

Health, growth, completion

Vision



New Apostolic Church USA

District News

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Autumn 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Throughout the months of October and November, our small group discussions turn our attention to the **THRIVE** Membership Booklet. This publication, created in 2016, was formulated to satisfy the need for a short outline of our faith that could be given to guests desiring more information about our faith. It includes our Vision and Mission, a brief church history, an explanation of our Stepping Forward strategy, our Creed, our organizational structure, and various other points.

Of special interest is a listing of what a member can expect from our Church. Also included is what is expected of our members. Don't be alarmed; it is simply six elements from the teachings of Christ categorized according to the acronym – **THRIVE**:

TRANSFORM YOUR NATURE USING JESUS AS YOUR EXAMPLE

HELP SPREAD THE GOSPEL

RESPOND TO THE CALL TO SERVE

INVEST IN YOUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

VALUE THE CHURCH, AND

EMBRACE THE PROMISE OF JESUS CHRIST'S RETURN

To thrive is to grow and develop vigorously, to flourish. When we recall the words of Jesus, *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly* (John 10:10), we realize that it is Jesus' will that we thrive.

I hope you were able to avail yourself of this opportunity to join a small group discussion (whether online or in person) and participate in some stimulating conversations about thriving in your faith and in your life. If you were unable to do so, I encourage you to start a new small group, invite others to join, and start exploring this **THRIVE** content and new ways to inwardly blossom.

Wishing you wonderful moments of discussion and discovery,

With love,





Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,

...in everything

give thanks

for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



"Yes, we celebrate *Thanksgiving!*"

This was my response last year to a member who asked if we still celebrate our church Thanksgiving. The reason for his inquiry was because he had heard nothing about it in his congregation and was saddened by this.

Perhaps, others may have also experienced or wondered about this, so I would like to highlight a few ways in which we *very much anticipate and celebrate Thanksgiving*.

In 2017, we began a series of teachings and articles called ***Giving is...*** with aspects of thanksgiving woven throughout them. Simply put, we give because we know that God has given us everything! The additional resources developed for this theme have helped create the understanding that giving is a fundamental characteristic of true Christians and they can give in many different ways. Certain aspects of our international theme for last year, "Rich in Christ," focused on thankfulness. Our response to the richness that our Father shares with us must be thanksgiving, expressed through the use of our talents, gifts, time, resources and our offerings. In various small group sessions, we have reflected on the theme of giving and very intentionally connected it to thanksgiving and how this prompts us to action.

The Psalmist expressed so beautifully in Psalm 103 -

*Bless the Lord,
O my soul; and
all that is within
me, bless His holy
name! Bless the Lord,
O my soul, and forget
not all His benefits...*

We can understand in this verse that the expression "bless" means to *increase* or *magnify* God in our lives.

Thus, through various themes, writings, and encouragements, we have tried to inspire everyone to become a Christian that lives a life of gratitude and generosity, even beyond the celebration of a single Thanksgiving day once a year. Our individual nature and congregational culture must evolve to be one that continuously reflects on the goodness of God and discovers new ways to express our gratitude to Him every day, so that giving truly becomes part of our nature.

This is what Jesus taught in Matthew 25: 31-40... *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink...* Interestingly, the Lord showed in this instruction that those who had freely supported and had given to others directly created a bond to Christ Himself, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me...* Further, the nature of giving had become such an integral part of their lives, Jesus had to remind them of their actions; without flourish or recognition they had simply provided when they saw a need.

As this attribute grows in us, it culminates in the celebration of Thanksgiving Sunday. Leading up to this event, over the past ten years, a Thanksgiving article has always appeared in the Summer Vision to remind everyone of this special church holiday. Beginning in October, a banner is generally posted on our website to make it easy for members to make their Thanksgiving offering electronically if they so desire. In addition, some years ago, through messages to our ministers and articles published in the Summer and Autumn Vision Newsletters, we have

encouraged congregations and families to create a *Season of Thanksgiving* starting in October, rather than only focusing on one day of Thanksgiving in November.

Of course, we still happily decorate the altars festively for Thanksgiving Sunday as a simple expression of thanksgiving for the harvest that our Father has richly provided. And, we bring our Thanksgiving offerings that we have prepared as a humble token of our gratitude and love.

Yes, due to the pandemic this year, things are different. Perhaps, not everyone may be able to attend Thanksgiving Sunday in their congregation. Yet, I encourage everyone to bring thanksgiving to the forefront by speaking to your ministers and brothers and sisters. If possible, volunteer to create activities or times of worship for your congregation to express gratitude, gather some members and do something for your community. After all, each one of us is *the church*. We all can contribute to the life of our congregation and share with others the joy, the feelings, the passion of expressing our humble gratitude to our ever-giving almighty Father.

Ultimately, Thanksgiving is what each of us makes it for ourselves.

I wish for you an enriched season of Thanksgiving and a blessed Thanksgiving Sunday.



In October 2020,

a special devotional will be published on our website, Facebook page, and app to encourage intentional moments of personal thanksgiving. We'll also be making an at-home worship experience available called *Songs of Gratitude*.

New ways to give thanks...

The 2020 pandemic has hit South and Central American countries particularly hard. Social services, such as health care and unemployment assistance, are severely strained and, in some places, not able to keep up with the needs of the people. Many are unemployed or severely underemployed, often leaving individuals with the impossible choice of deciding whether they should go out looking for work and run the risk of bringing the virus home, or staying home and having nothing to eat.

During these six months of the pandemic, our brethren have stayed connected: viewing the Apostle services online, utilizing the Small Group material for the midweek experience, and frequently communicating with their local ministers.

In these countries, Thanksgiving Sunday is celebrated on the first Sunday of October. In spite of the difficult circumstances they are dealing with, our brethren have expressed concern about how they would be able to bring their Thanksgiving offering. In a number of countries where it is not yet possible to gather for divine services, they have come up with a solution. On Saturday, October 3, and Sunday, October 4, they will open the church. One at a time, families can enter the church, bring their offering and pray. Everyone will need to wear a mask and observe social distancing, but they are determined to bring their offerings. It is overwhelming to see this depth of love for the Lord and dedication to their relationship with Him. The Chief Apostle spoke about this in a recent service:

The love that the Holy Spirit poured out in us (Rom 5: 5) creates in us the yearning to be in fellowship with God. Knowing that God loves us, we fearlessly submit all our material needs and wishes to Him. And because we love God, we place more value on fellowship with the Giver than on His gifts.

For those unable to observe Thanksgiving Sunday in your church, allow this account to inspire you and your congregation to find creative ways to make it a memorable celebration. - JWF

Ideas for creating your own Season of Thanksgiving:

IN YOUR FAMILY:

- Create a “thanksgiving tree” and write down what you are thankful for
- Leave one another notes of gratitude and appreciation
- Go for a walk in God’s creation and decorate your house with the things you find
- Pray together as a family at least once a day and devote the majority of your prayer to thanking and praising God for who He is
- Learn a new song with your family that expresses thoughts of gratitude and thankfulness to God
- Find song lyrics and Bible verses that reflect gratitude or worship and include them in your seasonal decorations, or write them on pieces of paper and read one at each meal and discuss

IN YOUR CONGREGATION:

- Discuss gratitude and thanksgiving in your small group and find ways to let each member of your group know why you are thankful for them
- As a small group, find a member who is having a difficult time and love on them (send cards, make phone calls, drop off meals or necessities)
- Plan a congregational worship evening (on Zoom!), even just a short one where you can all sing and read from the Bible together
- Decorate the altar together, or have every family bring a “basket of gratitude”
- Create a display or decoration where members can write notes of gratitude, thanking God for one another
- Celebrate *Pastor Appreciation Day* on October 11 by sharing your appreciation for your rector or a minister in your congregation

IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

- Participate in a food drive for a local food bank or city mission
- Find opportunities to volunteer with congregational members or your family at a local charity or community organization
- Practice small acts of kindness throughout October and November – bring cookies or dinner to a neighbor, cut their lawn, or rake leaves
- Plan a neighborhood donut and cider gathering on your street

THE WORD OF God



*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*

PSALM 42:1-2

In this passage, the psalmist is calling out for God in the midst of his own distress. Have you found yourself uttering similar words recently? Perhaps your prayer has sounded more like this, “God, when are we going to be able to go back to church and have a normal service?”

After all, it is only when the assembly of believers can be together in the divine service that we fully experience the presence of God in worship, true fellowship in Holy Communion, and the blessings given through Holy Baptism and Holy Sealing. If we cannot come to the divine service, the preached Word – God’s Word for His people, the bread of life – is available to us wherever we are. Whether we hear it at home, live online, or as a recording, God reaches us through His Word.

Since the beginning of Christianity, God has been touching the lives of people through the preaching of His Word. As the apostles spread out from Jerusalem and shared the message of the gospel, we can read that they were known for causing trouble, because the Word they preached was turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Undeterred, they pressed on to continue announcing the glory of God, carrying out their mission to teach about Jesus Christ. They travelled, preached, and built up congregations. They wrote letters to edify the new believers. Luke tells us in Acts 19:20 that the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect (NLT).

Does the preaching of God’s Word have the same effect on people today? Does it cause people to stop and reflect on what they have done and then open their eyes to see the wondrous things God has done? God’s people need His Word in order for faith to grow. It is when we know and live by His Word that He can be glorified in all we do.

When we take in the Word of God, we are engaged with the Holy Spirit because we believe that He has inspired Scripture. As we surrender to God’s will, the Holy Spirit, who is the creator of new life, has the power to influence and shape us. He meets with and speaks to souls who are open and seeking to grow in their knowledge of God. Through the power and work of the Holy Spirit, God’s people are transformed into new beings who see, speak, and act more like Jesus.

Why is it important to hear the Word of God? Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.* For both us and the original audience of the many letters in the New Testament, *hearing* the Word of God causes a reaction. Does hearing the Word of God today still cause a reaction within you? This is the power that God’s Word has – that no matter where we are, no matter who we are, when we hear the Word of God, a spark is ignited. The Spirit prompts us to listen. Even in the case of listening to a recorded service, the effect isn’t changed or diminished.

God has been, is, and will always be watching over and guiding all that happens. That includes determining *when* you hear His Word. Consider that: every time you sit down to hear the message of God through the preaching of ministers, it is according to His plan. It's like a divine appointment. God knows when you are listening, and He is at work within you, transforming you through the power of the Holy Spirit. It's not about *when* the Word is spoken, but about our readiness and willingness to listen. We have learned to prepare ourselves to receive His Word by pausing and recognizing who is speaking, humbling ourselves, and then approaching the message with an open and surrendered heart. We should never lose sight of the fact that the omniscient God is always at work. Jesus reminds us of this, as recorded in John 5:17, *My Father is always working, and so am I* (NLT). As we hear and engage with His Word, God speaks directly into our hearts. Teaching us. Sometimes rebuking us. But all the time loving us.



Do we feel this? Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit is testifying to us about Jesus Christ and helping us to see Him more clearly. That's why we should never cease to listen. Because God's story revealed to us through His Word is our story. God, the Father sent the Son to redeem us from the power of sin and establish us in eternal fellowship with Him. When we hear the message of the gospel, we are reminded that we are all sinners, but through the work of Jesus on the cross, we have been made righteous. Hearing and believing in this message gives us reason to celebrate and praise God every day.

This is why we have placed such a focus on ministers preparing and sanctifying themselves to preach God's Word. It is *His* Word for *His* people who *need* to hear from Him. No minister should take their calling lightly. They submit themselves to preparing, studying, and engaging the Holy Spirit, who will speak to those who are ready to hear.


Of course, being in the divine service, with other believers, *is* the experience we seek and need. No matter when we listen to God's Word, He is aware of it. Whether we listen to His Word live, in person or via video, or through a recorded message, He speaks to us. We can take comfort in the knowledge that God knows us and wants to speak to us. And through His power, He can transform us because in these moments, His word is "live" to us. He has sent the Holy Spirit to be present with us to teach, guide, comfort, and build up.

During the uncertain months ahead, whether we are able to gather in church or not, be encouraged by the omnipotence and omniscience of God. Even as Psalm 42 begins with feelings of despair as referenced earlier, we find that the psalmist's attitude turns around as He remembers the goodness of God: *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God* (verse 11). Instead of perhaps focusing on what we think is lacking in our life or even in

our experience of the divine service, we too can also remember the goodness of God and all that He provides.

What grace and what a blessing it is that God speaks to us today! Let's humbly approach our heavenly Father and open our ears to hear His Word and allow the Holy Spirit to work on our soul. As Chief Apostle Schneider said about those who listen, "The preaching inspired by the Spirit strengthens their faith and nourishes their hope. By putting it into practice, the believer has the assurance of being blessed." Never grow tired of listening to the Word of God. Value His Word above all others and experience how He will bless your life. – LRK / MDB / VAA

*For further teaching on this topic, you can also refer to the article published in the Spring 2019 Vision Newsletter, *Changes to NAC USA Online: Finding Community in Church*



A study of John 8:31-36

*You shall be
free indeed*

For what He has of His own nature He communicates to us by adoption, when we are engrafted by faith into His body and made His members...*our freedom is a benefit of Christ*, but we obtain it by faith, through which Christ also regenerates us by His Spirit.

- John Calvin

As we draw closer to the end of this year, let's revisit our theme for 2020 once again: **Christ makes free!** A few verses from the book of John where Jesus is speaking in the temple give us some new insights.

John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

At first glance, these verses might seem a bit opaque, but let's deconstruct and examine them. Before we come to verse 31, we find Jesus in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths). The chapter records various encounters with the scribes and Pharisees, who first bring to Him the adulterous woman (John 8:1-12), and then interrogate Jesus about who He is, who His Father is, and what He is doing. As He responds to these questions, verse 30 tells us that *many believed in Him*.

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him,
"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."*

At this point, Jesus addresses *those Jews who believed Him*, giving them a condition of the freedom that He offers – *if you abide in My word*. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Jesus makes it quite clear – to remain in His teachings.

Jesus is also saying, My teaching *is* God's teaching. Later in His discourse with the people, Jesus says, *Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM* (John 8:58). This is a reference to the name that God gives Moses in Exodus 3:14, *I AM WHO I AM*. All Jewish people would have recognized this reference instantly, knowing that Jesus was identifying Himself with their God.

We believe that a Christian is someone who believes in Jesus, is baptized, and professes His life and teachings. However, some followers of Christ may *profess*, but they do not *progress*. They make a commitment to Christ, but do not orient their lives to Him. Are we constantly changing, growing, and orienting ourselves to the mind of Christ? Do His teachings give meaningful direction to our lives? This is a lasting and progressive directive from Jesus that applies to His disciples still – *continue, remain, abide in My word*.

Some may profess, but not progress...

Jesus continues in John 8:

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

What are we freed from? The bondage and weight of sin. Sin placates us into the false belief that the comfort of the status quo is preferable to growth and change. The truth of Christ sheds light on our sin, bringing it out in the open so it can be forgiven and we can be liberated from it. This concept is intensely brought into focus in the record of Jesus' encounter with the adulterous woman just a few verses before. The scribes and Pharisees brought the woman to Jesus to be judged, but with His response, *He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first*, they walked away, condemned of *their own* sinfulness. And she, whose sin was so harshly exposed in public, heard words of mercy, encouraging her to overcome and start anew.

In Judaism, it was the law that set you free (Psalm 119:45). However, some of the teachers and leaders of the time had twisted the truth and order of God's law into a warped version of itself. This is again evident in the story of the adulterous woman. The Mosaic Law teaches that both the woman *and man* caught in adultery should be put to death (Leviticus 20:10). Scholars also say that by this time period, punishments of death were not usually adhered to so strictly. The scribes and Pharisees apparent zeal for righteousness in the situation was a façade, only meant to trap Jesus. If He said not to stone the adulterous woman, they could point to His irreverence for the Mosaic Law. If Jesus condemned her to death, He would acquiesce to their judgmental and violent treatment of the woman, and would have to answer to the Roman authorities for instigating a stoning. Jesus' response points to a different understanding of God and His law – *a perspective of love*. God is love, and He gave His law to the people to guide their communal living and to set them as an example for the world, *a light in the darkness* (Isaiah 42:6). The people were to obey God's law because they loved Him, not for self-justification, comparison, or judgement.

Obedience to God brings freedom. Not freedom to do as we please, but rather, freedom from our fallen, sinful selves, and the power and guidance to act in accordance with the will of God. This is what God intended for His chosen people, to live in the freedom of His will. Jesus came to earth to display what it would look like to live the way God intended. His life portrayed the truth of the law and He fulfilled the law. He was *the way, the truth, and the life* – He personified it.

Jesus said to the people, *you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*. How do we know the truth? For disciples of Christ, it's not only about deeply studying Jesus' teachings, but additionally, growing closer and uniting ourselves with *the One who is truth* – Jesus Christ (John 14:6). He has made known to us the eternal God, even as He is the eternal God (John 1:18, John 14:9).

To know Jesus is to know God, and the more we enlighten ourselves with and embody His teachings, the more we will find ourselves living in obedience to God.

To continue our examination of John 8, the scribes and Pharisees' response to Jesus' statement about freedom was:

"We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?"

Seeing as the Jewish people were slaves to Rome, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and a number of other nations, this response seems quite odd. We should understand their claim to *have never been in bondage* to mean that even throughout their enslavement and oppression, they were able to maintain their identity as God's chosen people. This was not the case for every tribe enslaved at those times; many lost their identity, culture, and religion in the process. By naming themselves as Abraham's descendants, they were implying they were not in need of freedom. As a result, they misunderstood Jesus, thinking He was remarking on their national freedom and identity, when He was really asserting *inner freedom*.

Jesus clarified this misunderstanding by responding:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Inner freedom is freedom from sin, that which ensnares and enslaves us. Jesus accentuates the contrast between His status, as the Son of God, and humans, subjugated by sin. Jesus is the One with freedom in God's kingdom (or house), and He shares this freedom. When we accept the Son, we share in His inheritance and in His relationship with the Father (John 17:20-26). Paul further develops this thought in his letter to the Galatians: *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

Jesus proclaimed that *the truth shall make you free*. We know and believe that Jesus Christ is *the way, the truth, and the life*, and He has come to liberate us from sin and give us a new life in His kingdom.

We are free indeed.

-KAH

WITNESSES OF GOD



Reflecting on the goodness of God and all that He provides for us, we are moved to respond in some way. There are many ways that we can make our gratitude known, but one such way is following His command to carry out the mission of the church. Jesus lays out that mission in Matthew 28:19-20: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Each of us is tasked with the responsibility to share the gospel with those around us. Not only is it our responsibility to proclaim the gospel clearly to all people, but we hope that our testimony will be accepted. This doesn't mean we to try force others to accept Jesus; rather, it means that our own actions and conduct must *be the proof* that we are disciples of Jesus. This is what makes us credible witnesses and help others to more clearly see the truth found in the gospel.

As with all things, it is in Jesus Christ that we find our example. In His trial with Pontius Pilate, Jesus says, *You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth* (John 18:27). Jesus' *witness to the truth* was believable because of the works that He had done throughout His life – preaching the truth of His Father, caring for people around Him, showing compassion to sinners, and ultimately, His sacrifice to take the punishment of the sins of all people.

We can only be witnesses of the gospel if we are credible, that is, if we show ourselves to be worthy of the message we proclaim.

In following the example of Jesus, as witnesses of His gospel, we should be:

- **CONFIDENT.** *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). Our faith gives us firm confidence in that for which we hope. When we have faith in God, our confidence in Him can be perceived by those around us.
- **DETERMINED TO OVERCOME EVIL.** If we give in to temptations and make no real effort to avoid sin, then our testimony as a Christian is not credible. As followers of Jesus Christ, our mindset changes, and our desire for a relationship with God can help us to overcome evil. After all, we have promised to renounce evil in our Confirmation vow.
- **HUMBLE.** With a humble heart, we recognize our own sinfulness. It is only because of Jesus that we have the opportunity to be reconciled with God. Out of humbleness and gratitude, we do what Jesus expects of us. This starts with not judging others for their own sinfulness, as He instructs in Matthew 7:1 – *Judge not, that you be not judged.*
- **UNBOUND.** When we are bound by material things or we place high value in our own honor or ego, we align ourselves more with the mindset of this world. When we are unbounded to these things, it is easier for us to transform into the nature of Jesus Christ and even forgive others who cause us harm.
- **FILLED WITH LOVE FOR GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR.** *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:18). Because we love Jesus, we have a desire to share this love with others. Through our acts of love, *some of which may cause us inconvenience or even suffering*, we demonstrate our love for God and all His creation.

**Based on an excerpt from the Chief Apostle at an International District Apostle Meeting in Vienna.*



THE BENEFITS OF MUSICAL TRAINING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Our children and youth are both the present and the future. The Lord Jesus made the importance of children clear when He brought a child into the midst of His disciples and said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me”* (Matthew 18:1-5).

Christ shows us here that we need to see our children as important today, not only ten, twenty, or thirty years from now. Their love, joy, compassion and serving can have a mighty impact on the church right now, and their childlike faith and trust in God is to be an example for people in all seasons of life.

If our children and youth are to be the future ministers, choir and worship leaders, accompanists, small group facilitators and Sunday school teachers, are we equipping them today in such a way that they will have the tools and skillsets they need to lead the church into the future?

Let's look at the music and worship side of things. The average age of our current accompanists, choir leaders and instrumentalists is higher than

we'd probably care to admit. This should be cause for action. Can we only rely on the assumption that perhaps others will come to do this special work? How will these musical roles be filled in the future?

Mentoring is one answer. It's important that those currently serving in these roles take children and youth who show musical potential under their wings. The music leaders of today have the responsibility to motivate, encourage, and inspire future generations of music leaders.

Another answer is through music lessons and training. In the past, significant emphasis was placed on this. As mentioned in a 2011 Vision newsletter, in the early 1960s, Bishop William Fendt communicated with the parents of Sunday school children and suggested that they provide their children with piano lessons. This wise advice led to an entire generation of future pianists and organists within our congregations. During their tenure, the District Apostles Wagner and Freund also promoted a music program of concert choirs and orchestras.

Why did these men of God place such an emphasis on music? They did so because they recognized the value of it for the children, youth, and church.

Here are a few of the many individual benefits of music lessons and training for children:

- **It boosts young brains.** Immersing children in music can help boost their brainpower. Numerous studies have proven that children's IQs increase after even a few weeks of music lessons.
- **It helps build language skills.** While children come into the world ready to decode sounds and words, music education helps enhance those natural abilities. Musical training physically develops the left side of the brain that processes language.
- **It makes one stronger academically.** Researchers have found connections between music lessons and nearly every measure of academic achievement: SAT scores, high school GPA, reading comprehension, and math skills.
- **It teaches discipline and perseverance.** Most children aren't musical prodigies like Mozart. Things like piano fingering, trumpet embouchure, and violin technique often take a considerable amount of time and energy to master. Music lessons require considerable concentration and patience. They also force children to learn how to persevere even when things aren't going well—an invaluable skill for all areas of life.
- **It builds confidence and brings joy.** As children develop music skills, and improve upon these skills through repetition and practice, they build confidence in themselves. Music also brings joy. There's nothing quite like the feeling of pride and fulfillment when a new skill has been fine-tuned, and the result is beautiful music!

The longer a child continues with music lessons and the more skilled and confident they become on their instrument, the more likely they are to then use their musical gift in the church.

When they engage their gift in such a way, there are also many lasting, *spiritual* benefits:

- Their relationship with God is deepened as they learn to worship and praise Him through music.

- The joy, peace, and comfort they provide through their singing or playing is a blessing to the congregation.
- They have increased opportunities to be strengthened through collaboration with other musicians in their congregation and in nearby congregations.
- They have an outlet for praise, worship, and thanksgiving unto God, and help lead and inspire others to also praise, worship, and give thanks to God.
- They help ensure that music remains an important part of worship in our church moving into the future.
- They learn Biblical history in the hymns and expressions of faith and devotion that will remain with them their whole life.

Even if all of these wonderful benefits are shown to them, children and youth won't always jump up and down pleading to take music lessons. Some may, of course, while others might look at music lessons and training in much the same way they do broccoli: "I know it's good for me, but do I have to?" While young people should never be forced into lessons, and they may not be for everyone, encouragement (or even a gentle "nudge") can often be very impactful. And this is where a child's support system comes in—parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, and ministers. Each one is called to *train up a child in the way they should go* (Proverbs 22:6). Does a child have musical potential? If so, are we encouraging them to tap into it? How might we guide them to value glorifying God with their gifts?

We must not back away from bringing up.

Children are a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). Let's be good stewards of this heritage—these wonderful gifts of grace given to us from God. With His blessing, the investments we make in the children and youth today will have a positive and lasting impact not only on them, but also on the generations to come, and on the growth and health of our church into the future. - MNJ



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VISION JOURNAL VOLUME 2

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At the end of 2014, the first volume of the New Apostolic Church USA Vision Journal was released. It was the compilation of Vision Newsletter articles from 2009 to 2014, and it showed the evolution and progress of the Stepping Forward initiatives. Because each topic is organized chronologically, it gives the reader a clearer understanding of the steps we have taken to grow in our faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. Copies of this Vision Journal are available for purchase on the nac-usa.org website store.

Starting in October, the new Vision Journal: Volume 2 will be available. Similar to the first journal, it is organized by the four elements of congregational health found within the Stepping Forward strategy: culture, divine service experience, pastoral care, and sustainable structure. The articles again are ordered chronologically to show the continued progress of the Stepping Forward strategy. In addition to a copy being sent to each congregation, the Vision Journal: Volume 2 will also be available for purchase on the nac-usa.org website store.

