



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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Dear Friends,

August 21, 2003

I want to thank all of you who read this Legacy Newsletter for the support you send and the many prayers you make petitioning our Great God to bless Legacy Institute. Because of your faithfulness, God hears your prayers and empowers us through His Holy Spirit to accomplish the work we have been given to do. We receive letters of encouragement every month, and we always appreciate and are deeply inspired by them. The Bible says that a person's heart is where his treasure is. You have shown by your faithful support that you believe in what God is doing through Legacy Institute to impact the lives of those reaching out for God.

As a policy, I never ask for donations in our Legacy letter. We believe that God will inspire people to financially support us with whatever is needed to accomplish His will. Legacy's activities are acts of faith. We rely on Him.

Legacy supporters fellowship with many various COG organizations, not just one or two. And while we receive donations from several small Church of God and other Sabbatarian congregations, we receive *no financial support* from any of the larger COG corporate organizations. We rely almost entirely on the donations of *individual Christians* who believe in what we are doing. In fact, I have turned down offers of direct support from some large corporate churches because I believe this would limit our freedom to act as God directs us.

We organized Legacy Institute as a charitable foundation and not a church specifically for two reasons. The first reason is that we can operate in the non-Christian world more freely as a foundation than a church. The second and most important reason is that we believe the Church of God is a SPIRITUAL BODY founded by Jesus nearly 2000 years ago. The Body of Christ is *NOT limited to one human organization or another!* I want to make my feelings on this perfectly clear to all our readers.

This means that Legacy Institute is not chained by the idea that God *only* works through one group or another. This means that we are not handicapped by the concept that we cannot work with someone else because they don't belong to "our group" or come under "our umbrella"!

I find it appalling that one can find several U.S. corporate COG groups, with almost exactly the same doctrines, meeting for the Feast of Tabernacles –all in the same city, but at different locations! Why can't we all be meeting, fellowshipping and worshipping the same Great God together?

I am going to quote something I have said many times in past letters,

“It is God’s Work, not some particular person or organization’s work. It is presumptuous to believe that His Holy Spirit is the exclusive property of one person or group. God does what He wants. He will empower whomever he chooses, whenever He chooses, and in whatever part of the world He chooses, with or without the approval or even the knowledge of any particular church organization. He is God.”

Legacy Institute’s philosophy allows for various individuals or Church of God fellowships to cooperate together, in a spirit of one body and Christian fellowship, to achieve a common goal – without the “baggage” of our traditional idea of how corporate church organizations should operate. It also means that Legacy Institute is free to cooperate with any other Sabbatarian or Church of God organization that wants to work with us, if they are doing so in a spirit of brotherhood and mutual respect. If this makes me a “loose cannon” or “rogue elephant”, so be it. If God wants to bring different people or organizations together to accomplish His will then we go where He wants us to go!

The Holy Spirit is far greater than corporate church lines. The Church of God is a spiritual body and Jesus Christ is the Head. This is what we believe and this is how we operate.

Building Bridges with the Alliance of the Churches of God Seventh Day of Portugal

A couple of years ago, Legacy Institute came into contact with an organization called the *Universal Church of Jesus Christ*, a Sabbatarian group in Portugal. We asked them to help us get some funds to Church of God members in Angola and they were very helpful.

I came to realize very quickly that these people were truly brethren who share almost the same doctrines as we do and displayed the *active* telltale fruits of the Holy Spirit of God. I felt compelled to develop stronger ties with them. So I asked our Legacy Secretary, Herbert Vierra (who is of Portuguese descent) to please go to Lisbon and pay a visit to this Church that predates the founding of the Radio Church of God by Herbert W. Armstrong.

Here is a report of his visit:

August 12, 2003

Earlier today I returned home from a remarkable eight day visit to Lisbon, where I met with members of the Aliança das Igrejas de Deus do Sétimo Dia de Portugal (Alliance of the Churches of God Seventh Day of Portugal). This new church organization was formerly two congregations: the Universal Church of Jesus Christ and the Church of God 7th Day, but have recently aligned themselves into one Church of God.

Even though Legacy Institute has been in contact with the people from the former IUJC for some time, this was our first face-to-face meeting. This meeting has forever changed my view of the

Church of God. It's amazing how common it is to place ourselves at the center of our view of the world, forgetting God's admonition to Elijah, "...I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal..." (I Kings 19:18 NKJV). This statement rings clearer for me than ever before. Let me give you a brief background of this small flock of the Church of God and how we came into contact with them.

A Seventh Day Adventist missionary traveled to Portugal in 1928 with the purpose of beginning a Church. I'm not clear on what contacts he may have made before his momentous trip. Three years later there was a falling out between some members of the congregation over the teachings of Ellen G. White. They separated themselves and began a new church, the Igeria Universal de Jesus Cristo. This was three years before Herbert W. Armstrong began the Radio Church of God.

In the year 2000 Legacy Institute received restricted donations for a congregation in Africa, the Worldwide Church of God, Angola. Our problem was how to get the money to them safely. We were given the name of a man living in Portugal whose business frequently took him to Angola. A few e-mail messages later Vitor Quinta agreed to deliver the money to them. Not only that, but his congregation chipped in several hundred dollars of their own money to help this fledgling Church of God! Now Vitor regularly spends his Sabbaths in Angola with the brethren whenever his work takes him to that part of the world. He was there six times last year. Surprisingly, Vitor was even present last December for a very crucial meeting. He served as interpreter between the Portuguese speaking Angolan ministry and English speaking representatives sent to make a last ditch effort encouraging changes in doctrines. The Angolans refused, and were told they were no longer a part of their parent organization.

Vitor Quinta and I planned to meet sometime last year, but our work schedules just didn't mesh. Recently, however, I received a message that he would take a month off in August so I was finally able to make the necessary arrangements for us to meet. My only goal was to build a bridge between us. But I also had many questions regarding their Church... just as they had many questions about us. We knew something about the IUJC from reading their web site and an exchange of e-mail messages. Still, I had no real idea just how this first meeting would go, but hopeful God was orchestrating our contact with one another.

August is an extremely busy time to travel in Europe with so many on holiday during this time of year. Booking a flight was difficult, with me finally having to settle on a flight that took me from Los Angeles to Washington DC, from Washington DC to Frankfurt, and finally from Frankfurt to Lisbon. Vitor met me at the airport and drove me to my hotel. For me there was an immediate connection, the same connection I've felt before when meeting others with the Spirit of God for the first time. I was to rest and refresh a bit and then join Vitor after dinner for a Bible Study with AIDSDP.

When Vitor picked me up later that evening I discovered the first Tuesday of every month AIDSDP schedules an evening Bible Study. So, my providential arrival made it possible to meet some of the members of the Church before the Sabbath. A short drive from the hotel we arrived at what seemed to be a residential area of apartment buildings. Down two flights of stairs on a wide street we approached an entrance with the name of the Church across the top of the doorway. (Portugal is very hilly, not unlike San Francisco.) One man was waiting. Soon, others began to arrive. I was given a brief tour of the facility, which I learned later they have been renting for over 40 years. Inside, there were several rows of wooden pews that appeared hand made.

I was introduced to the other Church elders serving the congregation, Paulo Coelho and Manuel Santos (who I'm told reluctantly serves as Church Pastor). Mr. Santos conducted the Bible Study for a group of about 15 people. Vitor told me several members were on holiday and that I'd see more people on the Sabbath. The topic for the evening was spiritual gifts. We sat in an informal circle and everyone was allowed to freely comment on the presentation. It reminded me a bit of the Bible chat we have in the Los Angeles congregation I attend. Also that evening, Vitor invited me to give the sermon on the Sabbath.

Over the next several days Vitor showed me around Lisbon. Occasionally, his wife, Grace, would join us. I deeply appreciate their hospitality, and for allowing me to intrude on their vacation time.

While seeing the sights was very interesting and enjoyable, the best part of my visit was the informal spiritual interchange during our time together. On several occasions Paulo joined us, either for lunch or an evening meal. It was also a real treat to spend Sunday afternoon with Paulo's family in the nearby city of Sintra. We all sat around a large table. Vitor and Grace were there, Paulo and his wife Louisa, their two children Joa'o and Miguel, Paulo's mother and father and two nephews, and a Church member who was a close friend of Paulo's mother. I told Paulo later that the whole setting made me feel as though I was in a Portuguese Norman Rockwell painting. It was wonderful.

Two-hour Sabbath services begin at 10:00am with a Bible Study. During this time the children attend Sabbath School. We began with a single hymn, which we sung a cappella because the organist had yet to arrive. Then, there was an opening prayer. While our doctrines are near mirror images of one another, customs, culture and traditions make for a difference in the style of worship. For example, most of the women wore a lace covering on their heads during the service. The opening and closing prayers were also a bit longer than what we usually have, with members saying amen at various points along the way. And about one third of the congregation knelt down during the prayer.

The Bible Study was interesting, with members commenting freely just as they did the previous Tuesday evening. Having the Bible Study first initially gave an impression of a loose style of worship because people kept coming in throughout this part of the service. It finally dawned on me that the formal part of the service was the sermon, and not everyone had planned to attend the Bible Study. Hummm?. Just like home!

To begin the second half of services we sang another song, only this time to the accompaniment of the organist. There was a heat wave throughout Europe and it was very hot inside the hall. So, I was encouraged to speak in shirt sleeves and a tie. Vitor translated for me. My topic was on reaching out to the gentiles at the end of the age. After the sermon a man got up to recite scripture. Vitor leaned toward me and said it is their custom to have someone read the 10 commandments for the congregation every Sabbath. (The 10 Commandments are also posted on a pillar in the middle of the meeting hall just as you walk into the room.) After that, there was another song, and then the female organist remained seated as she offered the closing prayer.

It was also a special treat to have five former WCG members present to hear my sermon. These people are some of the remnants left after the break up of the small congregation in Portugal. I was asked to visit with them and I invited them to join us on the Sabbath, partly because they spoke almost no English... and my Portuguese is quite limited. We had lunch together in the afternoon. They seemed greatly encouraged, and later said they were very surprised at the doctrinal similarities and depth of spiritual understanding of this Church.

Well, it was never my intention to give you a "blow-by-blow" account of my trip, but I thought you might find some of these details interesting. Now let me get to some of the more salient points of my discussion with AIDSDP. (Bear in mind that AIDSDP... like us... is not an entity where everyone is at the same level of spiritual understanding. We are all growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.)

- *AIDSDP has five congregations in Portugal, with about 350 members.*
- *They have been keeping five of the annual Holy Days for a time. However, this year is the first year they will observe Trumpets and Atonement. I asked Paulo about his understanding of the ritual of the two goats and he understands the meaning in the same way I understand it.*
- *Vitor told me they count to Pentecost after the first Holy Day and not the weekly Sabbath. (It is obvious to me they will change this if they learn they are in error, otherwise they would never have begun keeping the Holy Days in the first place. The same, of course, applies to us.)*

- *AIDSDP has an understanding the lost tribes of Israel are scattered throughout the nations, but don't have the same perspective we do regarding the identity of Israel, particularly the US and Britain.*
- *We spoke of God's plan of salvation. AIDSDP holds a view that this is the only day of salvation. However, it is my belief this concept may change as they keep the Holy Days and experience them in their context. When we spoke of this Vitor wanted to make sure I wasn't speaking of a 2nd chance for salvation.*
- *AIDSDP believes in baptism by full immersion. A slight difference though is they only baptize in the ocean or river, never in a swimming pool or what they consider a non-living water source. Interesting.*
- *I was under the false impression they didn't drink alcohol or wine. The reason is they use unfermented wine for the Passover service. We didn't really speak of this much because it was something I gleaned from their web site... which led to a false assumption on my part.*
- *They enjoy a unique legal status in Portugal because of their long history. New churches formed there fall into a different category and have more difficulty operating. Need I say Portugal is primarily a Catholic dominated country with churches on nearly every corner... sometimes even across the street from one another.*
- *The AIDSDP has a curiously similar literature base in common with the Church of God in the US. They publish a magazine, Compreender. If this title has a familiar ring to you it is probably because it was inspired by The Plain Truth. Compreender means understanding. Some of the other items in their lit base are...*
 - *As Christian, why we keep the Sabbath*
 - *Signs of the End of the Ages*
 - *There is still Hope*
 - *Are You Worshipping God in Vain*
 - *Life Goes By*
 - *Declaration of Faith – Being A Christian*
 - *September 11th, 2001 – An Explanation*

AIDSDP is very accepting of those from other fellowships. Differences in style don't bother them. In fact, even differences in doctrine are not necessarily a problem. We can certainly learn from them in their approach to others. They are not threatened by differences, but focus on the similarities. Paulo told me he believes AIDSDP is actually closer to our particular Church of God fellowships in their doctrines than with others they regularly associate with. However, attempts by them to meet with one of our fellowships in the past were met with suspicion and a mild rebuff. That's to our shame, but alas... we are not yet perfect. Perhaps this meeting can be a new start.

I deeply appreciate having made a connection with AIDSDP and firmly believe that our meeting is only the beginning of a relationship being promoted and blessed by our Great God. Thanks be to God and Jesus Christ for His word and truth, mercy and patience. There are probably a few other details I have forgotten to mention. If so, I'll add them later in another message. Regards to all.

*Your brother in Christ,
Herb Vierra*

Herb's report is very revealing. It reminds me of the time I met Lazum Brang and the Kachinland Church of God for the first time. I was surprised and humbled to come to the realization that they really, truly had the Holy Spirit working with them – that they were just as much a part of the Body of Jesus, the Church of God – as I was! Now, once again, God is

showing us that He is much greater than the box we keep trying to stuff Him in. How many more are out there? Elijah was one. There were 7000 others *he didn't know about!*

Update on Heather Beyer

If you read my last letter to you, you know that Heather came over to Thailand to teach at our Legacy Institute Leadership Training school in Chiang Mai and suddenly had to be hospitalized. We later found out that her body had, what now appears to have been, a very strong toxic reaction to monosodium glutamate (MSG). Thai people usually put MSG in everything, and the accumulation of “poison” to Heather’s body finally caused her to go into septic shock.

Heather had to have an operation and spent over 2 weeks in the hospital, much of that time in the ICU. She is now back in the USA with her family and recuperating from the ordeal. Please pray for Heather’s complete recovery.

Legacy School

The school year is progressing well. We have a good teaching team with 4 young volunteers from the USA (Ryan Foster, Jessa Moser, Bobbie Bauer and Daniel Miller) who will remain throughout the school year. Our youngest son Bronson has also volunteered to be with us again for another year. He helps administer the school and takes care of seeing that things run smoothly at the school and farm.

We have 14 students this year. All are working hard and progressing well. We have 5 students who are attending for the second year and I am pleased at the progress they have made in learning the English language. They are also doing well in Bible classes. First year students are currently learning about the foundations of our modern human society from the book of Genesis where it all began.

The second year students are studying about the pure teachings of Jesus as taught in the Bible – not the corrupted versions that have become the Christian traditions taught by men. The Truth of the Bible and the teachings of men are world’s apart. Most of the students are actually amazed that what they had been taught by their religious teachers or parents *is not in the Bible!* It is incredible and very rewarding to watch their faces as - suddenly – a light switches on in their minds! How many are actually being called by God, only time will tell. Being able to answer questions correctly on a test doesn’t necessarily mean they are becoming converted. I cannot change their hearts and open their minds. I have no power to do so. This is a spiritual miracle that only God can perform. But we all can (*and do*) pray that God please open their minds to the Truth through the power of His Holy Spirit.

I can frankly tell you that the students have never heard anything like what they are now hearing! Their religious leaders teach them to sing nice songs and learn about a little baby in a manger. We at Legacy teach them the Truth! God will do the rest.

Feast of Tabernacles

We will be holding the complete 8-day fall festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand once again this year. We also plan another feast site (Mae Sariang) closer to the Burma border, so that our Karen brethren who live in refugee camps can attend.

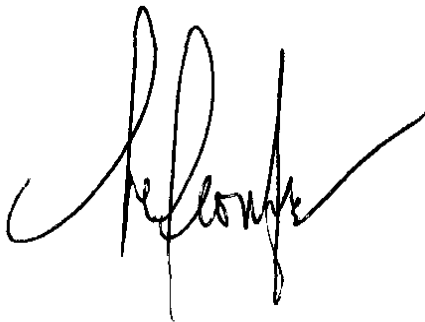
We will also help sponsor the Feast in Madras, India, again this year. We expect a total of over 130 people, local and international in attendance at all 3 sites. As well, we expect many new brethren to be keeping the Feast at several sites in Burma for the first time this year. I just received a letter from Evangelist Lazum Brang that there are now 10 new Karen Church of God families meeting together with Saw Htoo Saw in Central Burma.

God is pouring out His Holy Spirit upon His chosen people in Thailand, Burma, and India. We will even have a young man wanting to attend the Feast for the first time from the People's Democratic Republic of Laos. This Work is just beginning. Because of the preaching of Thomas in India, there were many thousands of converted Christians living in South India during the first century of the Common Era (C.E.), and for several centuries after his martyrdom they remained faithful. Is God going to call many thousands more in these Asian nations before He brings the curtain down on this sick and dying world? Only time will tell.

Please keep us always in your prayers. And please pray for our Karen and Kachin brethren living in the border areas of Thailand and in Burma. The Thai government has enacted draconian measures to force the insurgent groups living along the border to make peace with Rangoon. Permission to travel for our refugee brethren is now severely restricted. Some of our people live in constant fear that they might be arrested and sent back to Burma. Pray that God protects them and works out all things so that they can attend the Feast of Tabernacles in peace and safety.

That is it for this letter. God be with you all. Next month begins the fall Holy Day season. Gloria, all of us at Legacy and I want to wish you a safe and very spiritual festival season. Time is short. Make sure your Feast this year is spent in faithful communion with Our Great God and strengthening fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ.

In Jesus Righteous and Holy Name,



Leon Sexton

WHAT IS LEGACY INSTITUTE?

LEGACY INSTITUTE is a private, non-profit, charitable foundation and is not affiliated with any human church organization. Legacy Institute seeks to serve and help mankind in the spirit and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. His instructions were to freely give. This means without discrimination and without prejudice. Your donations to Legacy Institute are tax deductible in the USA.

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