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# A call for compassion

Evangelicals commit to refugee resettlement efforts

by TIMOTHY C. MORGAN, Religion News Service

Rejecting fearmongering about the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the U.S., about 100 evangelical leaders are calling on Christians and their churches “to support ministries showing the love of Jesus to the most vulnerable, those in desperate need, and the hurting.”

“Our statement is to change a narrative of fear and instead focus on faith and compassion,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research in Nashville, Tenn. “Our desire is not to resettle everybody in another country. When a house is burning down, we need to put out the fire and rescue people fleeing the fire.”

Meeting on Dec. 17 at Wheaton College, outside of Chicago, evangelical leaders said in their statement, “We will motivate and prepare our churches and movements

to care for refugees. We will not be motivated by fear but by love for God and others. ... We cannot allow voices of fear to dominate. Instead, we commit to actions of love and compassion for refugees.” They said there are nearly 60 million displaced or refugee people worldwide, “a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented size.”

The planning event brought together top leaders from World Relief, World Vision, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Wesleyan Church, the Assemblies of God, and more than 50 other groups for dialogue in advance of a larger event on Jan. 20, designed to develop a sustainable Christian response to the global refugee crisis.



A group of refugee families escorted by Slovenian police walk from Slovenia to the Austrian transit camp on the border. The countries along the West Balkan route, including Slovenia, have now restricted access to refugees who can prove they are fleeing war, effectively meaning those from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In mid-November, the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, the Humanitarian Disaster Institute, and LifeWay Research announced they would convene what they are calling the GC2 Summit, which references the biblical Great Commission and Great Commandment from Jesus to spread the gospel to all nations and exhibit love of neighbor.

Since the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., Americans have become more fearful in general. A Dec. 9 NBC/Wall Street Journal survey of

1,000 U.S. adults found that “national security and terrorism” displaced “job creation and the economy” as the No. 1 issue for the federal government needs to address.

Much public anxiety has focused on the Obama administration’s plan during the next year to resettle in the U.S. 10,000 refugees from the Syrian civil war in addition to increasing overall refugee resettlement to 85,000, from 70,000 last year. Since October 2010, the U.S. has resettled 2,234 Syrian refugees. A November survey by Ipsos Public Affairs on behalf of World Vision

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from the publishers...

### New format, same mission

It’s just different paper. Well, a different size, too.

After our message in November about a possible move to digital-only, readers responded that they would much rather see us produce a more economical publication in print than to eliminate print altogether. This was especially of concern to those who didn’t have access to a computer and, subsequently, no access to the Internet.

Despite living in a digital world, many of our senior readers still rely solely on the printed word. Even many who have embraced the digital age are finding that the experience of reading a hard copy publication is preferred over scrolling on an electronic device.

But for those who want that digital experience, Refreshed is available online as a downloadable file or on-screen flipbook. It looks great on an electronic notepad.

Whether as a magazine or newspaper, whether in print or online, our message is the same: We will continue to present engaging, real stories and inspirational columns and features that offer our readers practical solutions to the challenges and complexities of life.

Lamar & Theresa Keener  
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found that 41 percent of respondents were fearful of Syrian refugees, a rapid rise from the 25 percent figure recorded in October.

In Syria, about 4.4 million people have fled violence to neighboring nations for shelter and safety from the nearly five-year-old civil war. Right now, the conflict in Syria creates more refugees, mostly women and young children, than in any other nation. “Moments like these are when Christians cannot remain silent and still,” the statement said.

“Critical moments like these are opportunities for us to be like Jesus, showing and sharing His love to the hurting and the vulnerable in the midst of this global crisis,” the statement said.

But the Obama administration’s plan to ramp up resettlement of Syrian refugees, which depends largely on nine nonprofit agencies, has faced sharp criticism. In Congress, House Republicans have complained that the mandatory screening of refugees is failing and risks allowing radicalized Muslims to enter the U.S. to carry out violent attacks.

So far, House critics have been unsuccessful



Two days before Christmas, refugees wait to register in the refugee camp of Vinojug in Gevgelija (Macedonia) after having crossed the border with Greece at Eidomeni.

in attempts to delay refugee resettlement until new security screening protocols are in place. State governors in Texas and Indiana have also been unsuccessful in

stopping resettlement of Syrian refugees in their states this month.

Others have accused refugee resettlement agencies of having a financial conflict

of interest in their advocacy for refugee resettlement because the agencies receive a commission when a refugee repays government loans for travel to the U.S. In response, resettlement agency leaders say the commissions that they receive are necessary to sustain their programs operationally.

During a press conference, evangelical leaders said more churches are stepping forward to resettle refugees. Agency leaders emphasized that they offer their services based on need, not religious affiliation.

“We unashamedly want people to see the love of Christ in the actions that we manifest (as) we render aid,” said Frank Page, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention. “But never is ministry or aid dependent on one’s acceptance of the Gospel message.”

Since the start of the Syrian conflict, the U.S. has spent \$4.5 billion on humanitarian assistance inside Syria and in the region, the largest amount of any nation. ■

*Learn more about GC<sup>2</sup> Summit and the Christian Declaration on Caring for Refugees at [www.gc2summit.com](http://www.gc2summit.com).*

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## refreshed

VOLUME 3 | NUMBER 1

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Refreshed is an independent, faith-based newspaper published monthly by Selah Media Group. It is distributed in bulk, free of charge, to hundreds of locations throughout San Diego County.

For a 1-year mail subscription, send \$24.95 to the address below or visit [refreshedmag.com](http://refreshedmag.com).

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# FIGHTING TRAFFICKING

PLNU uses multi-faceted approach to combat sex trade

by LORI ARNOLD

**T**hirteen months ago, as families across San Diego County were preoccupied with the trappings of Christmas, law enforcement officials interrupted the season of light with the reality of the region's dark underbelly after announcing the infiltration of a national human trafficking ring.

More than 20 gang members were arrested in the joint operation, which was based in Lemon Grove and Spring Valley.

In addition to the arrests, Operation Stolen Souls was able to identify more than 100 victims, several as young as 12 years old. Many of the victims were recruited on local school campuses, either by pimps called recruiters or experienced, high-ranking prostitutes, with false promises of a luxurious lifestyle. They were then kept in the sex trade by intimidation, physical abuse, threats of violence or being plied with alcohol or drugs. Some of the victims were "branded" with gang tattoos; some were trafficked as far away as Kansas, Michigan and Texas.

The undercover bust was no surprise to Kim Jones, an East County mom who began volunteering with several human trafficking programs in 2013, but the discovery of the trade's tendrils into local schools unnerved her.

"It was that moment that I realized this is happening everywhere ... and right next door," she said. "It upset me, but it also compelled me. This is happening to girls of all races, all socio-economic status, all family backgrounds. While some girls are certainly more at risk—runaways, foster kids, kids without a strong family structure—every child is a target."

It wasn't too long ago that Jones, like many Americans, believed that human trafficking was something that only happened overseas.

"I had no idea that human trafficking happened in San Diego and that survivors lived in our community," said Jones, who was hired in October as the program director for the Center for Justice & Reconciliation at Point Loma Nazarene University. She came on staff after volunteering with the group for several years. The Center for Justice & Reconciliation addresses a variety of social issues by researching and studying topics of poverty and oppression, then working to create solutions through

faith-based dialogue and social engagement.

"I'm a great example of how anyone can get involved," said Jones, a PLNU alumna. "When I found out that the Center for Justice & Reconciliation was actively working on the community's anti-trafficking efforts I made a call to offer my help."

With her background in marketing, special events and fundraising, CJR was eager to put Jones to work.

"CJR needed help in all of these areas," she said. "It's the perfect example of when your gifts and talents match up with your passions—and to do this work in a place I love and respect like the university makes it even better."

Jones' interest in human trafficking was originally piqued after a friend told her about the work of Generate Hope, a San Diego-based ministry that operates a safe house and other programs for survivors. Jones now volunteers with the Generate Hope.

"I have a teenage daughter and I thought of girls her age who were forced into the sex trade and I knew I had to do something about it," she said.

After undergoing training in interpersonal relationships with Generate Hope, Jones volunteered as a mentor to a trafficking survivor.

"Each survivor has such a unique story

and a difficult past to come to terms with," Jones said. "Every person deserves dignity, respect and compassion as they seek a new life."

"I found the best thing I could do with the woman I mentored was spend my time with her. I let her tell me the pieces of her story that she wanted me to know. I shared my life with her, prayed with her, took her places—like a walk on the beach or a movie—and just tried to communicate to her (that) 'You matter to me, you have value and you are loved.'"

## Stunning numbers

At the core of what the center does is research, which helps them to understand the scope of the issue and identify possible solutions. In October, the center released an eye-opening study that found that human trafficking in San Diego has created an \$810 million underground economy. Additionally, they found that the region has between 8,830 and 11,733 sex trafficking victims/survivors a year.

"We were surprised at the scale of sex trafficking going on in San Diego, and the scale of the income," said Jamie Gates, M.Div., PhD, the center's director and a co-researcher on the project. "We were also surprised at how wide a range of methods are used to exploit other people."

The study included interviews with edu-

## An inside look at San Diego's gang-trafficking connection

In October, the groundbreaking study "Measuring the Nature and Extent of Gang Involvement in Sex Trafficking in San Diego" discovered some disturbing trends.

Four years in the making, the study was financed by the National Institute of Justice and involved researchers Dr. Jamie Gates from Point Loma Nazarene University and Dr. Ami Carpenter of the University of San Diego. The scope of the study—involving hundreds of current and former gang-affiliated individuals, schools, law enforcement agencies and victim service providers—prompted researchers to call it one of the largest, most comprehensive human trafficking case studies in the United States to date.

Data was collected from 1,205 individuals, including 156 gang-affiliated persons and/or traffickers, 702 first-time prostitution offenders, 189 survivors from eight victim services programs, and 140 county school administrators and staff.

### Key Findings:

- Sex trafficking is San Diego's 2nd largest underground economy after drug trafficking. The underground sex economy represents an estimated \$810 million in annual revenue.
- The study methodology produced San Diego County's first credible estimate of sex trafficking victims/survivors per year: 8,830 to 11,773. Of these, 1,766 came into contact with law enforcement

- At least 110 gangs are involved in commercial exploitation of people; 85 percent of pimps/sex trafficking facilitators interviewed were gang-connected.
- Pimps/sex trafficking facilitators are not primarily African American. The sample of traffickers in prison contained roughly an equal number of white, black and Hispanic facilitators
- 15 years old is the average age of entry into child commercial sexual exploitation.
- Sex trafficking facilitators control 4.5 victim/survivors on average.
- 42 percent of first-time prostitution arrests are in fact cases involving sex trafficking.
- Domestic trafficking accounts for the majority of CSEC cases (commercial sexual exploitation of children).
- Transborder criminal networks are involved in trafficking minors and adults between Mexico and the United States; 20 percent of trafficking victims referred to service providers come from Mexico and 10 other countries.
- Female recruiters and pimp/sex trafficking facilitators are perceived to be a significant and a growing feature of the underground sex economy.
- Significant CSEC recruitment is happening on high school and middle school campuses.





Kim Jones, left, is the program director for the Center for Justice & Reconciliation at Point Loma Nazarene University. Jamie Gates is the center's director and a co-researcher on the project.

cators from campuses throughout San Diego. All of them, Jones said, “reported some sort of recruitment or victims in their schools. The results of the research did not specify any particular schools, because we wanted to be very careful to not call out a particular school. No school wants to be known as a recruiting ground for sex trafficking.”

While schools have become a new hunting ground, teen runaways still remain at a high risk.

“Statistics show that runaway teens have less than two days before they are likely going to be approached by a pimp or a recruiter, and foster kids are extremely vulnerable to being trafficked,” Jones said.

Recruiters are not only well-trained on scoping out vulnerable young girls, but they have developed nuanced skills that make these teens easy prey.

“I heard a story of a recruiter who said that when he saw a girl at the mall he would say hi and tell her she was beautiful,” Jones said. “If she looked him in the eye and responded he moved on. If she looked down and did not make eye contact he knew he had met a potential new ‘girl.’ Many recruiters today use the guise of ‘boyfriend’ to lure in the victims.”

In addition to developing solutions, the center works to educate the public about the complexities of human trafficking, including countering myths and preconceived biases. The most pressing, Jones said, is how the public views prostitutes.

“We are trying to change the language from prostitute to victim or survivor,” she said. “Think about it. Who gets up one morning and decides they want to be a prostitute? There are forces that drive victims to this place. I’ve met victims from all walks of life. All races. All socio-economic backgrounds.

“The reality is that most women who are selling sex are doing it under force, fraud or coercion—or they began that way and now they cannot see a way out.”

#### Committed collaboration

Because of San Diego’s proximity to the border—and its consistent ranking as one of the top human trafficking regions in the

country—multiple agencies have begun working together to combat the crime. In 2011, the San Diego County Regional Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Advisory Council was formed in 2011.

“Communities all over the United States are watching what we are doing, and even representatives from governments all over the world are brought to San Diego to learn how we are working to combat trafficking in our region,” Jones said. “We have come together in a powerful way with law enforcement, prosecution, child welfare, direct services, education, community organizations and more working together to change the trajectory.”

In addition, the FBI conducts annual Operation Cross Country stings, which as of last October, resulted in the rescue of more than 4,800 children and the conviction of 2,000 suspects nationwide, including at least 15 life sentences since the program began in 2003.

Some of the local busts have been brought about by trained school officials and parents who spotted the signs of trafficking and called law enforcement.

San Diego’s broad-based coalition includes numerous churches that have created their own outreach ministries, with some participating in Churches Against Trafficking, a network that rotates monthly meetings between North and East County. The group involves more than 50 churches, ministries and parachurch organizations. CAT is committed to raising awareness, promoting organizations combating the crime and offering encouragement and prayer.

A practical initiative undertaken by the churches, Jones said, is helping required businesses to comply with the posting of state-mandated human trafficking posters.

“Many of these businesses don’t know or don’t comply and church members all over the county have visited local businesses to give them copies of the poster and request that it be posted,” she said.

#### A powerful voice

Center director Gates, a professor of cultural anthropology, said churches have

## Anti-human trafficking resources

### Restore International

Founded in 2003 by Point Loma Nazarene University adjunct professor Bob Goff, Restore was founded to free those who were caught in bonded labor, sex trafficking, or otherwise exploited in India. In 2006, it expanded its focus to include human rights violations and education, and now serves Uganda, India, Somalia, Iraq and Nepal. [www.restoreinternational.org](http://www.restoreinternational.org)

### Churches Against Trafficking

Churches Against Trafficking is a network of more than 50 North and East County churches that have committed to fight human trafficking by raising awareness, promoting organizations that are combating the crime, and offering encouragement and prayer. [www.abolishhumantrafficking.com](http://www.abolishhumantrafficking.com)

### FreeThem Road

The San Diego ministry, founded by Ginger Shaw, is a grassroots, non-profit organization that advocates for human trafficking awareness. It does so primarily by working to get National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline posters posted wherever possible, particularly in major transportation corridors where victims are most likely to see them. [www.freethemroad.org](http://www.freethemroad.org)

### Generate Hope

The mission of the faith-based ministry is to serve San Diego’s sex trafficking survivors by offering a real way out. GenerateHope provides a long-term, comprehensive housing and recovery program to young women who have been sexually trafficked, providing them skills that enable them to reintegrate into society and walk powerfully into their future. The ministry needs just \$20,000 to purchase the South County property that has been serving as their headquarters. [www.generatehope.org](http://www.generatehope.org)

### Hidden Treasures Outreach

Rock Church’s Hidden Treasures volunteers reach out to women and children who are being sex trafficked in San Diego County. Each of the outreach teams includes men and women who are specially trained in effective sex trade ministry. [www.sdrock.com/ministries/trafficking/streetoutreach](http://www.sdrock.com/ministries/trafficking/streetoutreach)

### San Diego Dream Center

The Dream Center offers victims of human trafficking a six-month recovery home and an emergency shelter for adult female survivors of domestic human trafficking in California. The ministry also offers a rescue component that includes an outreach program, emergency hotline, networking with other organizations and law enforcement, and emergency shelter services. [www.sandiegodreamcenter.org](http://www.sandiegodreamcenter.org)

### Seeds of Hope

Founded by former San Diego businesswoman Penny Williams, the ministry was started after Williams met a man who said he traveled to Costa Rica regularly because of its sex industry. Williams and her husband sold their home and relocated to Costa Rica to begin Clubhouses catering to girls ages 8 to 17. The clubhouses offer safety, rehabilitation and education to children who are at risk or victims of sexual exploitation. The ministry now operates five clubhouses serving 120 at-risk girls. [www.seedsofhopehome.com](http://www.seedsofhopehome.com)

### Agape International Missions

Originally launched as a church planting ministry, the Roseville, California organization changed its mission to combating human trafficking in 2005. Its primary focus is Cambodia. [www.agapewebsite.org](http://www.agapewebsite.org)

### Not for Sale

The group was founded in 2001 after Bay Area resident Dave Batstone discovered that his favorite restaurant was involved in a human trafficking ring. The San Francisco-based organization assists at-risk youth by offering stability, safety, educational opportunities and jobs. [www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org)

### Slavery No More

The mission of Calabasas, California-based Slavery No More is to offer a variety of resources to the most effective organizations working to combat and abolish modern-day slavery and human trafficking, and to create awareness of the diversity of opportunities for meaningful personal engagement. The main emphasis is on working with non-governmental agencies, while also working with local and national law enforcement. [www.slaverynomore.org](http://www.slaverynomore.org)

### Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking

This Christian alliance mobilizes organizations and communities through resource sharing, tools and collaboration. Located in Baltimore, its resources include a tool kit for churches. [www.faastinternational.org](http://www.faastinternational.org)

### Others

**International Justice Mission** — [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)

**Hope for Justice** — [www.hopeforjustice.org](http://www.hopeforjustice.org)

**Covenant House** — [www.covenanthouse.org](http://www.covenanthouse.org)

**National Educators to Stop Trafficking** — [www.nesteducators.org](http://www.nesteducators.org)

**Demand Abolition** — [www.demandabolition.org](http://www.demandabolition.org)

**DEMANDForum** — [www.demandforum.net](http://www.demandforum.net)





long participated in helping to curb social injustice.

“There is a misperception that the church has only been paying attention in the last few years,” Gates said. “Look at the issue of slavery in the Progressive Era (1890s to the 1920s). It was the church who pushed for action. But the issue did go dormant, and it’s been in the last 20 years that the church has really been paying attention again.”

He said it was the work of churches that helped secure the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, a federal law designed to combat the sex trade, slavery and involuntary servitude.

“As long as there are people who buy

sex we will have a problem,” Jones added. “If we can be brave enough to talk about it in our churches—to educate people that when they buy sex it is not without a victim. The person is likely trafficked and under the thumb of a trafficker who is controlling them.”

Churches can also assist by providing donations to ministries or organizations that are actively working to stop human trafficking.

“What if every church would adopt one of our local agencies and provide the very needed resources to help survivors find a new way of living? That would be powerful,” Jones said.

“We also need to look within our walls. Kids in our own congregations are at risk.

## Events on anti-human trafficking efforts

**Jan. 7:** The 5th Annual Freedom Breakfast, celebrating Human Trafficking Awareness Month and Angels of Trafficking Award, will be held from 8 to 10 a.m. at the San Diego Library. Sponsored by the Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition. \$20. [www.bsccolalition.org](http://www.bsccolalition.org)

**Jan. 16:** The Third Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Rally from 1 to 2:30 p.m. at Sixth Avenue and Laurel Street in Balboa Park. Hosted by the Junior League of San Diego. [www.jlsd.org](http://www.jlsd.org)

**Jan. 21:** The monthly San Diego Human Trafficking Community Committee meeting from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at Point Loma Nazarene University Mission Valley (Room 315). The network of civic, service, non-profit and faith-based organizations and individuals meets each month to discuss approaches to ending human trafficking by raising awareness, advocating for social and legislative change, and engaging the community and its citizen in action. [www.abolishhumantrafficking.com](http://www.abolishhumantrafficking.com)

**Jan. 23:** Freedom NOW Fair, an anti-human trafficking street event, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the corner of Ohio Street and University Avenue. Organized by Survivor Leader Network of San Diego. [www.thehopeprojectsd.com](http://www.thehopeprojectsd.com)

**Jan. 31:** Orientation meeting for volunteers with Rock Church’s Hidden Treasures outreach ministry to those in the sex industry. The session is scheduled for 1:45 to 4 p.m. The location will be announced at a later date. [hiddentreasures.sd@gmail.com](mailto:hiddentreasures.sd@gmail.com)

**Feb. 5:** Children of the Immaculate Heart Dinner and Gala from 7 to 9 p.m. at Our Mother of Confidence Church, 3131 Governor Drive. The free event is a fundraising dinner and silent auction to a benefit shelter for female minor victims of human trafficking. [www.childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org](http://www.childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org)

**Feb. 6:** Sex and Human Trafficking: Seduced—The Grooming of America’s Teenagers seminar will be presented from 9 a.m. to noon at Calvary Chapel Lakeside, 9839 River St. The free session will explore the warning signs, what to look for, how to inform children and others to recognize what is happening, and the dangers of social media. [www.cclakeside.com](http://www.cclakeside.com)

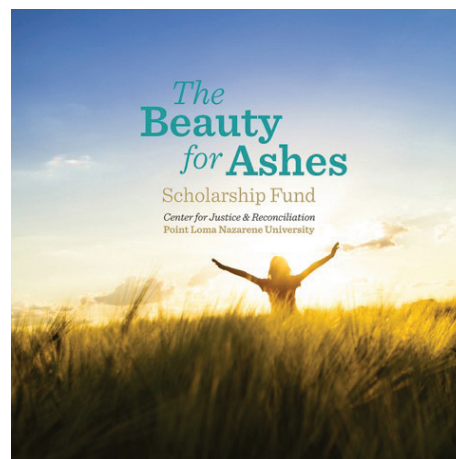


We need more foster families who will take in and nurture high-risk children and we need to pay attention to the recruiting that is going on right under our noses.”

### Beauty for Ashes

In addition to promoting practical efforts to help such as the poster project and recruiting Christian foster parents, PLNU has created its own niche by developing Beauty for Ashes, a new scholarship program for victims of sex and labor trafficking. The idea came from a survivor who shared her story for the first time during a meeting of sociologists. During her presentation she said her dream was to finish her degree.

“(It) started as a dream with a few of us who were considering how PLNU might be involved more deeply in the work to help survivors find a new life,” Jones said.



“We’ve been talking to survivors from all over the world. You can imagine the kind of tenacity it takes for someone to pursue a university education. We’ve been amazed at the resiliency of the survivors we are talking to who are currently considering applying to the university or are in the application process.”

The first Beauty for Ashes scholarship recipient at PLNU will begin attending classes in January, which also happens to be national Human Trafficking Awareness Month. It is believed to be the first scholarship of its kind in the country.

When the scholarship was announced in August 2014, the center was hoping to raise \$10,000, but after national media picked up the story the fund grew to \$100,000.

“We knew that if people had the opportunity to be a part of something like this that they would respond,” Jones said. “We were excited, but surprised, by the national media attention the scholarship received. It obviously hit a nerve with people. I think it truly signifies hope.”

That hope, she said, is dependent upon a multi-faceted community-based approach.

“This is a dark issue,” she said. “And it’s a complex one, too. There are no easy answers, and when you look at both labor and sex trafficking it intersects with all of us. From the products we buy, to the way media portrays sex, to the fact that in the church we don’t talk much about the demand for buying sex. We all have a role to play in changing this story.” ■

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# Ageless energy

## Mount Miguel retirees prove age is no obstacle to servanthood

by LORI ARNOLD

Joanna Meckley may be an octogenarian, but she still has plenty of octane to serve others.

"It is important for people to know that once they move to a retirement community, they can continue to live and give," she said.

Meckley, 84, is a resident of Mount Miguel Covenant Village, a faith-based, not-for-profit, continuing care retirement community administered by Covenant Retirement Communities. The Spring Valley facility offers a wide variety of activities for its residents, and while many of them are entertainment-driven, service opportunities are among the most popular. Meckley, for one, is happy to dispel the myth that retirement is meant for golf or traveling.

"I have always been one who likes to help others, and Mount Miguel gives us plenty of opportunities," said Meckley, adding, "I no longer drive, and they are pretty good about supplying transportation."

One of the activities offered by the senior living community is a chance to volunteer at New Seasons Church, also in Spring Valley. Once a month, a group of residents will take a shuttle bus to the church and help re-package industrial-sized crates of fresh produce into smaller, individual packages that will be redistributed to those in need.

"There are crates of oranges or kale and we will spend a few hours repackaging the produce," Meckley said. "I like seeing the good works done by these charity organizations, and I enjoy interacting with people who are not as fortunate as I am. Volunteering is a rewarding and good way to give back to the community."

Ruth Egbert, 88, Meckley's Mount Miguel peer, also volunteers repackaging produce at the church. She said she feels good about helping feed people who experience food insecurity.

rience food insecurity.

"To know that someone will be able to get food and help is so important," Egbert said. "The church can't do it alone, so it's good to be able to volunteer and help."

Margo Bule, the resident services director at Mount Miguel, said scheduling a plethora of opportunities is all part of the active lifestyle envisioned at the senior community. In addition to the monthly project at New Seasons, the community recently participated in a Habitat for Hu-

manity construction project, as well as a trip to the San Diego Rescue Mission where residents helped serve the evening meal to mission guests.

"We offer volunteer opportunities that not only our independent residents may participate in, but some that are also open to our assisted-living residents and skilled nursing residents who enjoy participating in volunteer programs," Bule said.

Resident involvement from a variety of healthcare levels is beneficial to everyone, Meckley said.

"We have people that need walkers or who can't stand for a long time, but they can sit and package up food," Meckley said. "When you retire, you keep living your life. Some people have a state of health where they can't do much, but Mount Miguel also offers activities on campus, too, to help others."

Mount Miguel Covenant Village is one of 14 retirement communities nationwide operated as a ministry of the Evangelical Covenant Church. The retirement facilities serve 5,000 residents. ■

Learn more at [www.mountmiguelcovenant.org](http://www.mountmiguelcovenant.org).



Mount Miguel Covenant Village residents, from left, Bill Notehelfer, Bill Klug and Dr. Mel Nelson, volunteer their time during a recent build for Habitat for Humanity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT MIGUEL COVENANT VILLAGE

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## ‘The Masked Saint’

The New Year will be ushered in with the Jan. 8 release of “The Masked Saint,” which chronicles the journey of Chris Samuels, a former professional wrestler who becomes a small town pastor after retiring from the ring.

The Ridgerock Entertainment film stars Brett Granstaff (“Black Mass,” “Vice”), as Samuels, who becomes troubled with the rampant problems in the community, prompting the spiritual leader to moonlight as a masked vigilante fighting the injustice. While facing crises at home and at the church, the pastor must evade the police and somehow reconcile his secret, violent identity with his calling as a pastor.

Directed by Warren P. Sonoda, the film is inspired by true events and is based on the Chris Whaley book by the same name. The film also stars Lara Jean Chorostecki (“Hannibal,” “Antiviral”), T.J. McGibbon (“Christmas at Cartwright’s,” “Remember”), Diahann Carroll (“Julia,” “Dynasty”)



Brett Granstaff, who stars as wrestler-turned-pastor, leads a secret life as a masked vigilante in the film ‘The Masked Saint.’

and the late “Rowdy” Roddy Piper (“Wrestlemania”), who died of a heart attack earlier this year.

## ‘Risen’ film looks at Easter from a new view

Affirm Films, makers of the successful faith-based movies “Soul Surfer” and “Courageous,” returns to the big screen in February with an epic offering exploring the post-crucifixion story from a unique angle.

The “Risen” screenplay, co-written by Paul Aiello and Kevin Reynolds, who doubles as director, follows the story of Clavius (Joseph Fiennes, “Shakespeare in Love,” “Luther”), a Roman military officer who is commissioned by Pontus Pilot to solve the mystery of what happened to Jesus Christ after his death on the cross.

Implementing his orders, Clavius and his aide, Lucius (Tom Felton, “Harry Potter,” “Rise of the Planet of the Apes”) launch an intense manhunt for the body of Jesus Christ in hopes of preventing an uprising in Jerusalem after rumors swirl of a risen Messiah. In the midst of his encounters with the apostles and other followers, however, Clavius begins to question his own doubts about the supernatural accounts of the Messiah.

In an interview with CBN, producer Rich Peluso likened the film to a collision of ‘The Passion of the Christ’ and the sequel with ‘CSI.’”

The film also stars Peter Firth (“The Hunt for Red October,” “MI-5”) and Cliff Curtis (“Live Free or Die Hard,” “Training Day”).

The film opens Feb. 19.

## ‘Providence’

Just in time for Valentine’s Day, Mainstreet Productions and Faith Flix Films present “Providence,” a romantic story that’s four decades in the making. It stars Juli Tapken (“The Colors of Emily”), and



Roman officer Clavius (Joseph Fiennes) searches for the body of Jesus in a scene from “Risen.”

Rich Swingle (“Beyond the Mask”) who find love in their 40s after growing up together in a small town. Year after year their lives keep intersecting before tragedy strikes, setting the stage for finally finding true love.

The childhood role of Rachel is portrayed by Emily Knapp (“The Good Book”) and Stacey Bradshaw (“Touched By Grace”) plays the lead character in her teen years. Mitchell’s childhood years are portrayed by Chase Anderson (“Where Hope Grows”), while Josh Allen (“Home Sweet Bus”) takes on Mitchell as a teen.

portrayed by Chase Anderson (“Where

Hope Grows”), while Josh Allen (“Home Sweet Bus”) takes on Mitchell as a teen.

The story is told without dialogue, using the strength of acting, cinematography (including scenes from the ’70s and ’80s) and a dynamic soundtrack, featuring an eclectic blend of indie music to weave the story.

“Providence” is the sixth feature film for MainStreet Productions, including “The Good Book,” which has spent the past year on the film festival circuit, playing in 18 regional and international festivals and accumulating 21 nominations and five wins since its February 2015 release.

“Providence” releases Feb. 12.



Juli Tapken and Rich Swingle, star as friends from childhood in the film, “Providence.”

## Big Daddy weaves together new tour, album

Big Daddy Weave, which has landed its first radio No. 1 single from the new *Beautiful Offerings* album, will appear in concert at 7 p.m. Feb. 3 at Calvary Chapel Oceanside. Doors open at 6 p.m. The Beautiful Offering tour also features Plumb and Jordan Feliz.

The hit song “My Story” landed at No. 1 on seven different charts, including Nielsen BDS’ NCA Monitored and AC Monitored, as well as Mediabase’s Christian AC Published. It was co-written by Big Daddy Weave’s Mike Weaver and Grammy-nominated songwriter Jason Ingram.

The song came from a transformational time in Big Daddy Weave’s story and reflects the outcome of nightly conversations the band members had following



the ministry time at the end of each of its performances. Big Daddy Weave’s ministry time is an intentional time of dedicated dialogue and one-on-one prayer with the people who attend their concerts. The band has seen God work in powerful ways in the lives of people across the country.

“If I told you my story, you’d see hope, you’d see love, you’d see victory, all these things, but it’s not mine,” Weaver said. “My story is really the story of what God has done in our lives, and the goodness of that is that it awakens things in other people. Our story is really just part of His story.”

## TobyMac tour ‘Hits Deep’

Six-time Grammy-award winner TobyMac brings his “Hits Deep Tour” to San Diego State University’s Viejas Arena at 7 p.m. Feb. 28.

Sponsored by Food for the Hungry, the line-up also includes Britt Nicole, Building 429, Colton Dixon, Capital Kings, Finding Favour and Hollyn.

The concert is also presented by KLOVE and Air1 Radio and Awakening Events.

TobyMac is promoting his latest album, *This is Not a Test*.

“What hits me now more than ever is that you really don’t get a practice run at life,” Toby said. “This is it. In my friendships, raising my children, loving my wife, loving people, performing with my band and stepping on stage at arenas, I want to make every moment count.”

## Delirious over remastered album

Stu G, guitarist, songwriter, producer and founding member of Delirious?, has released *Have You Heard 2015*, a remastered 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. The album features every original member of Delirious?

The band’s promoters said *Have You Heard 2015* captures the youthful en-



ergy and passion of Stu G, Martin Smith, Tim Jupp, Stew Smith and Jon Thatcher before they were known as Delirious?, the band widely credited with founding the modern worship movement. Delirious? toured the world several times over before disbanding in 2009.

“Beyond all the nostalgia of going back and rediscovering this music that pre-dated Delirious?, it’s remarkable how well these songs have held up to the test of time,” said Tony Patoto, who managed Delirious? before starting The Fuel Music in 2008. “Stu G has uncovered an extraordinary album that will shine like new once again for every Delirious? fan and fans of modern worship.”

The Fuel Music is distributing the album, which Stu G produced through his StuGiology Music.

In addition to the tracks recorded in 1995, *Have You Heard 2015* also features two “reinvented” songs from the original tracks that were re-recorded and produced by Matt Stanfield: “The Rain” and “Rest.”



## School ministry program expands

SAN DIEGO — Urban Youth Collaborative, which this year reached 3,000 teens each week at 80 different public school campuses, will launch five new campus ministries in January. The 80 public schools served by the program include campuses in South Bay, inner-city San Diego, up to Mira Mesa, and out to El Cajon.

The expansion comes at the end of a productive 2015 for the youth ministry. In addition to its weekly Bible clubs, the teens donated more than 9,000 youth volunteer hours across San Diego County through the ministry's annual Project 25 community service challenge. Through the project, the student clubs received \$100 mini-grants to design original projects to creatively serve others. Last spring, San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer issued a proclamation declaring the May 16 as "Project 25 Day in San Diego."

UYC also sponsored 22 motivational school assemblies for 10,000 students, inspiring students to overcome obstacles standing in the way of their dreams. The assemblies, which promoted Christian clubs on campus, were held in partnership with iThink Big Assemblies.

Other highlights of the year include 144 teens attending a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp at the University of California, Los Angeles, with 59 students going on to complete a four-session discipleship program with a Christian adult mentor. In addition, 1,300 church volunteers and community partners beautified 26 campuses throughout San Diego County as part of the ministry's sixth annual School Beautification Day.

Learn more at [www.uyc.org](http://www.uyc.org).

## Churches of prayer meetings

CARLSBAD — The Southern California National Day of Prayer will host a series of meetings on "Leading Your Church to Becoming a House of Prayer."

The sessions, for pastors and leaders, will be led by Dr. Mel Blackaby, pastor of First Baptist Jonesboro, Jonesboro, Georgia. Mel Blackaby is the son of best-selling author and speaker Henry Blackaby.

The first San Diego session will be held from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Jan. 22 in the Prayer Chapel at North Coast Calvary, 1330 Poinsettia Lane, Carlsbad. An optional lunch will be available afterward. The cost is \$20; scholarship funds are available. For more information, visit [www.northcoastcalvary.org](http://www.northcoastcalvary.org) or call (760) 929-0029.

An afternoon session will be held from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Jan. 22 at Mission Church of the Nazarene, 4750 Mission Gorge Place, San Diego. The \$25 fee includes lunch. For more information, visit [www.missionnaz.org](http://www.missionnaz.org) or call (619) 287-3211.

Orange County will also host a meeting from noon to 2:30 p.m. Jan. 21 at Mission Viejo Christian Church, 27192 Jeronimo Road. The \$25 fee includes lunch.

For information on the Orange County meeting, visit [www.mvcchome.org](http://www.mvcchome.org) or call the church at (949) 465-1940.

## Walk for Life 2016

SAN DIEGO — The fourth annual San Diego Walk For Life—2016 will be held be-

ginning at 9 a.m. Jan. 23 at Sixth Avenue and Laurel Street in Balboa Park. This year's theme is "Walking the Talk."

The event begins with an opening ceremony and invocation. The walk starts at 9:30 a.m., with a rally set for 10 a.m.

In addition to the walk, the event will include inspirational speakers, entertainment and exhibits.

The event is sponsored by the Knights of Columbus and Culture of Life Family Services.

Learn more at [www.sandiegowalkfor-life.net](http://www.sandiegowalkfor-life.net).

## Secrets for living longer

SPRING VALLEY — Mount Miguel Covenant Village, a residential faith-based retirement community, will host the seminar "Blue Zones: Secrets for Living Longer" at 2:30 p.m. Jan. 26.

The program will be presented by Dave Tsang, an expert on "Blue Zones." The concept was explored in-depth by National Geographic journalist Dan Buettner, who went on a mission to find out why some people live healthy lives beyond the age of 100. While on assignment he uncovered places called "Blue Zones," where people tend to live longer. Tsang's presentation on Buettner's findings will include how to make small changes for living longer that can easily be applied to anyone's daily routine.

The retirement community is located at 325 Kempton St.

Learn more at [www.mountmiguelcovenantvillage.org](http://www.mountmiguelcovenantvillage.org) or call (619) 479-4790.

## Narrowing the niches

SAN DIEGO — Professional Women's Fellowship will hold its monthly networking lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Jan. 28 at the Handlery Hotel in Mission Valley.

The topic for January is "Riches are in the Niches: How to Double Your Income by Narrowing Your Market" and will be presented by Stephanie Nivinskus of Sizzleforce Marketing. Highlights of her presen-

tation will include why those who niche can charge so much more—and get it; how to identify your niche and communicate it to your audience and how this approach immediately positions you as the go-to expert in your industry.

The cost is \$25 for members and \$35 for non-members. The walk-in fee is \$40.

The hotel is located at 950 Hotel Circle North.

## Community prayer breakfast

SAN DIEGO — The Southern California Second Jurisdiction's annual Community Prayer Breakfast, hosted by First Lady Barbara J. McKinney of St. Stephens Church of God in Christ, will be held from 9 a.m. to noon at the MLK Facility at Bayview Baptist Church.

Dr. Rachelle Y. Benson will be the guest speaker.

The event Scripture is 2 Chronicles 7:14. The church is located at 6134 Benson Ave.

Tickets are \$40.

For more information, call (619) 470-1185.

## Seeking the 'Father's Heart'

EL CAJON — Foothills Christian Church will host the 1J3One Conference, "The Father's Heart for You," from Jan. 14 to 17. The sessions start at 7 p.m. Friday, 9:30 a.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. Sunday.

The conference is based on 1 John 3:1 and will focus on how to be completely free of the orphan heart by learning to live out life as the sons and daughters of God, complete with Kingdom birthrights.

Topics include living like Jesus, with a renewed mindset as a son, or daughter of God; identifying with the Holy Spirit's cry of "Abba, Father"; living free from negative expectations and faith; praying daily with expectation of the Father hearing and answering prayers; freedom from strongholds of fear and anxiety; learning to live and love out of a growing sense of self-appreciation and learning to experientially know God's

Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy.

Conference presenters include Marc Dupont of Mantel of Praise Ministries Inc.; Charles Simpson, a pioneer of the modern charismatic renewal movement, and Clive Corfield, founding pastor of Father's House in Lancaster, England.

The registration fee is \$35.

The church is located at 365 W. Bradley Ave.

Learn more at [www.foothillschurch.org/1j3one/](http://www.foothillschurch.org/1j3one/) or call (619) 442-7728.

## Release party for new album

SAN DIEGO — Local band The Eagle and Child, will have a listening party for their new album, *All Moments*, from 7 to 9:30 p.m. Jan. 15 at Flood Church.

Band members Nick Maybury, Luke Floeter, Brad Davis and Mark Suhonen will share some of the process they went through in the two-year journey to make the record. They make music for their Creator and try their hardest to make it listenable.

The church is located at 3878 Ruffin Road, Suite B.

Learn more at [www.theeagleandchild-music.com](http://www.theeagleandchild-music.com).

## Leadership and business conference

POINT LOMA — Risen Leaders presents "America's BEST Leadership Conference," from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Jan. 16 at Rock Church.

The conference is designed for aspiring and experienced entrepreneurs, supervisors, workers, speakers, trainers and marketers.

Presentations will focus on leadership, business, speaking and marketing.

Risen Leaders is a leadership ministry of Rock Church.

The church is located at 2277 Rosecrans Ave.

There is a suggested donation of \$20 at the door.

Learn more at [www.risenleaders.org](http://www.risenleaders.org) or call (619) 805-5508.

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## Iranian pastor released from prison

Farshid Fathi, an Iranian pastor who had been in jail for five years, was released in December. Originally arrested in December 2010 for “action against the regime’s security, being in contact with foreign organizations, and religious propaganda,” Fathi was not tried until January 2012, though details of his trial were never released.

An additional year was added onto his six-year sentence, which meant that Fathi was not due to be released until December 2017. He was one of about 60 people arrested as Christian “extremists.” Most have since been released. One of Fathi’s co-prisoners, Alireza Seyyadian, was released in August after serving six years. Seyyadian had been arrested as he was leaving Iran for a vacation.

## Gospel shared in China

BEIJING, China — Evangelist Andrew Palau visited China for the third straight year in December, distributing more than 15,000 copies of the book “What is Christmas?”

Through the trip, Palau partnered with leaders in China to share the Gospel at events in Beijing, Hangzhou and Harbin. At each event, Palau worked with local churches to distribute the book. He also met with leaders in Shanghai.

Everyone who attended the gatherings received a copy of the book, with many people taking extra copies to give to family members or friends. While in the Asian country, Palau also met with seminary students and top government officials regarding further visits to China, as well as with a publisher to discuss further evangelistic book opportunities.

“There was great joy and testimonies



Thousands of people turned out for several evangelistic meetings in China hosted by Andrew Palau. Each of them received a book explaining the meaning of Christmas.

shared about the great harvest in these days to those who are faithfully preaching the Good News and appealing for response, and there are many doing so,” Palau said. “We found the same to be true in our opportunities in every city. We are grateful for the privilege of being able to partner to share with the Chinese people that we love dearly.”

Palau was in China from Dec. 13 to 18. His visit also included a meeting with the China Christian Council, an umbrella organization and network for all Christian churches in China.

## Coach sues over prayer suspension

BREMERTON, Wash. (WNS) — A high school football coach suspended for praying on the field after games has filed a discrimination complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Coach Joe Kennedy, assistant varsity and head junior varsity coach at Bremerton High School, claims the school district violated his rights by prohibiting him from kneeling at the 50-yard line and praying silently after games. The district, Kennedy claimed, also retaliated against him for exercising his freedom of religion.

“All we are asking is for Coach Kennedy to be allowed to pray silently, for 30 seconds, at the 50-yard line after the game,” said Mike Berry, senior counsel at Liberty Institute, which represents the coach. “We are committed to defending his rights to private religious expression. No one should be suspended from their job over a moment of silence.”

Kennedy began working part-time at Bremerton High School as an assistant coach in 2008. His personal, postgame prayer sessions eventually attracted players, fans, and other coaches—all joining in voluntarily. School officials in September told him he could pray, but his prayers should not be “outwardly discernible as religious activity.” Kennedy took a break from the prayers while he sought legal advice, but resumed them in October.

“Pursuant to my attorneys’ advice, I intended to pray privately and quietly after BHS football games, and at a time during which my private religious expression would not interfere with my coaching duties,” Kennedy said.

He did so on Oct. 23, and afterward was suspended with pay.

## Bible translation expands

ORLANDO, Fla. — Wycliffe Associates launched 203 translation projects worldwide in 2015, including Vision 2025, a plan to have Bible translation for every language in need of translation within 10 years.

“We have seen dramatic breakthroughs like this all around the world this year,” Bruce Smith, president and CEO of Wycliffe Associates, said in a news release.

“I was exhilarated to witness God at work like this. We were stymied in our own power—yet when we prayed, when we acknowledged God’s power, God opened the door.”

The Vision 2025 plan has garnered a broad base of support from national Bible translators, translation consultants, volunteers, and financial donors.

“If ever there was a time when Psalm 147:15 could be observed in ‘real time,’ this is it. ‘His word runs swiftly’ the Scriptures say. I have found myself speechless, time and time again over the past several months, to see the fulfillment of Revelation 7:9—God’s Word in every language—now, finally, truly within our reach.”

Currently there are 3,377 languages without a Bible translation project underway. Of the 2,883 languages in the world that have the Scriptures, 531 have an adequate Bible, 1,329 have an adequate New Testament and 1,023 have at least one book of the Bible.

Learn more at [www.wycliffeassociates.org](http://www.wycliffeassociates.org).

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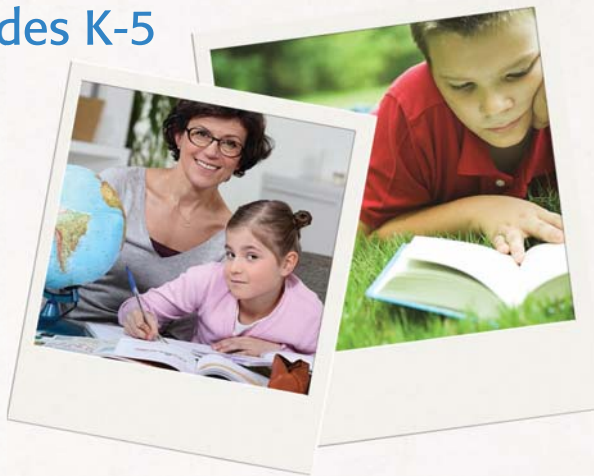
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# Religious Freedom Day and public schools

Right up there with Christmas music on the radio and festive lights on people's houses, it's become an annual tradition during the Christmas season for people to criticize schools for daring to display Christmas trees, sing Christmas carols, and acknowledge the birth of Jesus.

And of course, a lot of schools avoid the controversy all together because they have long ago stripped Christmas of its meaning and even stopped children from talking about Jesus as the reason for the season.

As Eric Buehrer of Gateways to Better Education reminds us, when it comes to education, as the saying goes, "More is caught than taught." The tone or atmosphere in a classroom can have a great impact on students. When a generation of young people is raised in public schools where they aren't allowed to freely express their faith, is it any wonder they become adults who think that religious expression should only be a private affair in their homes or churches?

This generation of children and teens need to be taught that they have the freedom to express their faith at school. Faith isn't just a private matter that can only be expressed in the evenings and on week-

ends. Americans are free to articulate their faith in their words and by their actions in all areas of their lives.

That's why it is important that we all draw attention to Religious Freedom Day, January 16th. Each year since 1993, the President declares January 16th to be "Religious Freedom Day" and calls upon Americans to "observe this day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and places of worship."

January 16th is the anniversary of the passage, in 1786, of the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom. Thomas Jefferson drafted the legislation and considered it one of his greatest achievements. The men who drafted the U.S. Constitution leaned heavily on Jefferson's statute in establishing the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom.

Today, that protection is as important as ever--whether it involves Obamacare trying to make religious organizations pay for abortions or judges forcing bakers, florists, and photographers to participate in same-sex weddings.

When it comes to public schools, in too many instances, teachers tell students they cannot include their faith in their

homework assignments or classroom discussions. These teachers are often simply unaware that the U.S. Department of Education has issued guidelines explaining students' religious liberties. According to the guidelines:

- Students can pray, read their Bibles, and talk about their faith at school during school hours.
- They can organize prayer groups and Bible studies and announce their meetings.
- Students can express their faith in their class work and homework.
- They can express their faith at a school event such as a talent show or a graduation ceremony.
- And, teachers can organize prayer groups and Bible studies with their colleagues.

Our friends at Gateways to Better Education have put together all the resources you need to promote awareness of Reli-



gious Freedom Day in your church, your schools, and your community this January. Their mission is to create a better future for our children by keeping God in our schools. And that includes promoting students' freedom of religious expres-

sion.

So, here's the plan: On the Sundays before and after Religious Freedom Day I urge you to get information to the families in your church about their children's religious freedom at school. Make sure all the educators in your church get it, too.

Learn more at [www.gtbe.org](http://www.gtbe.org).



Eric Metaxas is the voice of Breakpoint, a radio commentary. © 2015 Prison Fellowship Ministries. Reprinted with permission.

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## Practically speaking – Wealth health

I am passionate about finances and serving people in this area of their life. Managing financial resources must be in my DNA! Witnessing the consequences of financial neglect compels me to promote wealth health to anyone who will listen.

Grasping how people could pay so little attention to this vital area of their life baffled me until I experienced an “ah-ha” moment with an equally important area in my own life. While I found personal financial discipline came more naturally to me, my physical well-being was suffering from years of neglect. I understood the short- and long-term benefits of exercise, proper sleep, and a healthy diet but I lacked the confidence that I could make it happen. Valuable time to do something about it was slipping away. I finally decided to face this challenge head on and make some dramatic changes. After all, what good was my passion and calling if I didn’t have the health to deliver my message?

It has been a slow, steady process but the rewards that are surfacing one year later are truly significant. If your financial health is off track, let me challenge you with some interesting parallels I’ve drawn from my recent journey.

### Assessment

When you make a resolution to live a healthier lifestyle, you get on the scale, create strategies and set goals. This same concept applies when you determine to improve your financial health. First, assess your current condition by reviewing your income and expenses and listing all your assets and liabilities. Next, resolve to grow your net worth by this time next year through a combination of savings, investing in appreciated assets, and/or reducing debt. Finally, set long-term goals that are meaningful to you (for example, paying off your home before retirement).

### Commitment

My health concerns didn’t happen overnight. They resulted from years of neglect—all of which I could do something about. The same is true with finances. It’s rarely one incident that brings us down but more commonly years of poor habits or carelessness. Obviously, the longer you let it go, the harder it is to correct. Commitment is key—so dig deep and make a conscious decision to change your financial behavior one step at a time. You alone

must make this decision to change and once you understand you can do this, it will truly be empowering.

### Accountability

Seeking advice from exceptional health professionals helped me make many small but significant changes that led to big results. Engaging professional financial help isn’t a sign of weakness. It is an acknowledgement that you care enough about your personal well-being, and those you love, to prepare for the future. Financial professionals who help keep you on track can be just as impactful as those who keep you accountable with your health!

### No Comparisons

Just as there will always be someone thinner, stronger or faster in the physical arena, there will always be those with bigger paychecks or a higher net worth than you as well. Comparing yourself to others in better “shape” can lead to discontentment. It’s not how much you have but how wisely you manage what you have that makes the difference! As you make incremental adjustments, you will experience a growing

sense of satisfaction that your wealth health is improving. With time and consistency, these changes can lead to a dramatic difference in your life.

Are you ready to improve your financial health this year? If you’re not sure where to start, begin with the following five core principles that can help lead to lasting financial well-being (with a little tongue-in-cheek):

- Spend less than you earn (burn more calories than you take in)
- Avoid debt (minimize junk food)
- Build liquidity (exercise regularly)
- Set long-term goals (think marathon, not sprint)
- Live a life of generosity (share your Jamba Juice)

Financial fitness comes easily to me but physical fitness, well—that takes a lot more concentrated effort. It may feel intimidating at first to change financial habits but with the right attitude, a clear vision of what life could look like, and appropriate professional support if necessary, transformation begins to occur! Acknowledging you need to do something is a great place to start, but it takes action to get lasting results. So put those cross trainers on and take that initial transformative step toward “fiscal” fitness this year.



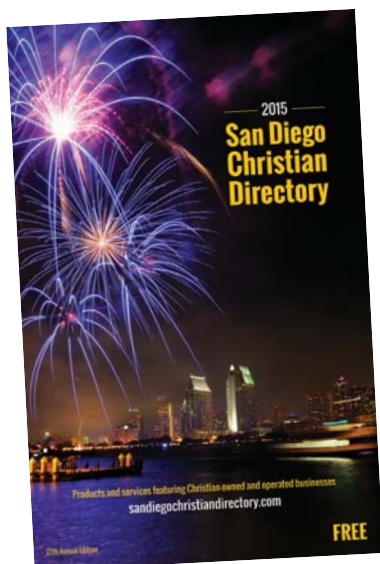
Janice Thompson is a certified financial planner and co-founder/CEO of One Degree Advisors, Inc. A frequent speaker on financial topics and mentor for financial professionals,

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## 4 (more) New Year's resolutions for a better family

My youngest son was born six months ago this month. During that time he has learned to hold his head up, grab toys, roll over, and—my favorite—smile.

It's been an incredible short journey, but it certainly doesn't seem like he was born six months ago. In fact, it seems more like five minutes.

A friend warned me years ago that when you have children, time accelerates. It's as if "Back to the Future's" Marty McFly and Doc Brown are in charge of your life, driving you from year to year in their magical DeLorean—all with the power of that much-needed flux capacitor.

But we don't need to depend on Hollywood movies to understand and appreciate the brevity of time. God warned us long ago that our lives are like a "mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14). The Bible's point isn't to depress us but to give us a sense of urgency—to encourage us to treat each day as if it could be our last. Life, after all, is a gift, and we should live with a spotlight on eternity (Hebrews 13:14).

But with so many distractions in our day-to-day lives, how do we stay focused? Here's one way: Make meaningful New

Year's resolutions. Last year I listed five resolutions in Refreshed: Each day vow to read the Bible with your child; get home from work earlier; say more positive words around your child; spend less time on your smartphone and love your spouse more in front of your children). This year, I'm listing a few more—for me and perhaps for you, too.

If you're looking for a few resolutions for 2016, consider these:

**1 Pray for your kids.** I'm not referencing the weekly or monthly "dear-God-please bless-my-child" prayer. I'm talking about pleading with God each day—and even throughout the day—for your kids. Yes, pray for their health, their grades and their relationships, but also pray for their future. Do you want them to have a great career? Marry a godly spouse? Give you wonderful grandchildren? Then pray for it. The Bible says there are blessings from God we don't receive because we don't ask (James 4:3). That's convicting, isn't it?

**2 Pray with your kids.** It's not enough that I am praying for my children. They need to see me pray. If this intimidates you,

then begin by reciting the Lord's Prayer each night with your kids. They will catch on. A few nights ago my 4-year-old son woke up with a stomach bug and—over the span of an hour—lost all of his supper in the toilet. He knew he needed help, and he knew the help ultimately wasn't coming from me. "Daddy," he pleaded, "pray for me!"

**3 Give with your kids.** Our goal should be to raise children who see a need in others and meet it—that is, to raise children who live selflessly. Of course, your life as a parent is full of sacrificing for your kids, but, sadly, those lessons often go unnoticed. Here's what children do notice: Mommy and Daddy and the entire family giving their time to others. Such as visiting someone in the hospital. Or taking baked goods to the elderly woman across the street. Or volunteering at the homeless shelter. Your kids may complain for a short while, but it will change them for the better. And they won't ever forget it.

**4 Get in your kids' world.** My oldest son's favorite three things in life are these: animals, animals, and animals. An-

imals aren't very high on my list, but if I am going to relate to my son as he matures into a man, then animals better be somewhere up there. Too often when he's reading to me his latest "amazing animal fact," my mind is elsewhere—on work, on church, even on the latest ballgame. He usually senses this and complains: "Dad, you're not even listening." He's right—but I will do better this year. I must.

That's because a few years from now, my son will be off to college and I will be at home, wondering how 18 years passed by in about, well, five minutes. By then, I will have all the time in the world to think about work or the latest ballgame or even to watch "Back to the Future" a dozen times. But I'll probably be wishing my son was back home, on the couch, talking a mile a minute—and reading me all of those animal facts.



Michael Foust is the father of four small children and blogs about parenting at [michaelfoust.com](http://michaelfoust.com).

## Thinking for Tomorrow, Today

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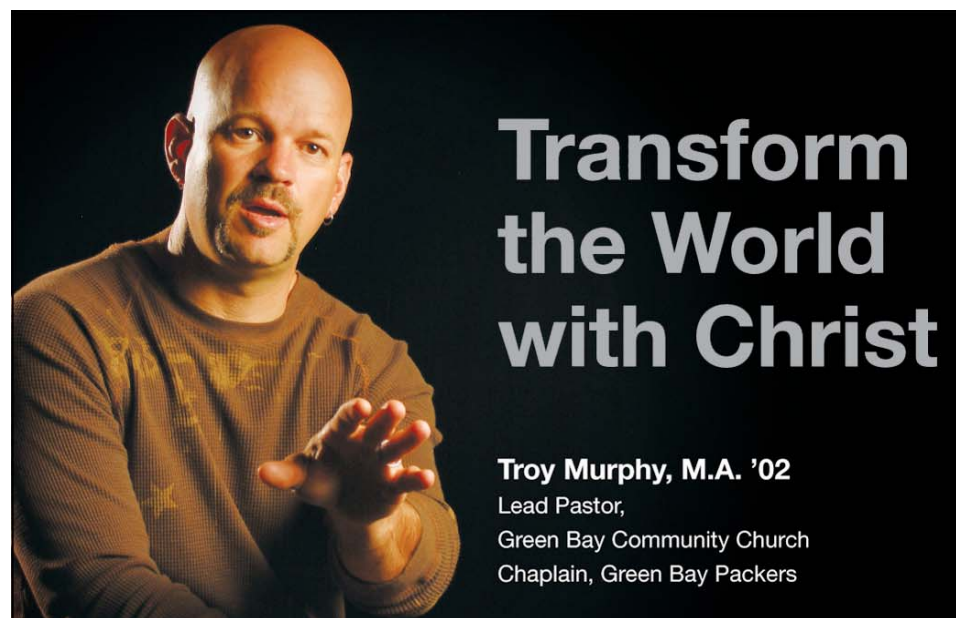


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# Set the watch: The power of the words we say

Think about the power of words for a moment.

Business deals are won or lost so many times not by the product we sell but by the words that we use in the deal. Company stock goes up and down based on just what people say about what's going on there. Problems with neighbors or in the office are either resolved or just blow up because of certain words that are spoken.

How do most friendships start? They start with words people say, simple words. Love relationships are born many times by certain words spoken, and many times they're broken apart by words, too. Family relationships can be repaired or ripped apart, sometimes by a single conversation or phrase or word that is spoken. Our self-image can be built up or demolished by words.

So when God says in Proverbs 18:21, *"The tongue has the power of life and death,"* He's not exaggerating. I like how The Message re-words that verse: *"Words kill; words give life. They're either poison or fruit—you choose."*

Scary, huh?

You and I hold the power of poison and of life-giving fruit in us all the time—and it's up to us how they will be used. That's especially important for us as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, sons and daughters, siblings, bosses, employees, and friends.

So how do we make sure our words are fruit, and not poison? The Bible gives us a clue in a prayer offered to God: *"Set a guard over my mouth, Oh Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips."* (Psalm 141:3) God commands us to "set the watch" over our words, and what a powerful metaphor that is. Think of all the times in life that you wished you had a watch or a gate guarding words that are about to escape from your

mouth. Then think of all the times you wish someone else had that guard.

Scripture shows us three important guards that God wants us to set over our mouths.

## Guard the lips

Guard No. 1 comes from Proverbs 13:3: *"He who guards his lips guards his life. But he who speaks rashly will come to ruin."*

Guard No. 1 guards against rash words. How many times have you said something then decided later that you spoke too quickly? You wish you'd taken more time and thought it through before you responded? But it's too late, and it's done. Without a guard to stop rash words from passing, it's going to happen. Many times rash words are grouchy, irritable words. But the consequences of rash words can be much broader than hurt feelings.

They can, for instance, commit us to something that could be ruinous, such as saying yes to a business deal or an investment or a job change. Don't say yes too soon, before you've thought about it, prayed about, got input from people you trust and respect.

In the New Testament, James (Jesus' brother) said it like this: *Everyone of you should be quick to listen, and slow to speak* (James 1:19). And that's a strong guard against rash words. Let's challenge each other to ask God to help us do exactly that: to be much quicker to listen and much slower to speak in our marriages, in our jobs, with our kids, with our friends. Imagine how much of an impact that alone could have!

## The guard of forgiveness

Here's another guard we need, Guard No. 2. Have you ever seen the redwood trees in Sequoia National Forest in north-

ern California? They are incredible. Just to look at them they seem indestructible. One fascinating thing about these trees is that their rings reveal the history of that tree year by year; when there was a terrible drought, or if it was struck by lightning, or ever damaged by a forest fire. All this history lies embedded behind the bark of the great redwood—out of sight—in the heart of the tree. That's the way it is with humanity. By the world's standards, we can show up looking very successful, very accomplished. But just a few inches beneath the protective bark, are recorded the rings of our lives:

- parents who didn't come through for us
- a spouse or a love that gave up on us
- the year when like a bolt of lightning the boss handed you the pink slip
- someone you trusted, but shouldn't have

Within our rings are daily thoughts and emotions—and it's hard not to sometimes be bitter. So we rehearse our speeches. We make up insults in our minds for people who've hurt us or wronged us. So what do you do with bitterness? Forty-fives times in the Bible we are warned about bitterness.

*You tear yourself to pieces with bitterness* — (Job 18:4)

*A wise man restrains his anger and overlooks insults. This is to his credit...* — (Proverbs 19:11)

When Jesus was on the cross, He looked at the people who condemned him to death and then tortured him, and as they were slowly, deliberately killing him, he says what? "Father, forgive them, they don't even realize what they are doing." Let's commit to constantly asking God, "Set a guard over my mouth, Oh Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips, that bitter words may never pass."

## The guard of blessing

Guard No. 3 is more proactive. Have you ever had a special pass, like to a VIP section somewhere or back-stage? It always feels really cool to get past the crowds and the guards or bouncers. Guards don't just keep things out, they also let some things pass through. The third guard that we need for our words is a guard that knows what things to let pass, and makes sure they get through. We need to have a guard set on our lips to make sure that words of blessing do get through. In the book of Hebrews we find these words: *Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today* — (Hebrews 3:13).

See what that is saying?

If the day you're in is considered Today, then seize that day and encourage the people around you. Speak words of blessing. Don't wait until tomorrow or the next day, thinking you'll have a chance to do it later. Take every chance you get to encourage, to build up and to bless each other with your words.

Our world may say "talk is cheap," but our God, in His wisdom, reminds us that our words can be either poison or fruit; they can be destructive or life-giving. As we strive to be godly, let's commit to asking our God daily to set these watches on our lips, that these guards can watch over our words. And let's see how life-changing that can be for us, and how life-giving it can be for others.



Moss Carter is an author, speaker, and campus pastor for Newbreak Church's Ocean Beach community. He lives in sunny San Diego with his wife and three kids and

tries to play as much beach volleyball as he can.

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# This old (falling apart) house

The problem with talking about things you would like to do is that someone might overhear and make your wish come true.

Apparently, God reads my column. Some months ago, I wrote about how darling husband and I were watching home remodeling shows on Netflix and making a list of things we'd like to repair in our 88-year-old house. Then a pipe in the upstairs bathroom burst, causing Niagara Falls to cascade into the kitchen.

Once the culprit was found—ancient cast iron pipes that literally caved in on themselves—we were left with holes in the walls where the main stack had been replaced, as well as a gaping hole in the kitchen ceiling and upstairs bathroom floor.

That provided an interesting new system of communication, to say the least: you could sit on the upstairs toilet and talk to someone standing in the kitchen below.

Entertaining as that might be, it got old pretty quickly. We needed to fix the holes.

I have discovered that the best way to do a DIY project is to hire someone else to do the work. While darling husband and I probably could have replaced drywall and

flooring, it turns out we didn't need to. The insurance company gave us enough money to hire someone to fix the damaged walls, ceiling and floor. In fact, with darling husband doing the tear-out and painting, there was enough left over to put toward retiling the shower and replacing the bathroom sink and vanity. Work started a week ago.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that anyone who's ever done home repairs on an old house knows that once you touch one thing, something else breaks, and before you know it what was a simple job turns into a total tear-out.

Ka-ching.

While we had the kitchen ceiling opened up, we decided to install some recessed lights. Yay! I'd been working in the kitchen for two decades with a ceiling fan that had one working, 60-watt light bulb socket. Now I have about 40,000 lumens that allow me to see exactly how dirty my kitchen floors are.

Of course, while we had the ceiling open it also meant we had access to all of the pipes in the upstairs bathroom. It was a good time to replace the tub drain. It

hadn't had a stopper since we bought the house 25 years ago. When you took a bath, you had to use a rubber plug and hope it didn't move while you filled the tub. No splish-splashing allowed.

The contractor had originally estimated the project would take about a week. Unfortunately, as I sit here writing, we're behind schedule. In the kitchen, there were wires in the ceiling coming from nowhere and others leading to nowhere, and they had to be sorted out before he could install the new lights. Then the tub drain took hours longer than expected to remove (rusted right to the tub; it needed to be removed without damaging the tub, since there wasn't money in the budget for a new one).

He did get the new shower fixtures installed. Yay! New faucets and shower head! Then pipes started dripping elsewhere in the house, and he had to search for the culprit.

Let's just say he'll be here a few days longer than anticipated.

It's been a very stressful process; I've used the word "overwhelming" several dozen times in the last week. And we're not even actually remodeling anything.

Not moving walls or reconfiguring pipes or electric. Just working with what's there and making upgrades as the damage done by the burst pipes is fixed.

Ah, life in an old house. But that's OK, because we're making updates! New drain! New shower! New floor! New ceiling! New vanity! New paint! A thousand decisions to make! A thousand new reasons to argue with your spouse!

I'm trying to keep my focus on the end result: our kitchen will be well lit and freshly painted, and our bathroom will essentially be totally redone.

Even better, I now know that God listens to me when I talk about things I want. I really need to be more careful about that in the future.



Award-winning freelance writer Joanne Brokaw spends her days dreaming of things she'd like to do but probably never will—like swimming with dolphins, cleaning the attic and someday

overcoming the trauma of elementary school picture day. She lives with two dogs, a cat, six chickens and one very patient husband. Learn more at [www.joannebrokaw.com](http://www.joannebrokaw.com).

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## Resolving to forgive and to love

Now that we've gotten that pesky Christmas Spirit out of our system, we can get back to what had been bugging us before we had to put in on hold for the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.

Where were we? Oh yeah. Revenge.

Revenge for police shootings, bombings, mass shootings, discrimination, terrorist attacks, insults both grand and personal. It's our comfort zone. It's the way the world works.

Or is it?

When apartheid ended in South Africa in the 1990s, everyone predicted a bloodbath. Oppressed, poor blacks were going to extract their revenge on the brutal white minority that had committed horrible crimes—that was the dominant view. The world cringed in anticipation.

But just like a stick of dynamite where the burning fuse goes out before it reaches the explosive, the bomb didn't go off. Something better happened. A panel called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed—not only to punish, but to also reconcile blacks and whites.

One story in particular illustrates the upside-down way this worked.

During the brutal oppression, white po-

lice officers kidnapped a young black man, shot him, and then set his body on fire. As the body burned, the men celebrated around the fire. Eight years later, the same men took the boy's father, tied him to a pile of wood, poured gasoline over him and the wood, and set him on fire.

Years later during a hearing through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an elderly black woman faced the killers, who had confessed. She was the mother of the boy they had killed, and the wife of the man they had killed. The commission allowed her to make a statement as to what kind of punishment she thought they deserved. She addressed the leader of the group, a man named Van de Broek.

"I want three things," she said. "I want Mr. Van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my husband's body. I would like to gather up the dust and give him a decent burial.

"Second, Mr. Van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot to give. Twice a month, I would like him to come to the ghetto and spend the day with me so I can be a mother to him.

"Third, I would like Mr. Van de Broek to know he is forgiven by God and that I for-

give him, too.

And I would like someone to come and lead me by the hand to where Mr. Van de Broek is so that I can embrace him and he can know my forgiveness is real."

Grace, in the form of forgiveness and reconciliation, creates holy moments.

Remember the shooting last June at the church in Charleston, South Carolina? Remember the response of the church members and family members of those who were killed?

"We forgive you," they said.

At the end of Psalm 139, the Psalmist says "Search me, Oh God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any hurtful way in me. And lead me in the everlasting way."

What is that everlasting way? Mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation. Those are the activities of God that are constantly

being poured out in our world. There are other things being poured out in the world, too. We only have to look to New York, Newton, Conn., Paris, Beirut, Baghdad, Syria, San Bernardino, Sudan, just to name a few.

Just before we hit the revenge button, though, remember the old lady in South Africa. She still had a lot of love to give. So do we.



Dean Nelson directs the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. His book about seeing God in everyday life is "God Hides in Plain Sight: How to See the Sacred in a

Chaotic World."

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