# The THIRTEENTH MEETING

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

Psalm 66:16

Glenda-mae Greene

Emma Van Komen

April McNeil

Virginia Casey

Donald W. Murray

Gary S. Force

Suzanne Waters Street

Frances Johnson

Clinton Jones, Sr.

Carol and David Tasker

#### OVER AND OVER AGAIN!



### STUFFED STRAWBERRIES AND A FULL HEART By Glenda-mae Greene

COLLEAGUE asked me to host a small group of students at my home on a Friday evening for vespers. I swallowed hard, caught on the edge of a personal dilemma. I wanted to entertain the young scholars, but I had no more than \$7 of disposable cash until the next paycheck.

"It'll be only about ten of them," my friend continued. I accepted willingly. It simply entailed providing light refreshments, and my cupboards were not exactly empty.

But I really wanted the students to experience a very special Sabbath welcome. Rummaging through my purse, I searched for any money I might have overlooked. I discovered instead the check for last week's tithe and offerings that had been missing ever since that church service. I paused for a nanosecond. I would not consider using it. Nor would I use my credit card.

Driving along the country roads that afternoon, I spotted a roadside fruit stand where huge red strawberries were on sale. Moments later, with the luscious berries in one hand and \$2 in the other, I walked triumphantly to the car. Stuffed strawberries, I decided, would be Friday evening's specialty.

As I stuffed the fruit with a delicately flavored cream filling, I used the time to commune with God. As music floated from my stereo, I prayed for a blessing on our vesper program and for the students who would be my guests.

Just before the sun set that Friday, laughing students spilled from their cars. Clearly I was about to host more than 30 students. Could they all fit in my modest bungalow? Would I have enough food?

I left the details of the programming to the Father.

We had a lively songfest. Then the young adults broke up into small discussion groups to talk about God's love. They spread all through the house. Some prayed in the bedrooms, others chatted in the dining room, and yet others moved to the kitchen. Some even knelt by the dryer in the laundry room. My house seemed to expand. I could feel God's blessings upon us.

After we formed a circle of prayer around the table, we sat down to eat. The food seemed to take on the dynamics of those five barley loaves 2,000 years ago. It was enough, and it was good.

That ending was only the beginning. Three days later I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. "Your tire has gone flat," one of my Friday-evening guests reported sadly. "But I have an open period right now. I'll help you change it."

As he put away the jack, he said, "I'm glad I got to know you."

I was the happy one. It had finally occurred to me that although the strawberries,

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with their creamy centers, were to be the focal point of the Friday-evening celebration, God had a different agenda. He intended to open my eyes to the blessings—both spiritual and material—that He had been stuffing into my life all along. And I will never have enough room to hold them all!

O Lord, how manifold are your works! . . . When you open your hand, they are filled with good things. Psalm 104:24-28, NRSV.

Glenda-mae Greene is assistant vice-president for student services at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. She is a member of Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs.



# CRAZY ED, A LITTLE CHURCH AND 21,000 RUSSIAN BIBLES By Emma Van Komen

IN THE early 1990s, when Russia opened its doors to Christian evangelism, our little church learned through *The Carter Report* of the need for Russian Bibles. Each Bible could touch the lives of an estimated five to eight people. We felt a call to help these people, so starved for Christ, by providing them with Bibles printed in their own language. Each Bible could be bought for a dollar.

We had approximately five months to raise money for these Bibles, and we set a goal of \$13,000. To most of us, this seemed an impossible amount for our small congregation of about 75 active members, but my son-in-law Ed assured us that this was nothing for the Creator of the universe. We rewarded his enthusiasm by calling him Crazy Ed.

We all set to work. The church-school children gave up ice-cream cones and candy and gave the money for these things to the Bible fund. One girl sold candy at her public school. She told everyone that the money was for Russian Bibles. It impressed the teachers and students so much that they started giving Shauna a lot of business.

We ran several garage sales, with members donating doors, lawn mowers, and other miscellaneous items. Each sale raised more than \$700. Many members' families and friends outside of our church community heard of our efforts and began donating.

That Christmas my family decided not to buy presents for each other, but instead to give that money to the Bible fund. We all later agreed it was the best Christmas we ever had!

Money poured in. Crazy Ed challenged us many times with his confidence that we could not only reach the \$13,000 goal, but exceed it. With many prayers

the money continued to pour in. God was blessing our efforts of stewardship and giving.

Through God's great love for His Russian people, our little church was able to raise \$21,000 for Russian Bibles. That is 21,000 Russian Bibles that might not have been in that country except for the blessing of God's stirring up the Fallon, Nevada, Seventh-day Adventist Church. As many as 100,000 people might be affected for eternity by those Bibles.

All of us, from the youngest to the oldest, felt blessed by this project. We saw firsthand that God really does work in remarkable ways through His people to spread the good news of salvation.

#### For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Matthew 6:21.

Emma Van Komen is a self-employed bookkeeper in Fallon, Nevada. She is a member of the Fallon Seventh-day Adventist Church.

#### A PECULIAR MINISTRY By April McNeil

WNE DAY last spring, my husband mentioned that some women were hoping I would consider teaching their children and themselves karate. He knew I had decided several years ago to leave that behind me. I had no intention of changing my mind.

As we discussed their interest in classes, he mentioned that since I had stopped practicing martial arts, I had lost some of my muscle tone. He wasn't being unkind; it was just one of those innocent observations husbands can make, which, I noticed, happened to be true.

I had recently reached an age milestone and hoped the next 50 years would be at least as good as the first. In the interest of maintaining my health, I thought I should at least consider the teaching request. So I decided to pray about it.

I had no problem with the idea of teaching self-defense. But I was uncomfortable with some of the Eastern traditions that had been part of my own training. My instructor was a Christian and had, in part, been responsible for my becoming a Christian. But his methods were laced with subtle Eastern practices that made me uncomfortable. I needed to settle this conflict, or I would not teach.

As I lifted the matter to God, I was shown just what to do. I changed a number of things, and I have been teaching again this past year. Respect, self-control, self-discipline, and focus are the keys to all that I teach.

I always prayed that each class would be an honor to God and a blessing to

every student. I prayed for my students and their families and specific needs I could see. I gave those classes to God, and He gave me this rather peculiar ministry.

My class was made up of a wonderful group of students from six years old through adults, many of whom were Christian. They knew I loved them and prayed for them. They also knew I'm a Seventh-day Adventist. Some have even visited our church.

I continually saw God's hand at work. Amazing transformations occurred. An uncontrollable hyperactive child, struggling in school, now became a calm, focused student, earning all A's and B's. An obnoxiously difficult child became an agreeable, happy, helpful son. One adult student noted the "peaceful spirit" in my teaching. That's not generally something one would notice in a karate class. I let her know it was the Lord.

When my husband and I were asked to pastor in a different district, I grieved over the thought of leaving my students and this ministry. Some adult students and some parents wept. So did I. It was truly a test of faith and submission. Once I understood and submitted, the weight of my grief lifted. Now I eagerly await God's next adventure, knowing He will use me wherever I am if I am willing.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10, NASB.

April McNeil is a martial arts instructor and pastor's wife in Wray, Colorado. She is a member of the Wray Seventh-day Adventist Church.



# NO NEED FOR SUBTERFUGE

By Virginia Casey

**VV**HEN I became a born-again Christian and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I was faced with a dilemma: How was I going to be faithful in returning tithe without my husband's knowledge?

Not having belonged to a Bible-based church before, I found the matter of tithing difficult and strange. For the previous 62 years of my life, I had belonged to a Sunday-keeping church in which tithing was almost never mentioned. Our "collection," as it was called, consisted of whatever loose change we had in our possession at the time, or in recent years, the occasional dollar or two. When a "special collection" was taken up and we parted with real paper money, we thought of it as a generous and sacrificial act.

I knew that my husband would "flip his lid" upon discovering the amount of my tithe, not to mention what I gave in offerings. I dared not write a check for fear of the repercussions that would surely follow when my husband scrutinized the bank statements. Returning tithe with cash wasn't a good option either as we kept very little cash on hand. Our monthly checks were deposited directly into our bank account.

One day we received our brand new "Cash-Stop" debit cards. I'll never forget the first time I used mine to make a purchase and how surprised and delighted I was when those five magical words stared me right in the eye—"DO YOU WANT CASH BACK?" What a stupid question! Yes, yes, of course I wanted cash back!

Returning my tithe with "extra" cash from ATM purchases worked very well until tax return time when my tithe and offering receipts from the church arrived in the mail. Needless to say, my deed was discovered, and I was found out. I had no choice but to give my husband an explanation. I bravely quoted to him exactly what the Bible says about tithing. He wasn't charmed with my quotation. In fact, he was very upset. Thankfully, however, the irritation was short-lived.

As a result of this unpleasant experience and my husband's more accepting attitude I decided to write checks for my tithe. When the bank statement comes now he never refers to the matter.

I should have trusted the Lord long before I did and saved myself a lot of unnecessary worry and stress. I tried to work out the problem all by myself instead of consulting the One who could really help.

I'm learning the hard way, but with His help, I am learning to grow in His love and grace.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5, 6, NKJV.

Virginia Casey is a retired municipal government employee for the city of St. John's, Newfoundland. She is a member of the Conception Bay South Seventh-day Adventist Church in Upper Gullies, Newfoundland.



### THIS IS YOUR SCHOOL By Donald W. Murray

HIS is your school! Someday you will be a student here!" When my mother spoke with such conviction, I usually believed her, but this was different. She was referring to Walla Walla College and my future enrollment there. That worthy goal seemed well beyond the grasp of a family like ours.

My parents had joined the Adventist Church in the 1940s, and the implications of that decision meant that a poverty-level subsistence became the reality in our

home. Dad had worked in the hard rock mines of northern Idaho as a young man, and then for 25 years he had been a meat cutter.

Saturday was the prime shopping day in the meat market. When he became a Seventh-day Adventist, he turned away from his Depression-era generation's obsession with financial security to follow Jesus. His decision meant that he would never again hold a steady job.

But being faithful to God and the teachings of their new church was a commitment my parents made with a firm resolve. In their view, that commitment included providing an education in Adventist schools for my sister and me right through college. So when I was still a boy, they took us regularly to visit Walla Walla College, to attend programs there. And my mother's familiar refrain was "This is your school. Someday you will be a student here!"

Dad worked hard, and he knew how to find jobs; but in his fifties, with limited skills and education, and faithful to his understanding of the Sabbath, finding work that lasted more than a few months was difficult. Many times the focus of our family prayers was asking the Lord to lead Dad to a job so the bills could be paid. My parents' dreams for my sister and me to be educated in Adventist schools must have seemed foolish at times. But they continued to arrange visits to those campuses.

In 1953 my mother found work as a receptionist for a Pasco, Washington, physician. Our attendance at an Adventist academy was now within reach, but college at Walla Walla still seemed a far stretch. But my mother, in her quiet way, kept the dream before us. "This is your school. Someday . . ."

During the Depression, Dad had invested in a few shares of stock in the silver mines of northern Idaho. The price of ore was very low, and the shares had provided no source of income for our family. But for some reason Dad had wanted to keep those stocks.

In the late 1950s, almost overnight, a boom hit the mining industries. Stocks split, and then split again. What had been purchased for pennies was now worth more than a hundred times that—and then still a hundred times more. Faithfulness, long taught in our family as its own reward, was now rewarded with the blessings of heaven.

The mining boom didn't last very long—just long enough for me to complete my educational goals and to be well launched in life; and just long enough for my parents to move into a more comfortable home. While their lifestyle remained basically unchanged in retirement, they enjoyed a measure of financial security they had never known before. Dad used his extra money to assist in worthwhile projects and to invest in people.

Both Mom and Dad are now deceased. In their will they gave a substantial gift to Walla Walla College. Since 1989 this memorial scholarship fund has provided tuition assistance for up to four students per year.

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God rewarded my parents' simple faithfulness to His truth in ways that blessed me and now bless others. Mom's dream is still being realized for others: "This is your school . . . ."

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matthew 25:21.

Donald W. Murray is the dean of men at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He is a member of Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs.

### GIVE AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN By Gary S. Force

IF YOU DON'T have a need, you don't need a miracle.

Self-supporting ministries are often in need of miracles; that is why we call them faith ventures. Our school was going through a need. We were experiencing some financial difficulty. Tuition payments were slow coming in, and the staff members were waiting for their stipend. This was a common problem for some of us. However, the longer we waited, the more our faith was tested.

During our daily prayer time we asked the staff to pray for God's intervention and blessing. We were reminded of the principle of sacrifice as originally stated in Luke 6:38 that we learned at the Institute of Basic Life Principles: If you need a blessing, pray to find how God wants to use you to be a blessing to someone else. So we did just that.

"God," we prayed, "is there someone to whom You want us to be a blessing?" God answered by making us aware of several families with needs. We discussed these needs at the weekly family council meeting of the students and staff and soon decided to help a family who had no housing because the father had lost his job. They needed first and last months' rent.

We took up a collection among the students and the staff. This was a real test for us. It took a special measure of faith to give to a family in need, even though our own families had not received any income. We mailed the check to the needy family on a Thursday.

That very next Sabbath morning, before receiving the check we had sent, the father in that needy family told his wife, "We have enough money to pay the rent or to return tithe but not enough to do both. What do you think we should do?"

They discussed their options and decided to return their tithe first and leave the rent to God. They wrote out their check for tithe and placed it in the morning offering. They both sighed with relief, knowing they had done the right thing. Later that day when they got their mail, they found the letter from our school. They opened it, not knowing what to expect, and found our letter of explanation and our check that would cover the expense of the rent owed. This time they didn't sigh with relief. They jumped for joy!

God led us to send a check, knowing exactly what day they needed to receive it for their faith to be rewarded. It had taken three days for the mail service to deliver our check to them. It took five days for the mail service to deliver their thank-you note to us. God not only can work miracles of the heart to give gifts; He can also work miracles with the U.S. Postal Service.

As for our staff stipends, we got them soon enough. God touched the heart of a very generous person to give us an unexpected donation. God had rewarded the faithfulness of His people. With God all things are possible!

Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands—all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one God will use for you. Luke 6:38, TEV.

Gary S. Force is president and principal of DayStar Adventist Academy in Castle Valley, Utah. He is a member of the Castle Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church.



# A TEST OF TIME

By Suzanne Waters Street

MY STOMACH turned as I considered my dilemma. I had to work, and I had a major exam to take in the middle of my workday. Was I prepared for the exam? No!

I could quickly recount the many hours I had spent in church and in church work. In fact, I had attended a weekend meeting, prepared an extensive financial report, attended a prayer meeting, and finally, had attended a special board meeting. As a result, the evening before my exam I had fallen asleep with my textbook and notes in my hands.

"To keep the Sabbath holy is one thing, but all of this other stuff I'm doing is just too much," I fumed. I was so angry that I couldn't even ask for my Father's help. I felt strongly that in spending so much time on church activities, I had not used my time wisely. It was an easy matter, after the fact, to see how I could have maneuvered work, school, church responsibilities, and home so that I could have been prepared for that exam.

Overwhelmed with fear, self-pity, and anger, I decided I was fed up with being pulled in so many different directions all of the time. I had always worn many hats, but I had begun to feel that I was just one step ahead of self-destruction.

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When I had started college in 1997, I was convicted that I must continue to serve God in my small home church. I had already promised to tithe my time in support of God's work, no matter what my life circumstances were. But many times I found myself tormented and struggling to keep that promise.

Now, through the burning tears of anger and pain, I opened my prayer journal to record my plea. I simply wrote, "Dear Father, I am tired physically and mentally, and I am grossly unprepared for my exam. Would you bring what I have read and written back to my mind so that I can do well? Please guide my hand."

I left the office that day and rushed over to my class. I sat down and whispered yet another prayer as my anger melted into helplessness. I was fearful of just flat-out bombing on the test.

After a little delay the professor stepped into the room and stood before the class. In a state of unbelief I listened as he apologized for somehow losing the exam while attempting to print it from his computer just before class. Needless to say, the dreaded exam that had shaken my soul was canceled until the next class meeting.

At that moment I was forced to see that God had never forsaken me but had continuously rewarded me for giving my time to His work. I saw a God of love, who is concerned with all that concerns us and who constantly works to cause all things to work together for the good of those who faithfully give of their time.

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28, NJKV.

Suzanne Waters Street is an administrative secretary at the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, in Princess Anne, Maryland. She is a member of the Pocomoke City, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



### FROM HOUSEBOUND TO HOMEWARD BOUND By Frances Johnson

MY HUSBAND was a dedicated Christian who worked as a typesetter for a newspaper. I had a job as a secretary and bookkeeper. I worried constantly about our financial security, fearing that we might end up losing our home. I asked my husband, "How can we continue giving tithe to the Lord with one of our daughters in nursing school and the other one in high school?" My husband calmly told me of his confidence in God's faithfulness. He also continued returning tithe and offerings. I worried so much that I had a nervous breakdown. For two full years I didn't leave our home even to go to church. In desperation I finally reached out to the Lord and asked Him to heal me. I promised Him that in thankfulness I would begin to work for Him.

God heard my plea and healed me. I was able to go to work again and do a job I truly enjoyed. God and I have been in partnership ever since. I can truthfully attest that God is faithful, and I desire to remain faithful to Him not only in tithing but in every area of my life.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22, 23.

Frances Johnson is now retired. She is a member of the Washington, New Hampshire, Seventh-day Adventist Church.



# THE WORDS OF DAVID

By Clinton Jones, Sr.

HADN'T missed a single day of work in ten years. I took pride in my job as a route salesman for a major bakery and was considered an exemplary employee. Reliability was an essential in my job because the bakery products were time-dated, and freshness was the company priority.

While my work life had been very consistent for a decade, things were changing in my personal life. I had discovered the Sabbath truth. The conviction to follow God all the way had already pierced my heart, and I took a stand for Jesus. I felt that was the least I could do, now that I understood how He had taken a stand for me.

The same day I was baptized (I was still damp from the service), I went to see my work supervisor. I took a deep breath and said, "I'm sorry, but I can no longer work on Saturday."

"What? That can't be allowed! You're a route salesman. Saturday is part of the job!"

I was prepared for the worst, but I was comforted by the promise in Psalm 37:25.

The strangest thing happened that evening of my baptism. A still small voice whispered to me as I lay in bed, saying: "Don't worry about the stand you have taken for My Sabbath. In three months something will happen, but you will be able to hold on."

On several occasions at prayer meeting in the weeks ahead, I shared my testimony about hearing that still small voice, though I didn't fully understand it myself. Soon enough, however, God intervened on my behalf. The supervisor assigned others to work on Saturday while I was given a Sunday route. And three months after my baptism, the company was closed.

Now I knew that the voice had been from heaven. I had no job, but I had peace in my soul. My wife was very loving and supportive during this difficult time. Again the words of David rang in my heart. I did not know what the future held, but my peace came from knowing who held the future.

The next six months were surreal. I started work as a literature evangelist. I had many experiences through which God revealed His power to me during this great work. Once I was working in Greenwood, South Carolina. My pouch was full of books, and my pockets were empty. I asked many people to purchase the blessings in the volumes of books that I had. They all said no. Desperate, I uttered a very simple prayer to God: "Lord, You know my needs today, and I have faith that You will meet them." Miraculously, the very same people who said no earlier all came to me and with a sense of urgency bought my books—*all of them.* Again the words of the psalmist rang in my heart.

After six months of working as a literature evangelist, I began receiving an unemployment check. Those payments would last for only six months. On the last day of receiving payment I was hired as a route salesman for another major bakery. The Lord has blessed me to work there for 25 years. I have been confronted and threatened many times by Satan because of the Sabbath—even briefly fired and rehired. Through all that, God's wonderful Sabbath has remained undefiled.

# I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. Psalm 37:25.

Clinton Jones, Sr., is a route salesman for Dolly Madison Bakery in Augusta, Georgia. He is a member of the Ebenezer Seventh-day Adventist Church in Augusta.



## GOD'S DIFFERENT TIMETABLE By Carol and David Tasker

**VV**E HAD planned our wedding for two years, but we were poor college students. Our best efforts to save money for starting our life together resulted only in the cash purchase of a fifteen-year-old EK Holden (the Australian General Motors equivalent of a Chevrolet) for \$300. On our wedding day (four days after Carol's graduation) we had just \$50 in cash to pay for the honeymoon and the first two weeks' groceries.

Before our marriage we had set up a budget plan. It seemed that we were bankrupt before we even started, and David had one more year of college studies. In spite of these dim prospects, we resolved to continue our practice of tithing and to add a second tithe. We also decided to return offerings equivalent to half of the tithe amount; making a total of 25 percent of our income returned to the Lord.

We also wrote down a list of four "luxury" items that we hoped to acquire in the years ahead: a piano, a sewing machine, a radio-cassette-turntable music system, and a freezer. We guessed it would take us at least 20 years of careful saving to purchase those items.

God had a shorter timetable. Before our first wedding anniversary He had arranged for us to own all four items, and He had fascinating ways of doing it.

Not long after our wedding we heard that the Primary Sabbath school department was disposing of its piano. A letter to the church board and a \$30 check made us the proud owners of an older, out-of-tune but serviceable, piano, and we were glad to have it. Four years later in New Zealand another family was delighted to pay us \$200 for that piano, rejoicing in their bargain, while we were able to upgrade to a very nice instrument.

During that same first year a recently remarried widower realized he didn't need two sewing machines in the house. We bought one of his—an older but adequately functioning, machine—for \$20. Three years later that machine became a \$100 trade-in toward a brand-new machine.

Both of us had come from families who saved money by canning and freezing, so a freezer seemed to us to be a good investment. A number of relatives unable to attend our wedding sent gifts of money. We decided that a freezer would be the ideal purchase with that gift money. However, we wanted to return the first and second tithe and give offerings on the cash *value* of all our wedding presents, not just the cash; it seemed to us that those gifts of household goods should be counted as "increase" to us.

We used the cash gifts to return the tithe and offerings on all the gifts, and thus we had to wait on the freezer. A few months after our wedding we had saved up an amount of money equivalent to what we had returned to God for the wedding gifts.

The timing was right. The appliance store offered an \$80 discount on their freezers, so were able to purchase a bigger and better freezer than we could have purchased immediately after our wedding.

And the music system? Carol's sister, on mission service at the time, asked us if we would mind looking after hers.

In all, we had paid only \$50 of our own money toward these four luxury items, and we were using them less than six months after we had begun our new partnership with God.

We discovered a further benefit. Until recently we had never shared this story with anyone, even our children. We thought that it might be seen as some sort of personal ego trip. However, this story is clearly one of *God's* greatness and goodness, not ours, and when we pass on these precious personal stories of God's blessing to our children, it builds their confidence and faith in God.

Recently we shared our story with our sons. We should have done it years ago. As Nathan thought of our story, it made him think of how God had blessed him in his finances as he has returned tithe. He commented, "I'm convinced that it's impossible to get poorer by giving to God."

Humanly speaking, this just doesn't make sense at all, but God invites us to take a risk so that He can impress us with how much He can be trusted. Having God as our senior partner in our financial affairs is the wisest, most exciting, and most rewarding thing we can do for ourselves and our families. We highly recommend it.

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Psalm 68:19.

Carol and David Tasker are completing doctoral studies at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. They are members of Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs.

> You have a stewardship testimony you need to share and we need to read. See page 224 for details.