

To all the Brothers and Sisters of the West Region,

As Jesus stood before his accusers the night before his death, they charged him with blasphemy for claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God. (**Matthew 26:63ff**) They had, in fact, fully understood these details from his message but due to the hardness of their hearts they had refused to believe it. For the Jews, Jehovah was the Creator and Maker of all things, but only in a poetic or symbolic sense was he ever referred to as ‘Father’ in the Old Testament. But at the core of Jesus’ teaching was the truth that the God of heaven was not only his Father, but desirous of a ‘father-child’ relationship with every one of us. One of the greatest expressions of generosity ever stated by Jesus was the inclusion of a simple possessive adjective in beginning the Lord’s Prayer, “*Our Father in heaven...*” (**Matthew 6:9**). The Son of Glory was born into this world so that he might share with mankind the greatest gift ever – spiritual sonship with the Father, the God of heaven and earth! *As we spend this day honoring and encouraging the earthly fathers among us, let us not forget our heavenly Father who so richly provides for our physical and spiritual needs.*

THANKS FOR YOUR SACRIFICE!

On behalf of the Middle East churches, I would like to again thank each one of you for your generosity and sacrifice. During the past few weeks, members of the West Region have contributed more than \$260,000 for support of Middle East missions (about 10 times our weekly contribution) and I truly believe that Paul’s commendation to the Corinthian church holds true for you as well, “*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has give you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*” (**2 Corinthians 9:12-15**)

THE SEARCH FOR A REGION EVANGELIST

The last few months have definitely been both exciting and interesting for the West Region as we have sought to imitate the spirit of **Acts 6** in our search for a new Region Evangelist. Al and I are very grateful for the seven brothers serving as a spiritual advisory group, and have also appreciated the involvement of many of you through your prayers and the sharing of your thoughts and convictions at our open sector meetings and in personal conversations. As already outlined in the last *Region Evangelist Update* of March 14 (and in Al’s *Elder Update* of May 30th), the 47 potential candidates named by the members at our open meetings was consequently reduced to a group of 16 by the advisory group due to the following reasons:

- 1) 15 candidates known to be firmly established and happily devoted in ministry positions elsewhere;
- 2) 11 candidates already known to be definitively not interested in the possibility of working in the ministry here in West Los Angeles;
- 3) 3 candidates with insufficient ministry experience to lead a Region as large as the West Region, and;
- 4) 2 candidates in fragile situations that should not be approached.

Al and I then contacted these remaining 16 candidates: 5 of the 16 answered that they were presently satisfied and convinced about their present situations, and 11 of the 16 agreed to receive the letter and prayerfully consider its message. Of these remaining 11, Chris Reed was already engaged in discussion with the Denver church about an evangelist position there (and subsequently accepted that invitation) and Doug Arthur was also being approached by the Baltimore church with an offer that he later accepted. In the end, there was only candidate that actually responded positively and decisively to our process and invitation to come out for an interview and that has been Christian Ray (along with his wife, Debbie Flores) who is presently leading the Kiev Church of Christ, Ukraine.

COMMITTING OUR PLANS TO GOD

On Wednesday evening, June 9th, the West Region met together for a prayer devotional and then committed the next week to a time of prayer. We also decided to set aside Tuesday, June 15th for fasting and prayer so that God would guide us in our decision making. We also took some time to examine some Scriptures following the theme of 'Knowing God's Will' and discussed some of the different ways in which leadership decisions were made in the book of Acts:

- 1) **Acts 1:15-26** – in seeking to replace the place of Judas among the Twelve, they first narrowed down the field by requiring that the candidate be an eye-witness of the ministry of Jesus from the beginning and then after committing the decision to prayer – they cast lots;
- 2) **Acts 6:1-6** – in seeking to meet the needs of the Greek-speaking widows, the apostles asked the church to select seven spiritual men who were in turn approved by the apostles and installed in the ministry of benevolence;
- 3) **Acts 13:1-3** – the prophets and teachers gathered together to worship and pray, and the Holy Spirit spoke asking them to specifically set aside Paul and Barnabas for mission work, so they sent them off;
- 4) **Acts 16:1-3** – Timothy was highly recommended by the brothers of the local congregation so Paul decided to take him along and began to train him as an evangelist.

It is very interesting to note the place of prayer in these decisions, as well as well-defined spiritual qualities and the part played by human opinion and commendation!

It was also explained that even though our process had only produced one viable candidate at the present time, the Advisory group felt that we should still hold to our original plan and bring Christian back for a second interview before making the final decision of the Region Evangelist position – Debbie will not be able to be present since she will be giving birth to their second child sometime in early July. At that time we will:

- 1) have Christian speak at a Sunday service when the other rotation of Kids' Kingdom will be serving;
- 2) meet with at least five couples from the LAICC leaders' group (probably two elders and three evangelists to be determined by the Advisory group);
- 3) set up times for open fellowships where members of the Region can spend some time with Christian;
- 4) possibly a separate time of deeper Bible teaching for some part of the Region (i.e., singles, Bible Talk leaders, etc.);

Also of note at that devotional, the advisory group thought it both wise and prudent to put forth an additional proposal before the members of the West Region. Since we all were in agreement that the process had definitely put us in contact with a solid ministry couple who are interested in working in Los Angeles, it was proposed that we would at least extend to Christian and Debbie the offer to be the Sector leader couple for the West LA Sector (presently 450 members) if no significant issues had been raised in opposition to it by the end of our week of prayer. (This offer was not meant to preclude of the possible offer of being the Region Evangelist, but was meant to convey both an affirmation of our need in the sector as well as the assessment of Christian and Debbie's capabilities after the first interview.) As of last Thursday evening I am happy to report that no such issues were raised to Al, the advisory group, the staff or myself, so on Friday I was able to extend this offer to Christian via telephone. As is only appropriate, Christian and Debbie are taking some time to prayerfully consider the offer in its present form and will be making a reply back to the Region by the end of June.

In closing, I thought it would be encouraging to share with you the present membership numbers for the West Region. So far this year we have had 13 baptisms, 1 restoration, 13 move-ins from other congregations, as well as 17 members leaving the fellowship, and 4 move-outs to other congregations. Therefore, our present membership is 640 with a year-to-date increase of +6. Truly God has many people in this city so let our lips continue to testify that '*Jesus is Lord*' (**Romans 10:9**) and our lives affirm that '*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is not other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*' (**Acts 4:12**).

Your brother in Christ, Andy Fleming