

The FIRST MEETING

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

Psalm 66:16

Lola Aagaard Boram

Richard J. Bascom

Clarence E. Hodges

Gary Land

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Henry W. Cowen

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AN ANNIVERSARY TO REMEMBER

By Lola Agaard Boram

IT WAS the night of our tenth wedding anniversary and my husband and I lay in bed, far apart, not even speaking to each other. This predicament was inevitable, given the pattern established from the beginning of our marriage.

We were married in California and moved to Oklahoma for graduate school within three weeks of the ceremony. In the university town where we settled was a small Adventist congregation. The members welcomed us with open hearts and immediately nominated us to offices in the church. We had come from very large congregations where we simply attended services each Sabbath. So having several jobs in a very small church was novel. I even had to play the piano, something I had avoided doing in public since I quit taking lessons in the eighth grade.

From then on we each held two or three positions in that church every year. We conducted Wednesday evening prayer meeting for several years, served on the church board, were elder and deaconess, communication secretary, and personal ministries secretary. We were even church janitors for a year.

For a time I was adult Sabbath school superintendent while my husband, Robert, taught the adult lesson. But the members who had kept the children's divisions going for years needed a break, so we took their places. I taught primary, and Robert managed the juniors. We often took the children on Sabbath-afternoon outings, making them happy and giving their parents a true Sabbath rest. After three years Robert was hired to teach at the nearby academy. We bought a new car—a station wagon—for him to use in the half-hour commute. It was too big for just the two of us, but we got it because a number of students could attend church school if they just had a ride every day.

We were happy but incredibly busy: writing dissertations, working for money, and working for our church. Then we became Pathfinder leaders, which led directly to the situation on our tenth anniversary. We worked with the Pathfinders all year and came to the beginning of summer. We both had completed our graduate work and were looking forward to the next month when we would move to Kentucky for new jobs. But the Pathfinders reminded us that we had promised them a campout before we left the state. We scoured our calendars to find a free weekend for the camping trip in the little time we had left before our move.

We found one.

So on the night of our tenth anniversary my husband and I lay in bed, far apart, not even speaking to each other—he in the boys' tent, and I in the girls' tent.

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:40, NIV.

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GOD'S BEES

By Richard J. Bascom

THROUGH experience I have found that one of the most exciting ways to develop trust in God and learn more about Him is by participating in the Investment projects program. That program may be going out of fashion in some congregations, but it certainly has been an important part of my spiritual life.

For an Investment project, the church member dedicates time, talent, or money to some "business partnership" with God. The eventual cash profit is sent to the mission field to spread the gospel. I have always been inspired by the idea that I could go into a business partnership with the King of the universe.

My Investment project for a while was to produce and sell honey. After some research I purchased the equipment and ordered a starter kit of bees, consisting of a queen bee and three pounds of worker bees. They soon arrived in town via the U.S. Postal Service. Apparently mail carriers aren't required to deliver a bunch of live bees, so I happily picked up my buzzing package at the post office.

Soon I had the bees established in a new hive. They quickly began doing what bees do so well—raising young worker bees and laying up a store of honey for the winter.

Not long after getting the bees started, my wife called me at work one evening to say that an airplane was spraying the field just south of our house. She wondered if the spray might affect our bees. I asked her to talk to the fellow marking the rows for the pilot and see if he knew. The flagger said we should call his father, the pilot, and he gave her the number.

I called the pilot, Al, and asked him what chemical he had been using. Al was a beekeeper himself—a serious one; he had 50 hives. "We were spraying an insecticide that is very dangerous to bees. By morning you will be out of the bee business," he said.

I soon learned that beekeepers are supposed to register their hives so crop dusters will know where the hives are. Al generously offered to replace my hive with one of his own. But since I had not registered it, I declined. After all, it wasn't his fault that the bees had been sprayed.

My bee book listed the chemicals most dangerous to bees. Out of the top 100, the chemical my bees had been exposed to was ranked number two.

The next morning I took a quick look around my hive and found some dead

bees. The following Sunday, prepared for a full and dismal examination, I opened the hive and found, to my great surprise, a literal “beehive of activity.”

My books told me that a hive of honeybees needs 30 to 40 pounds of honey to survive through the winter. The bees are doing well, the book said, if they make just enough for their own survival the first year. In the second year I could expect some surplus, which I would sell, and give the proceeds for my Investment project.

In the fall of that first year I opened the hive to see if my bees had made enough honey to get them through their first winter. Imagine my surprise to find that the bees had made enough for themselves, plus 100 pounds of surplus.

When I told Al the news, he was very much impressed with God’s bees.

**For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.
Psalm 50:10.**

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FAITHFUL IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST

By Clarence E. Hodges

WHEN I was 20 years old and newly married, I moved to St. Louis, Missouri. I soon became known in the church there, as that was my wife’s hometown. The church had a new pastor who was always alert to talents and spiritual gifts within the congregation. In the congregation were many very talented and qualified persons and many persons with graduate and post-graduate degrees. I was willing to assist and serve wherever a need existed. When I was asked to assist with different programs, I did so gladly. I had no position; I just helped others. Then I was asked if I would serve as an usher. I was honored and quickly said yes to my first official church office.

Soon the pastor decided he wanted me to serve as a church elder, helping him better to serve the church. Others said, “He is young; make him a youth leader too.” Soon I was first elder, youth leader, personal ministries leader, Sabbath school superintendent, school board chairman, church board chairman, interim pastor with conference credentials, all out of my desire to help others.

Professionally, during those early years, I was helping people as a social worker and then as a senior social worker, social work supervisor, and director of the department of social services. Eventually I was confirmed by the United States Senate as chief of the Children’s Bureau for the U.S. Government and

commissioner for the administration of children and families. This was the top social work position in the country—or the world, for that matter—with a multibillion-dollar budget.

That gift, or talent, of helps was not as insignificant as many had thought back in my church in St. Louis a few years earlier. When Jesus said if you are faithful over a few things, He will make you ruler over many, He was not exaggerating. I was later invited to serve the president at the U.S. Department of State with international responsibilities of *helping*: conferring with Congress and the president, giving advice on domestic and international issues, traveling around the world, helping and helping and helping.

The day came when God said that all these experiences were to prepare me for service in His church. He wanted me to help as an evangelist, as president at Christian Record Services, and then at the North American Division of the General Conference. And on April 15, 1995, it all came together. His master plan led to my ordination to the gospel ministry, with the gift of helps.

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:29-31.

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BUS RIDE TO A BETTER PLACE

By Gary Land

THAT SABBATH morning in September 1966 dawned bright and clear. A few days before, I had arrived in Santa Barbara and moved into a small apartment in Isla Vista, the student community adjacent to the University of California campus. I was truly alone, not yet knowing anyone at the university or in the Santa Barbara area.

For the first time in my life no one would notice whether I went to church. Sixteen years of Adventist education had provided a cultural environment that both supported and expected churchgoing. Not being particularly rebellious or nonconformist, I'd always attended.

But now I was on my own. I neither owned a car nor knew where the local Adventist church was. Getting there wouldn't be a simple matter. Furthermore, the southern California coast beckoned. I considered walking to the beach that morning. But all those years of training and practice within an Adventist home

and educational system won out. I decided to attend church. A public telephone book provided the address. A map gave me an approximate location. I made my way to the bus stop, map in hand.

Paying my 10 cents, I boarded the bus and after a while began anxiously reading street signs and checking my map, trying to figure out the best place to get off. After leaving the bus, I wandered several streets of a sun-washed middle-class neighborhood, eventually finding the church.

The Sabbath school lesson study had already begun by the time I arrived, but I was greeted by a friendly woman who directed me to the young adult class in the balcony. With surprise I saw an old academy friend and an acquaintance from Pacific Union College. No longer did I feel a stranger in the city where I planned to spend the next few years.

That initial church attendance proved to be significant, for that friendly congregation welcomed me with open arms. Over the next four years church members invited me to their homes for dinner, included me in church social activities, and took me on backpacking trips. Meanwhile I became involved with the youth Sabbath school and the Missionary Volunteer Society, and I was ordained a church elder. In the process I became an active member of the church community.

To be sure, the members of that congregation couldn't always help me with the intellectual and political issues that sometimes challenged my faith during my studies (this was the late 1960s). But they offered a warm environment that both supplemented and contrasted with my daily campus experience. I wanted to return each week because these people's faith in God manifested itself in an outreach to others, an outreach that included me.

If I had gone to the beach that first Sabbath morning, it probably would have been even easier to skip church on subsequent Sabbaths. That simple, yet significant, decision to attend began a new stage in my life when joining the family of God was my personal decision.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25, NIV.

Gary Land is professor of history at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He is a member of Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs. This story originally appeared in More College Faith (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Worthy Books, 1997).



TWO BAD TIRES AND THREE TWENTY-DOLLAR BILLS

By Stephen Orian

A WEEK earlier my wife, Micki, had just brought our second son home from the hospital when she had to be rushed back with life-threatening complications. Now she was with her parents in Arkansas, where she would get some needed rest and a proud grandmother could look after her newborn grandson.

I was home alone in Arlington, Texas, on a Wednesday morning when the mail brought my monthly paycheck. At the kitchen table I prepared a bank deposit slip for the check, figured our usual tithe and offerings, and reviewed the bills that needed to be paid. These included some unplanned expenses for Micki's second hospitalization. Then I remembered the car had two tires that were going bald and would very soon need to be replaced. I was overwhelmed with worry. Where could I find the money to pay for all of this?

Then, of course, I thought of the tithe. If I held it out this month, it would buy two new tires and help cover some of that extra hospital expense. The Lord would understand our predicament. Then I thought, *No, I can't do this. This isn't mine. But the offering? Now that's a different matter.*

Sometime earlier we had begun returning a second tithe for offerings. It had become a commitment. After wrestling for a long time on that point, I finally decided that I could not renegotiate a commitment, however voluntary, that we had made with the Lord.

In the next few moments I wrote a check for our regular tithe and offerings and then wrote checks for the rest of our bills. With concerns for the future but with a peaceful heart, I placed my tithe and offering check in an envelope and put the envelope in my Bible.

The next Sabbath, after preaching at the Arlington Church for the early service, I headed for southwest Dallas, where I was to preach at the Duncanville church.

Suddenly I recognized the familiar but unwelcome feel of a flat tire. Wednesday's worry had all too soon become a reality. Beside the road I jacked up the car and exchanged the flat tire with the spare from the trunk.

When I lowered the car again, I found to my dismay that my spare was nearly flat too. I decided it had just enough air in it to get me to the church. Very slowly I drove the remaining miles and arrived just minutes before it was time for me to begin preaching.

I made a brief apology to the congregation for my late arrival, explaining only that I had had a flat tire and a weak spare.

After the service a visiting couple asked me to visit them the next day. I met with

them in their home on Sunday morning and had a very fine visit. I offered a special prayer for God's blessings on the family and got up to leave. The couple followed me out to my car, where they thanked me again for my coming to visit them. As I shook hands with the husband I felt him passing something into the palm of my hand.

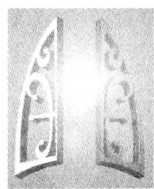
Surprised, I found that he had given me a roll of money. I immediately insisted that I could not take this from them. I explained that I was fully compensated for my work, including visits like this one. They refused to take back the money but suggested that I could possibly use it for a new tire. Very much embarrassed, I thanked them and drove away.

No one, including this couple, knew the struggle I had gone through the previous Wednesday. All that anyone knew was that I had had a flat tire. As I straightened out the roll of bills I counted out \$60 and realized it was just enough to buy two new tires.

Tears came into my eyes as I remembered my struggle just days earlier and how God had provided marvelously and quickly exactly the means necessary to meet our immediate needs. Never again could I consider withholding tithe or offerings from One who cared and provided so graciously.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8, RSV.

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THE BLESSINGS KEEP COMING

By Henry W. Cowen

AT OUR fledgling publishing ministry, finances were predictably tight. So we opened the mail with eager anticipation, relishing each new order. One letter contained a check and a note explaining a donation—from tithe. After discussing the situation and praying, we agreed to return the money with a note of appreciation, explaining that we do not accept tithe to operate our not-for-profit ministry.

Sometime later a friend challenged us to make the Lord our partner in the operation of the ministry and to give to Him a specific amount for each item the ministry sold. We decided to do this.*

We began to send God's share to the conference every Friday. Almost immediately good things started to happen. Sales that had been slow nearly tripled and have continued to grow for several years. One retired couple decided

to send *Peace Above the Storm (Steps to Christ)* to the 14,000 homes in their county. One conference sent the magazine to nearly every household in its territory. The Lord has blessed us with talented helpers who work for a fraction of their worth.

We have had several severe tests to our commitment. One Friday payables and payroll were due, but the only money we had in the bank was the share of previous sales we had promised to God. We prayed. As I wrote out the check to the conference the phone rang. It was an order for several thousand dollars' worth of books.

And the blessings keep coming. As I write this a \$3,600 debt has been retired by a donor, and a fax just came in for several thousand dollars' worth of books to be sent to India. The fax says the money is in the mail.

We have many needs, but our Father does a great job of supplying them all "according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19, NIV). And we have found that we are now more interested than ever in the work of our conference, such as evangelism, new pastors and churches, and academy projects.

*Usually we send this as a general contribution to the conference, rather than as "tithe," since our not-for-profit ministry seldom earns a net profit to tithe. We have always tithed our personal income.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Luke 12:34, NIV.

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THE HEALING POWER OF SCRIPTURE

By Ty Gibson

AS A young boy, my mind was quick, my comprehension high, my memory sharp. Teachers told my mother that I was a gifted child with lots of potential. But the gift of a good mind was quickly squandered and abused.

In the fifth grade my friends and I began taking Valium in the restrooms during recess. In the sixth grade we were smoking marijuana almost every day after school. By the seventh grade we were snorting cocaine and experimenting with LSD. The days at school were made up mainly of drug deals and party plans. Soon I could barely remember my own address, and reading became hard labor.

The sobering question occasionally crossed my mind. "What am I doing to myself?" I became dissatisfied with the emptiness of my life. It was a glorious day when I embraced the reality of God's existence and the precious realization that this God is infinitely good and loving, even toward me.

Through a remarkable series of providences, the Lord led me to become a Seventh-day Adventist Christian at the age of 18. Then it hit me with full force: I had been destroying myself all those years. As I tried to read, to remember, and comprehend the great truths of Scripture, it became painfully evident that I had injured the delicate machinery God had given me. Feelings of shame and despair almost took me down. But somehow, no doubt by God's tender mercy, my hunger for truth prevailed. At an evangelistic meeting I learned the principles of stewardship: Return one tenth of your income to the Lord, and He will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing beyond what you will have room to receive.

Perhaps the Lord might do the same with my mind. I decided I would give one tenth of each 24-hour period (about two and a half hours) to the study of God's Word. Of course this was not a requirement of God, and some may think it extreme, but I needed something dramatic to pull me out of my crisis and restore my brain to normal function.

At first it was difficult to force my mind to focus. For almost a year most of what I read seemed piled up as only a confusing mass of puzzle pieces in my mind. But by God's grace I persisted with the plan, hoping that it would eventually get easier. And slowly biblical truth started to take shape. The puzzle began to look like a single picture. Soon I found it easy to repeat from memory numerous Bible verses and some whole chapters. More important, I realized with deep gratitude that I was becoming personally acquainted with God's beautiful character.

It's been 16 years now since my restoration. I can detect no aftermath from my previous ruin. God has truly opened the storehouse of heaven and blessed me abundantly above all I could ask or think.

I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten. Joel 2:25.

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INTEGRITY ON THE CAR LOT

By Henry C. Martin

GOOD stewardship begins with basic honesty. As the owner of an auto dealership, I had to be on my toes to make sure my business was conducted fairly and squarely.

"This customer needs a \$1,000 refund check." A file folder was placed in my hands.

"Why should we be refunding money if we just sold the car?" I asked, puzzled.

"Oh, it will be endorsed back to us for down payment" was the reply.

THE FIRST MEETING

"There must be something I don't understand," I said, and I quickly compared the sales agreement with the bank contract. I found that the car had been financed at \$9,000 showing \$1,000 down, but we had been offering it for sale at \$7,995 plus title transfer.

It seemed to me that the car had been sold for \$8,000 with 100 percent financing and no down payment. I went to the sales manager's office.

"I've been asked to refund \$1,000 to this customer. Please explain it to me."

"Well," he said, "she is going to endorse it back to us for purchase of some wheels and other accessories."

"Well," I said, "it looks to me like the bank is financing the whole thing; yet they think there is \$1,000 down."

"Oh, it's OK. The book value is greater than the sales price."

Getting a little tense, I said, "No, it's not all right. The bank thinks there was a down payment, and they are relying on our information. I'll have to go the bank and tell them about it."

"Oh, you don't have to do that, I'll tell them for you," the sales manager said.

"No, my name is on this building. I'm going to the bank. I don't like it, but I must go. How can you expect God to bless you, your department, and this business, if we aren't impeccably honest with our financing sources?"

At the bank I asked for the branch manager. He was busy. I spoke with the installment credit manager, and then the branch manager joined us. I asked them how they liked our business.

"We love it," one of them said. "We just wish we could get a greater volume. Everything you say is always just as it says it is."

"That's the main reason I came to see you. I have just been asked to sign a \$1,000 check to this customer, to be endorsed back to us for down payment. It seems to me that you are financing 100 percent based on the information we gave you. I'm sorry."

"Well, it does appear like that," he said, as he studied the documents, noting that the customer had no credit history, good or bad, but that the cosigner had a perfect record with no delinquencies.

"What do you want me to do? I am under your authority. Shall I buy the contract back, finance it someplace else, pick up the car, fire the sales manager? What do you prefer?"

"Well, we have already forwarded the file to the head office. Please call me on Monday."

Each year I had called on each bank manager with our pastor during our annual report to municipal leaders on the community service activities our church offered. We even used his bank parking lot occasionally for our public-service blood-pressure testing. I prayed earnestly that the Lord would allow His hand to show in this experience. If the banker asked me to buy back the

contract, it would be difficult to place it someplace else.

On Monday I called the branch manager. He said, "Let's just leave it as it is. Thank you so much for letting us know what you found. With any other dealer, it would have been up to us to find it ourselves. That's why we appreciate your business so much."

"You are an answer to prayer, sir," I said. "I don't know what we would have done otherwise. I'll write to the customer, reminding her that she bought the car for \$8,000 with no down payment and urge her to always make the payments early in order to earn a good credit rating. I'll send you a copy. Thank you again, and God bless you."

I spoke with our managers. "If we expect to see proper results for all our efforts here, we must be perfectly honest with our customers, our banks, and ourselves. Can I have your commitment for absolute integrity?" They agreed.

By God's grace, in 12 months eight persons accepted Jesus Christ and joined the local church. If that can happen in a car lot, it can happen anywhere.

A just balance and scales belong to the Lord; all the weights of the bag are His concern. Proverbs 16:11, NASB.

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ABSOLUTE ESSENTIALS

By Michael L. Ryan

MY FOUR siblings and I knew that our family wasn't poor. But we also knew that we had little beyond the absolute essentials. Mom and Dad were totally committed to the church. Dad was a literature evangelist. Mom ran the house, worked when possible, and had her own outreach activities.

I often wonder how Mom and Dad managed it. All five of us children were attending church school, academy, or college, depending on our ages at the time. There were medical bills, auto repairs, utilities, food, and all the usual expenses of family life. We were not disappointed if we got one shirt for Christmas. All of us knew that such gifts were given in love, for money was scarce. We lived in an older house, drove small cars, and had few, but good quality, clothes.

Absolute essentials around our house started first with the church. The church was regarded with special respect and was considered a divine institution with a special message and mission. Regardless of any financial crisis in our home, all of us children knew that tithes and offerings were given before any other expenses were paid. Mom saved money for all kinds of church programs. I remember the little jar

marked “Church Investment” that she kept in the cupboard. I thought all Adventists received newsletters and envelopes from The Voice of Prophecy, Faith for Today, The Quiet Hour, It Is Written, Union College, and many others. Mom and Dad always sent something. Every organization got at least a dollar a month. The list has expanded, and Mom now has included ADRA, Global Mission, AWR, and others.

It seemed that Mom and Dad loved getting involved in church-planting projects. They helped to establish churches in Sunnymead, California; Independence and Gladstone, Missouri; and others scattered across Arkansas and Louisiana. I remember a meeting one night at one of those little congregations. The members were trying to raise money to buy some property for a building. I was old enough to understand our family’s finances, so I was shocked when Dad pledged \$500. I said nothing. I watched the next day as he went to the bank and borrowed the \$500. I also observed how he paid that loan month by month. I knew these were dollars the Lord was providing, because we certainly didn’t have extra money to pay bank loans. I have since preached in that church building.

Many things were not absolute essentials at our house. How thankful I am that sharing God’s love, supporting His work, and bringing hope to the unreached were set before us as absolute essentials.

Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. Proverbs 3:9, 10.

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PUT GOD TO THE TEST

By Rosa Taylor Banks

MY FIRST job helped me learn a lesson about proving God according to His promise in Malachi 3. My net pay was so meager that to deduct anything else after taxes would have left me with virtually nothing to live on. And yet I desperately wanted a new dress. A special program was planned at the church, and I was leading out. To look my best was important for me.

The dress I wanted would cost exactly all the amount of the paycheck I had just received. I faced my first stewardship dilemma. Would I fail God, or would I pass the test?

Lord, I thought to myself on that memorable Friday, how can I return my tithe

O V E R A N D O V E R A G A I N !

and offerings tomorrow and still buy this dress that I need? Since I am purchasing the dress for Your program, certainly You must understand.

As the hours ticked away toward sunset I rationalized with myself some more. *If I spend the whole check on the outfit and double up on tithes and offerings next time, I can honor God and satisfy myself. It doesn't matter when you return your tithes, only that you return your tithes.* These were the thoughts that sought to overcome my better judgment.

Somehow I was able to make the decision that would guide me throughout my life: Be faithful in what God expects of you, and He will supply all that you need. I resolved to return my tithe and offerings and to see what God would do.

I went to the store and discovered that the price of the dress had been reduced by 45 percent. That meant that not only did I have enough to make the purchase, but I could also buy a purse. No one was happier than I was the next morning when, wearing my beautiful attire, I placed my financial gifts to God in the offering plate at church. I had taken God at His word, and He had blessed me with more than I had asked.

Christ has much to say about our money, our time, and our talents, and what we do with each. Everything belongs to God. He blesses us with these gifts. If we are faithful and set aside the firstfruits of our increase for Him, we can count on His blessings, because His promise is sure. Put Him to the test.

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. Luke 6:38.

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