

A City on a Hill

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16)



Dear brothers and sisters,

Jesus' words remind us that we are dual citizens: living here on earth, yet belonging to the city of God. Scripture describes this heavenly city as radiant with God's own light (Revelation 21:23). Peter writes that we have been "called out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). That means while we live in the earthly city, we are guided and defined by our citizenship in the heavenly one.

Our congregations should reflect this city on a hill. They are meant to be visible alternatives to the world's way of living, so that others may see the light of the kingdom in our good works and glorify God.

Our Journey as a Church

Over the past decades, our church has changed significantly in how it relates to the world. Many of us remember a time when congregational life was more insular. Membership grew through family ties and close attachments. Conformity was highly valued, and often a few families could dominate a congregation. This closeness gave a strong sense of belonging, stability in times of upheaval, and a shared identity.

But a closed circle cannot last forever. Generational change requires openness. The Holy Spirit directed us to step outward. District Apostles through the years each contributed to this shift:

- Overseas missions expanded our horizon.
- We learned to deepen our faith, to engage society without fear, and to open new spaces like small groups.
- Slowly, we developed the ability to act as Christian disciples not only within our congregations but in our daily environment.

Today, this journey continues. With new challenges such as migration and asylum seekers joining our congregations, we are equipped to welcome, adapt, and shine God's light more broadly than ever.

Lessons from the Early Church

The early Christians faced similar transitions. What began as a small Jewish group of 120 believers (Acts 1:15) grew to nearly 30 million by the time of Emperor Constantine. How did this happen?

- They lived communally at first, but did not stay tribal.
- They welcomed all—Jews, Greeks, pagans—without requiring ethnic identity markers.
- They served their communities during plagues and crises, often at great personal cost.

As the historian Rodney Stark notes, Christian care during epidemics drastically increased survival rates. Pagans fled, but Christians stayed, cared, and bore witness to Christ's love. This was not about power or politics but about faithfully serving their neighbors. Their quiet, consistent witness became a force the empire could not ignore.

Serving in the Earthly City

Scripture shows us examples of God's people faithfully serving foreign societies while holding firm to their identity. Daniel and his friends thrived in Babylon yet refused to assimilate to its values (Daniel 1–3). Jeremiah urged the exiles to “seek the peace of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7). Joseph and Jonah also remind us that God places His people in specific settings to bless others.

This is our calling as well. Our identity is affirmed in Christ—this is our light. We can serve society without losing ourselves to it. The danger of assimilation is real. If our worth, belonging, or identity comes only from success, acceptance, or community approval, then we risk slipping away from Christ. But our discipleship draws a line: we have the ability to serve and work in our communities without surrendering who we are.

At the same time, God has not called us to be separatists or haters of our world. We are not waiting for the last soul before escaping. Instead, we pray daily: “*Your kingdom come.*” That means we already live as citizens of the heavenly city, here and now.

Loving Our Neighbor

Chief Apostle Schneider has emphasized again and again the call to love our neighbor in practical ways. To do good works is not optional—it is the outflow of our citizenship. We are not in our communities for our own sake, nor to boost the image of our Church, but to serve God by seeking the *shalom* of our neighbors.



Shalom is more than peace; it is flourishing in every sense—spiritual, physical, social, and economic. When we pray for our towns, contribute to harmony, and support the prosperity of all, we reflect the city of God.

As Jesus taught in Matthew 25, the mark of heavenly citizenship is found in being a good neighbor: feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and serving the least of these.

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Identity and Vigilance

This calling requires us to know who we are. Our young people especially face pressures and distractions far greater than in the past. Faith cannot be absorbed by osmosis; it must be intentionally formed.

Our strength lies in:

- Remaining rooted in Word, sacrament, and gospel.
- Keeping what is holy, holy.
- Patiently teaching and modeling faith for our children and youth.
- Building a congregational culture of belonging, accountability, and reconciliation.

If we know our true identity as God's children, we will not live selfishly with our light hidden under a basket. We will serve as effective witnesses right where God has placed us.

Congregations as Cities of God

Every place where a congregation exists is like a small outpost of the heavenly city. Together we bear witness that the kingdom of God is near. Our congregations should feel like previews of that city: strong, welcoming, filled with love and peace.

Guests who visit sense whether this is true. Do they see the light of Christ shining among us? Do they find belonging, forgiveness, and a foretaste of God's kingdom? This is both a challenge and a joy for us to nurture.

Congregations also serve their wider communities. Charitable contributions, outreach projects, and acts of service are natural results of living in Christ's light. They are not ends in themselves but signs pointing to the true Light—Jesus.

Moving Forward Together

As a church, our direction is clear:

- Love your neighbor.
- Do good works.
- Prepare for the return of Christ by fulfilling His purposes.

Small groups, minister training, family activities, worship and music, and our daily witness all contribute to this. Each initiative is a way of shaping disciples who are equipped to live as dual citizens: faithful to heaven, engaged on earth.

Brothers and sisters, you are a city on a hill. Do not despise the earthly city, do not assimilate to it, but serve it. Shine your light through good works, not for your own honor, but so that many may glorify our Father in heaven.

Together, as Christ's disciples, we are called to bring His kingdom into every place we live. Let us go forward together with courage, with joy, and with love.



John S. Schnabel

Scan these QR codes to access additional resources for “A City on a Hill,” perfect for use in your small group or for personal growth.



A City on a Hill
Video and discussion guide



A City on a Hill
For Your Journey with DA Schnabel
AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 1ST

A Thanksgiving Message

From our District Apostle

As we enter the season of Thanksgiving, we pause not only to count our blessings but also to reflect on how we live out our gratitude. The words from Colossians 3:17 remind us, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Gratitude is more than a feeling, it is a way of living. True thanksgiving is not just expressed in our prayers or offerings, but in how we speak, act, and respond to the gospel each day. It invites the question: What can I do for Christ here and now?

One way we offer thanks is by valuing His sacrifice and letting the gospel transform us. Like Zacchaeus in Luke 19, gratitude compels us to repent where needed, restore what we can, and live generously. His words in verse 8 show that a thankful heart leads to real, tangible change. When we give sacrificially, of time, resources, and love...for the good of the Church, our communities, and our families... we honor Christ and show His impact in our lives.

Our relationship with God becomes visible in how we treat others, care for creation, and reflect His love in our daily lives. When our words are seasoned with the salt of the gospel, they reflect kindness, forgiveness, and unity. Whether in person or online, our conversations should be shaped by the spirit of Christ. Every word has the power to reveal whom we serve.

So, in this season, may our gratitude go beyond words. May it be seen in how we live, how we speak, how we give, and how we love. For all that we have is from God; and to Him belongs our thanks. Happy Thanksgiving.

Celebrate Thanksgiving Sunday with us on November 23rd!





ON AUGUST 10, 2025, District Apostle Schnabel conducted a service in Panama, with 584 members present. During this divine service, Apostle Thomas Schmidt received the assignment of Lead Apostle. He will work alongside Apostles Barrera, Rangel, Flores, and Tuesta to care and support our members in the Spanish-speaking countries of Mexico, Dominican Republic, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela, as well as the Central American countries of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize.

In his address during the assignment, District Apostle Schnabel referred to the experience at the end of John, in which one of the disciples recognizes the Lord on the beach and points Him out. This example was used to illustrate one of Apostle Schmidt's key responsibilities: to recognize and highlight the Lord's activity to others.



Let's get together

June 26-28, 2026

Whether you are in a small congregation, or a big congregation, whether you are near your community of faith, or have many miles to come to church, whether you've been a member of the church all of your life or you've recently decided to become a believer, know that you are a part of God's family... you belong. As such, I am delighted to invite you to something revolutionary, a "family reunion..."

This weekend is more than an event - it's a movement of unity, renewal, and purpose. Mark your calendars, invite your friends and family, and join us for this life-changing experience. We are stronger, together. We are one church, together!

- DISTRICT APOSTLE SCHNABEL



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June 26-28 • Hyatt Regency Hotel • 350 N High St., Columbus, OH