purge and to purify the imperfect. Consider the words of Malachi 3:3-4:

- 3 *And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*
- 4 *Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.*



Ministers Convention 2006: Seeking perfection

Spiritual perfection was a primary theme of the Northeast Region Ministers Convention Oct. 21 in Uniontown, Pa.

“What is it that is standing between you and perfection,” Regional Overseer James Smith asked the 55 regional members who attended. “Whatever it is, we have to be willing to lay it down and, not only lay it down, but take up His cross and follow Him.”

In other convention activity, General Headquarters representative Kevin Werkheiser promoted the Missionary Partnership Alliance and outgoing Regional Overseer Elliot Leighty, pastor of the Uniontown church, was honored for his service with a video and music presentation.

Also, newly appointed auxiliary leaders spoke. They include ABM secretary Nancy Horchar, BTI secretary Shirley Sataneck, CPMA secretary Roger Fuester, VLB secretary Michelle Sokol, WMB/Ladies Retreat secretary Peggy Fordyce and Sunday School secretary John Burdett. Other appointees include Elma Kelly for Youth Camp, Lisa Smith as music coordinator, Shirley Sataneck as regional clerk/treasurer and Nora Edinger as assistant editor of **The Olive Branch**.



Top left: Bro. John Burdett, regional Sunday School secretary, speaks during the Sunday School portion of the convention. Top right: Sis. Nancy Smith, wife of Regional Overseer James Smith, leads the way for a march promoting Youth Camp. Bottom right: Bro. Thomas Kelly, pastor of Karns City, PA church, leads another segment of the Youth Camp march.

Wow! How time flies. Nearly two months have passed since the Assembly -- and before we know it, Election Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas will have come and gone. About this time of year, I start thinking about the holidays. Obviously, there is a little bit of anxiety -- only 57 more shopping days until Christmas as I write this -- but I can keep my eye on the calendar, and with a little planning, get everything done.

However, another special day will soon be upon us -- the day of Christ's return. The difference, of course, is that we don't know exactly when that will be. The Bible gives us many signs of Christ's coming: the rebirth of Israel as a nation (Isa. 11:11-12); wars between nations (Matthew 24:6-7); famines, disease epidemics and earthquakes (Matt. 24:6b); as well as persecution of believers (Matt. 24:9). Perhaps one of the most notable signs mentioned is the increase of false "christs" (messiahs) and false prophets (Matt. 24:11, 23-26). To be sure, we see these signs appear with increasing frequency, so we can know that His return is near.

Likewise, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Tim. 3:1), and what could be more perilous than the rumors of World War III that we hear on the news and see in the newspaper?

n Hezbollah Plans Annihilation of Israel

CPMA

2006-07 Theme:

"This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." Psalm 118:23

n North Korean Missile Tests Threaten the U.S.

n Civil War Imminent in Iraq

n Iran Will Use Nuclear Defense

n Steady Stream of Muslim Martyrs to Bring Down Western Civilization

We see headlines like these on nearly a daily basis -- so much so, in fact, that the average person is apt to respond, "So, what else is new?" When you think seriously about it, however, it becomes clear that that we indeed are living in perilous times. If all of this appears awfully scary, don't lose hope. As Christians, we are the populace of a divine kingdom; as members of The Church of God, we are part of the bride of Christ. Our expectations are as brilliant as heaven itself. The plans and wicked intentions of the leaders of this world will certainly not succeed -- but will be defeated by the return of Jesus Christ. The pandemonium that Satan will let loose upon the earth will be put down.

Returning with Jesus at the close of the Tribulation, we will pass the first 1,000 years of our endless existence serving as



*CPMA Secretary
Roger Fuester*

His emissaries and officers here on Earth (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2).

That's one of the reasons we're here now. We have a lot of lessons to learn that will aid us in being good servants throughout eternity. We get the best preparation by being faithful witnesses for the Savior in these trying times. We haven't been positioned here to suffer as victims of an evil world (though some of us might do that). We're here to do all we can to bring souls gone astray to the Savior.

If these are the last days and the Rapture is imminent ... so much the better! We'll soon see Jesus. On the other hand, if there's yet a little time remaining, then there's still a lot to do for him. Let us make the most of each precious moment by spreading the Gospel -- that Jesus offers eternal life and is coming back again. And oh yes, let's not forget to pay our CPMA dues—still only \$10 a year.

Best wishes for Christmas!

-----Meeting Uniontown-----

An open door

While about 50 people are actual members of the Uniontown, PA Church of God

and a number of others are faithful friends, many more church members from throughout the region

have attended services there. That is because Uniontown's 175-seat sanctuary and large fellowship hall have been home to the majority of regional activities since 1993, with members often providing meals on site to their many guests.

That kind of broad familiarity with his local church is fine with Bro. Elliot Leighty, pastor and former regional overseer. Bro. Leighty, who felt a pastoral call in 1970, said the outreach-minded church also conducts services at two area nursing homes and shares Sunday school literature with both a local prison work and a non-denominational mission.

Such commitment has been a long one. Uniontown church was established in the 1930s, by Bro. V.R. Sherill. Bro. Leighty has been pastor for 18 years, which he believes makes him the

longest serving pastor by about seven years.

Bro. Leighty, his wife Karen and their son Steven reside in a parsonage next to the church, which was built in the late 1970s/early 1980s. Their son Steven



currently is a junior at Penn State University's main campus.

Bro. Leighty, who has also ministered elsewhere in Pennsylvania and in Florida, said his primary calling has always been pastoral even though he has served as a regional overseer. He mentioned a tribute and love offering for that latter service that occurred during the October Ministers Convention.

"We have been richly blessed by the kindness and Christian love that (members) have shown to our family throughout the years," Bro. Leighty said. "The words 'thank you' hardly seem adequate, but they come from our heart. May God richly bless you as we continue in the work of our Lord and Savior."

A word from Uniontown's pastor

There are several passages of scripture that refer to a "solemn assembly" type of meeting of God's people. They were usually called for one purpose -- to receive God's help.

I Samuel 7:5-6 tells of the one-day prayer and fast that Samuel called on behalf of the people. The purpose of this gathering was to turn unto the Lord with all their hearts. God looked upon the sincere, earnest hearts of the people and was moved with compassion. He honored the meeting and miraculously protected them from the Philistines.



Uniontown pastor
Elliot Leighty

II Chronicles 20:3-4 speaks of Jehoshaphat proclaiming a fast throughout all Judah. Judah gathered together to ask help of the Lord. We find the hearts of the people were sincere and the spirit of God came into the midst of the congregation.

As God's Church, we are again today asking the Holy Ghost to direct us. Our prayer is that God's Spirit will come into the midst of the congregation now as He did in Jehoshaphat's day.

Jehoshaphat's example is one to follow. He bowed his head with his face to the ground and all the people fell before the Lord, worshipping Him. I think of the words in Joel 2:18: "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people." Is God not jealous for His Church? Will he not have pity on us and help us in this time of need?

Youth Camp 2007

Regional youth will be "Following Jesus" at this year's Youth Camp, scheduled for July 30-Aug. 3 at Camp Bucoco.



Camp Coordinator
Elma Kelly

This will be the first year for this camp location, which is sited just seven miles off I-79, north of Pittsburgh, PA.

This location will allow a longer camp and the ability to reduce costs by preparing our own meals. We are asking local churches to donate non-perishable foods to further assist with this. Each church will have a contact person for donations, with Sis. Elaine Smail of the Monongahela, PA church coordinating the overall food program.

Please watch **The Olive Branch** for photos of the new camp site and other information as camp time draws closer.

ABM

2006-07 Theme: Remain and Maintain



ABM Secretary
Nancy Horchar

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
Micah 6:8

How would you like an appointment with God? That would be very intimidating, appearing before God. It might seem like a job interview ... we want to make a good impression. But, He's not concerned what's on our resume, or whether we are dressed for success. He's concerned what's in our hearts! He accepts us even though we may think we're not very wise or important. No matter what we bring when we pray, we have God's attention and full acceptance.

Micah 5:8 tells us what God *does* require of us. As we all know, we cannot earn salvation -- we only receive it. This verse is not the plan of salvation or the path of salvation. God is telling us what He wants from those who are already His people. "To do justly, love mercy and walk humbly" are the outcomes of genuine faith. These things show us what God's people do -- not how they become His people. A living faith is seen by godly behavior. Our actions reveal whether our faith is true or not. These three things that Micah lists are characteristics of a life that is pleasing to God. Authentic faith produces personal holiness because it comes from God, along with the power and desire to live for Him. These things cannot be done without God. My prayer is that our families, our neighbors, friends and co-workers can see Christ working in us. I hope they see us *doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly* before God.

Band Leaders: *Here is a challenge.* Let's each pray daily for every member on the band we have been appointed to serve. Let us be of the same mind and spirit of Samuel, who said to the children of Israel, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." (1 Samuel 12:23). Also, encourage every band member to pray daily for everyone else in the band. Prayer will be our main source to help us Remain and Maintain.

Also, it's time again for each member to pay his or her emergency \$5 through local churches. Please remember to take care of this soon.

OVERSEER

continued from page 1

Verse 3 speaks of the future; while, verse 4 refers to a prior time of similar purification. Such a prior time “as in the days of old” can be found in the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, as described in 2 Chronicles 29. (At this point you will need your Bible, as this whole chapter will be examined in detail.)

When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, the house of God was in a miserable state of affairs. It was full of filth (v. 5); its many vessels were broken and discarded (v. 19); and its doors had been closed (v. 3) for a long time.

7 Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel.

One had to wonder if the house of God ever again would see its former glory ...

8 Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes.

Today, some wonder if the Church will ever again see its former glory, let alone “go on to perfection.” The answer is most assuredly “YES!” for our God has a plan!

In the days of Hezekiah, God inspired the king that the time had come for restoration of the house of God. But how would it come; how long would it take; would anyone listen?

10 Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us.

11 My sons be not now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense.

5 And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.

There was much work to be done. But before restoration of the house of God could begin, the ministry had to be cleansed:

15 And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and came, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD.

Afterwards, restoration of the house of God could begin. There will be plenty of work for us to do, too. What are you doing to get ready?

16 And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron.

17 Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of the LORD: so they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end.

The cleansing and restoration of God’s house was completed in only two weeks! Not only was the house of God restored, but the many vessels that had been defiled and cast away were repaired and consecrated for service.

18 Then they went in to Hezekiah the king, and said, We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, and the altar of burnt offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the shewbread table, with all the vessels thereof.

19 Moreover all the vessels, which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.

This was only the beginning! With the house of God restored, with its ministry and vessels cleansed and prepared for service, it now could assume its rightful role in God’s plan for His people. The next order of business was for Hezekiah to call the city’s rulers and people to the house of God for worship. Sacrifice and atonement is made for all Jerusalem and all Judah.

20 Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD.

21 And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he goats, for a sin offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them on the altar of the LORD.

In prophetic anticipation of what God would yet do in 2 Chronicles 30 (and which we will consider in a future sermon), Hezekiah called for sacrifice to be made for all Israel—not just for Jerusalem, not just for Judah, but for all of Israel.

24 And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.

The people did more than go through the motions of sacrifice; they joined in heart felt worship of God. This was more than a formality; this was indeed worship!

28 And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

29 And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were pres-

ent with him bowed themselves, and worshipped.

30 Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.

Having repented, having made atonement, having humbled themselves before God; the people now expressed their appreciation of what God meant in their lives:

31 Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the LORD. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt offerings.

34 But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests.

35 And also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings, and the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order.

The falling away of the people had occurred over several generations, with momentary reversals, but

Many people today behave as though they expect the last days preparation for Christ's return to be a gradual transformation ... They act as though they have plenty of time to prepare themselves to serve God.

nevertheless a steady downward decline in dedication to God, in fervent worship and obedience. But now, all this was washed away in a matter of two weeks!

36 And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly.

How could such a mighty transformation occur in such a short time? "God had prepared the people." And this was only the beginning, of God's quick work.

Many people today behave as though they expect the last days preparation for Christ's return to be a gradual transformation -- a little growth here, a little improvement there. They act as though they have plenty of time (plenty of warning) to prepare themselves to serve

God. They are totally unprepared for what God will do in these last days.

In coming sermons, we will examine further just how quickly the Lord can wrap up the last days -- even while many look on in astonishment. It is time to heed Romans 9:28.

28 For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

2007 CALENDAR

March 10 East District Convention (Newark, DE; Boston, MA; Pittsville, MD; Philadelphia, PA)

March 24 West District Convention (Grove City, PA; Karns City, PA; Monongahela, PA; Uniontown, PA)

May 4-6 Ladies Retreat at Camp Sunrise, Markleysburg, PA

May 12-25 Bible Training Institute in Charleston, TN

July 13-15 Northeast Regional Convention

July 30-Aug. 3 Youth Camp at Camp Bucoco near Pittsburgh.

Aug. 27-Sept. 3 General Assembly in Chattanooga, TN

Some final thoughts...

Now that you've had eight pages to check out *The Olive Branch's* new look, let me share something I discovered while experimenting with our excellent new software.

After laboring over the dove and branch on the front, I began to wonder if I even had the correct symbol to go with this newsletter's name. After all, the "olive branch" in



Assistant Editor
Nora Edinger

question could be anything from the leaf plucked by the dove Noah released to one of Jesus's illustrations to the peace symbol popularized by Picasso in the late 1940s.

Whatever the original intent of the name, I realized that it ultimately refers to the Righteous Branch of Jeremiah 23:5. It's all about Jesus -- from the newness of life and deliverance from death of Noah's branch to Gentiles being grafted in to Israel's holy rootstock to the heart peace that only He can bring.

Newsletter designs change. Even assistant editors change. (Thank you, Sis. Denise Satanek, for your years of service.) But, Jesus being the center of this publication never will. So, the dove stays and, with it, a hope that *The Olive Branch* will continue to represent Him well. X

WMB

2006-07 Theme: Work while it is day ... Behold the Bridegroom cometh.



WMB Secretary
Peggy Fordyce

This year's theme is a timely one. Looking at the first part, we know that God has given us an allotted time to finish the work. Jesus is still saying to us today what He spoke to his disciples in John 4:35: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." In all areas of this world there are souls still waiting for us to come and minister to them. While there is still light of day, we must thrust in the sickle.

"Behold the Bridegroom cometh," also has timely meaning. In Matthew 25, we find this phrase in the parable of the 10 virgins, which represent two types of people, the spiritually prepared and the spiritually unprepared. They all had lamps. Some had oil, representing God's Spirit, and some had no oil. Verse 6 says "And at midnight there was cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." By verse 10 it is clear the unprepared missed the call while they went to buy oil. We need to heed the harsh lesson they learned (being left out of the marriage celebration) and make sure we are prepared for the call to the Marriage Supper

of the Lamb. The door to this most important event will soon be shut. Will we be ready? Have we done all that could have been done to see that others are prepared?

In other missions reminders:

-- Support the Missionary Partnership Alliance, a monthly allotment for our national overseers. Your local WMB leader has pledge forms.

-- Have a mission crusade in your area. Whether you live in a rural area or a metropolis, the community is right at hand.

-- Don't forget Ladies Retreat, coming May 4-6 at Camp Sunrise in Markleysburg, PA. Sis. Connie Wilson will be guest minister and the theme will be "The Apple of His Eye."

-- Start making items for the mission table at the 2007 General Assembly. We have all winter to get together and work for the cause of missions.

X