

Happy Friday, New South Family!  
Welcome to the 89th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending April 16, 2021.

## Announcements

- 1) Delegates Names / Contact Information Needed** Please submit your delegate's (or delegates') name, address, phone number and e-mail address to Charlie Fiskeaux ASAP for this year's annual conference. [You can do that via e-mail by clicking here.](#)
- 2) A Great Women's Retreat** was held in Murphy, NC last weekend, bringing about 50 women together for all or part of the 3-day event. They represented 5 NSC churches plus women from Georgia, Indiana and the Murphy community. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit was powerfully present in each of the worship services where Speakers Vickie Reynen and Andrea Tinsley shared the preaching spots. The silent auction raised over \$500 for Tumaini Women of Kenya, an NGO that provides small business loans enabling families to rise above abject poverty and even support their local churches. If you couldn't attend, but you prayed for us, we sincerely thank you!
- 3) Local Church Annual Reports** The World Ministry Center has not yet sent the annual / statistical report to local churches. I've promised you that for several weeks, but so far, they've not released it. I'll certainly pass it along when they do, so again, you haven't missed it. 😊
- 4) New South Annual Conference** Annual Conference is scheduled for May 21 – 22, essentially noon Friday to noon Saturday, at Wilmore FMC. Business sessions from noon to 5:00p on Friday, and 8:00a to noon on Saturday and the ordination service at 7:00p on Friday evening. The complete notebooks will be out soon, but the agenda / draft schedule is below, as well as the listing for housing nearby. Plan now to attend.

## Resources

- 1. New Room Conference** – in Nashville...in September. Information here: <https://newroomconference.com/>
- 2. Holy Land Trip** – available to anyone interested, sponsored by the Pacific Northwest conference of the FMC [https://pnwc.formstack.com/forms/2022\\_holy\\_land\\_trip\\_registration\\_form](https://pnwc.formstack.com/forms/2022_holy_land_trip_registration_form)
- 3. Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy Conference** – March 10-12 in Texas. Information here: <http://www.whwomenclergy.org/>
- 4. Local Church Live Streaming Training** available in Nashville – check it out here: <https://www.cmcnashville.com/worship-tech>
- 5. Leadership In Tumultuous Times Video Series** The conference superintendents from Bishop Cowart's area have been creating these video discussion / training sessions from a few months now. We have completed three so far. Simply click on the title below. (The first one is a little over an hour, but the next two are shorter!)

#1 – Title: [Self-Differentiated Leadership](#)

#2 – Title: [Responding to Reactivity](#)

#3 – Title: [Managing the Herd Mentality](#)

## Articles

- 1) Can Pope Francis Head Off a Schism?** He should say no to demands by German bishops to embrace modern mores. By Tim Busch, WSJ, April 15, 2021

The Protestant Reformation began in Germany some 500 years ago before spreading across the Western world. Today, Germany's Catholic bishops are taking steps that could again rattle the foundations of the world's largest church. They are moving to tear down the Catholic Church's teaching on human sexuality, priestly celibacy and other morally and

politically charged issues. Without direct and immediate intervention by Pope Francis, the church could be headed for another schism.

Since 2019, German bishops have been pursuing a “synod,” or council, on matters of great theological importance. It is a response to the German church’s many challenges, which include plummeting membership and a sexual-abuse scandal.

Many other countries are facing a similar crisis, and surviving it is no small task. Yet the German bishops have chosen not to focus on cleaning their own house and spreading the saving message of Jesus Christ. Instead, they’re trying to build trust with their fellow citizens by breaking with the faith in favor of modern cultural norms.

The bishops have made their intentions clear since the synod process began in 2019, with a promise of “newly assessing” church teaching on homosexuality and sexual morality more broadly. While the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed the synod, its “Fundamental Text” hints at the most radical departure from Catholic teaching yet. Approved in December, the document speaks of dissatisfaction with the church’s “power structures” and “positions” on “sexual orientation” and “gender justice.” It also calls for a discussion of priestly celibacy. As the synod enters its latter stages, the bishops will debate these topics and issue decisions, which the local hierarchy has said will be “binding.”

The Vatican is aware of what’s at stake. In 2019 the head of the Congregation of Bishops sent a letter to the German bishops’ conference declaring that the proposed synod is “not ecclesologically valid,” making it illegal and immoral in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The letter specifically noted the involvement of individuals and groups opposed to Catholic teaching, as well as the bishops’ stated intention to enact binding theological changes. The German bishops voted to move forward with the synod anyway.

All eyes are now on Pope Francis. The holy father in 2019 sent the German bishops a letter in which he urged them to avoid “adapting” the church “to the current logic.” He was largely ignored. The pope has since complained to at least one German bishop behind closed doors, criticizing the synod’s focus on “political issues” ahead of converting souls.

Yet some synod advocates who have met with Pope Francis have come away heartened. Last year the head of the German Bishops’ Conference said he felt “strengthened by the intensive exchange with the holy father to continue on the path we have taken,” adding that “the pope appreciates this project.” Cardinal Reinhard Marx, one of the pope’s primary advisers, also is one of the synod’s biggest backers. And in January Pope Francis urged Italian Catholics to start a synod of their own, though he didn’t discuss the topics it should cover. Absent greater clarity, the advocates of abandoning Catholic teaching seem to think the Vatican is on their side.

Their hope may be mistaken. Last year, Pope Francis stopped a similar push to weaken Catholic teaching in the wake of the Amazon Synod. That council—attended by many prominent bishops from across the world, including Germany—ended with a call to ease Catholic teaching on ordination and celibacy in the Amazon region. The pope responded by denying their request and instead calling on bishops to “promote priestly vocations” and encourage the kind of “missionary” zeal that has spread the faith throughout history.

The Vatican also recently swatted down demands that the Catholic Church bless same-sex unions. In a move personally approved by Pope Francis, the Vatican bureau in charge of church doctrine declared that such blessings are morally unacceptable. Many German bishops and theologians immediately expressed their opposition to the Vatican’s ruling. Yet their actions only emphasize their desire to go their own way, even at the cost of rupturing Catholic unity.

As the Germans barrel toward a break with Rome, Catholics everywhere should pay attention. A divide that starts there would spread much further. It would surely find its way to the rest of Europe, the Americas and the wider world. The archbishop of Cologne said last year that “the worst outcome would be if the Synodal Path leads to a schism.” He’s right, and the faithful are counting on Pope Francis to stop it.

**2) A Kentucky Church’s Secret to Handling Abuse Allegations: Humility** *Tates Creek Presbyterian (in Lexington) won praise for its transparent investigation. Then it had to do it again. Christianity Today, March, 2021 - attached/below. *This caught my attention for the topic and the locale.**

**3) Giving Down By Half in Church of God in Christ** – Christianity Today, April, 2021 – attached / below – *some reflections on all things church and Covid.*

## **Regular Free Methodist Newsletters / Communications** (click the links below)

[This Week's Issue of the Light and Life Magazine](#)

[The Latest Issue of the Free Methodist Foundation Financial Newsletter](#)

[The Latest Edition of the FMC Chaplain's Newsletter](#)

[Free Methodist History Update](#)

## **New South Conference Calendar**

April 22	District Leaders – Zoom
April 22	MEG - Zoom
May 21-22	NSC Annual Conference – Wilmore
June 17-20	NSC Family Camp
June 21-27	NSC Teen Camp
June 28-July 2	NSC Kids Camp

## **April Birthdays**

Anderson, Neil – April 19

Ritter, Joe – April 22

\*I'd love to know your birthday, so the conference can send you an expensive present...or maybe just a "Happy Birthday" wish. If yours is not listed, [please e-mail it to me](#).

## **This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke**

**Passage:** This Sunday I'll return to the book of John to the Passion Place of the locked room where the disciples met following Jesus resurrection.

**Quote:** "Opportunity is missed by most people because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work." ~ Thomas Edison

**Joke:**



Blessings on your worship this weekend!

D-

New South Annual Conference  
Wilmore Free Methodist Church, Wilmore, Kentucky  
May 21-22, 2021  
Presiding Bishop Keith Cowart

Agenda (draft)  
\* all times eastern

**Friday, May 21, 2021**

- 12:00 p.m. Registration Opens
- 12:30 p.m. Welcome and Opening Prayer - Daryl Diddle  
Songs of Praise – Jan Coleman  
Devotional Thoughts -
- 12:45 p.m. Business Session 1, Call to Order – Bishop Cowart  
Organization of the Conference  
Roll Call taken by credentials placed at registration table  
Setting the Bar  
Adoption of Agenda  
Election of Secretary  
Election of Treasurer  
Election of Tellers  
Introduction of Special Guests  
MEG Report (Part 1)  
Treasurer’s Report – Charlie Fiskeaux, Patti McPeake  
Missions Report – Lois Huff  
MAC Balloting – Daryl Diddle
- 2:30 p.m. Break
- 2:45 p.m. Free Methodist Way – Bishop Cowart
- 3:45 p.m. Business Session 2, Call to Order – Bishop Cowart  
Free Methodist Foundation – Steve Macaluso  
Nominating Report - \_\_\_\_\_  
B.O.A. Report – Daryl Diddle  
Superintendency Task Group – Bishop Cowart
- 5:00 PM Dinner Recess
- 7:00 PM Ordination Service  
Memorials  
Ordinands Reception

**Saturday, May 22, 2021**

- 8:30 a.m. Welcome and Songs – Jan Coleman  
Morning Devotions and Prayer
- 8:45 a.m. Business Session 3, Call to Order – Bishop Cowart  
Eagle Ridge Report – Rachel Brown  
Youth Camp Report – Andrea Tinsley  
Kids Camp Report – Rebekah Tinsley  
Trustee Report - Dwight Winter  
Misc. Business
- 10:00 a.m. Break
- 10:15 a.m. Superintendency  
Open Discussion, Comments, Question and Answers
- 11:15 a.m. Prayer for the Church (Local, Conference, National, Global)
- 11:45 a.m. Reading of Appointments – Bishop Cowart
- 12:00 p.m. Communion
- Announcements, Closing Prayer, Adjournment

Here are **PLACES TO STAY IN WILMORE AND NICHOLASVILLE.**

Lexington, of course, has many other options. We suggest a search via [booking.com](http://booking.com) or [travelocity.com](http://travelocity.com).

Places to stay in Wilmore:

Scott Station: [scottstationinn.com](http://scottstationinn.com)

Asbury Inn: [asburyinn.com](http://asburyinn.com)

Red Bud Inn: [1898redbudbandb.com/](http://1898redbudbandb.com/)

The Home Place: <http://homeplaceguesthouse.com/>

Places to stay in Nicholasville:

Holiday Inn Express:

[https://www.ihg.com/holidayinnexpress/hotels/us/en/nicholasville/nvlky/hoteldetail?cm\\_mmc=GoogleMaps- -EX- -US- -NVLKY](https://www.ihg.com/holidayinnexpress/hotels/us/en/nicholasville/nvlky/hoteldetail?cm_mmc=GoogleMaps- -EX- -US- -NVLKY)

Comfort Inn South:

<https://www.guestreservations.com/comfort-inn-lexington-south/booking?gclid=CjwKCAjw34n5BRA9EiwA2u9k39i042DwNhtCVw6meJKdiYPf02Uf85W6T9gIHWEYRhV63vgRK LnOhoCnFgQAvD BwE>

Home Place Inn: <https://homeplaceinn.com/>

The Cottage at the Corner: [cornerhouse.com](http://cornerhouse.com)

The Corner House B&B and Corporate Housing: <https://the-corner-house-b-corporate-housing-nicholasville.booked.net/>

## NEWS &amp; REPORTING

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April 15, 2021

The following article is located at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/april/cogic-covid19-financial-crisis-bishop-sheard.html>

**News & Reporting, April 2021**

# Giving Down by Half in Church of God in Christ

New presiding bishop says budget is top priority for the black Pentecostal denomination.

DANIEL SILLIMAN | POSTED APRIL 15, 2021

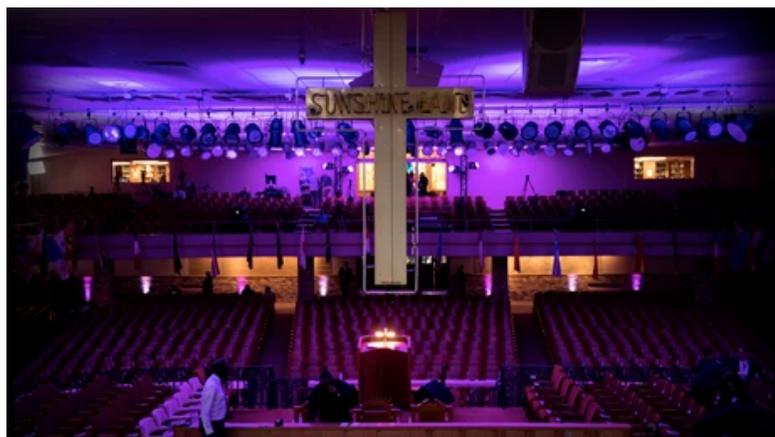


Image: Brendan Smialowski / Getty Images

Giving to the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) fell by nearly 50 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic. The church's new presiding bishop, who took office on March 20, said he will have to make finances a top priority his first year.

J. Drew Sheard Sr. has a full agenda for the 8.8-million member global church, which is the fifth largest denomination in the US. He has to fill vacant leadership roles, wants to develop programs to strengthen marriages and families, and hopes to unify COGIC after an unusually competitive election, with several bishops vying to lead.

But because of the coronavirus, Sheard will have to focus on the budget first.

Sheard, 62, is nonetheless confident that God chose him for this moment of leadership. Among other things, the seasoned minister—who is the son of ministers and grandson of a man ordained by COGIC founder Charles H. Mason—is good at math. Sheard is a former math teacher, with a master's of education in mathematics.

“I believe the favor of God has been on my life since I was a younger preacher, and he has blessed me in every facet of my life as far as my ministerial career was concerned,” Sheard [told](#) the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, where the historic black Pentecostal denomination is headquartered. “I believe over the years, and I say this very humbly, I believe God has taken note of me that he could trust me.”

According to the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, about 42 percent of churches have seen giving decline during the pandemic. While the majority of evangelical churches in the US saw tithes remain steady or even increase, one

out of five churches had to tap into cash reserves and reduce staff to make it through.

Pentecostal churches, where worship is often understood to be very physical, and African American churches, where the gathering of a community can be seen as testimony to God's goodness, have been especially hard hit by the safety precautions limiting or prohibiting congregations from coming together.

While some churches have resisted health department recommendations and local government restrictions, COGIC called for strict adherence after numerous denomination leaders got sick with the coronavirus and at least a dozen bishops [died](#).

In Michigan, where Sheard pastors at Greater Emmanuel Institutional Church of God in Christ in Detroit, three COGIC bishops and five superintendents [were killed](#) by COVID-19.

Sheard felt the tragedy at home, as well. His father and mother both contracted COVID-19, and his mother, Willie Mae Sheard, died in the hospital April 2020, about a year before she could see her son rise to lead COGIC.

"My mother was an encourager who encouraged everyone to be the best they could be," Sheard [told](#) the *Detroit News*. "She believed in doing the right thing and being true to God."

Black and Hispanic people have been disproportionately impacted, [according](#) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. One study showed that 34 percent of people who die from the coronavirus are black, even though black people only make up about 12 percent of the US population.

The crisis led outgoing leader Charles E. Blake Sr., COGIC's presiding bishop since 2007, to take a strong stance on public health rules. He called for a day of prayer and fasting to summon "heaven's help in mitigating this dreaded disease," and [said](#) that "all Church of God in Christ local, district, state and international gatherings should absolutely cease" until the pandemic is past.

The policy led to the decline in giving and the budget crisis that greeted Sheard on his first day. It's a plight Blake can certainly sympathize with, since he inherited an \$800,000 budget deficit when he took charge of COGIC 14 years ago.

In a 2016 speech, Blake said he knew a job promotion would bring new challenges, but leading COGIC was more challenging than he expected.

"The devil has some tricks that you've never seen before," he [said](#). "New level, new devil."

Blake borrowed money to meet the church's budget obligations but paid off the debt the following year and balanced the COGIC budget. He campaigned to increase giving \$10 million by 2016 and instituted COGIC's first-ever financial audit. The audit found an additional \$10 million that had not been accounted for, as the denomination's departments and ministries operated with increasing financial independence. Blake consolidated COGIC control of the departments and oversight of the budget.

Some of those COGIC ministries have rushed to meet the needs of the pandemic. The Department of Evangelism sent out 1,000 prayer cloths to replace the church's practice of laying on hands to pray for healing, and hosted regular weekly

prayer gatherings online.

“They pray the old fashioned way, calling on the name of Jesus,” Bishop Elijah Hankerson III said in a recent [report](#). “The flame of evangelism has never gone out. And it won’t ever go out until Jesus comes back.”

Ministers in the department typically receive honorariums for their committee work, but everything in 2020 was done on a volunteer basis. So far, Hankerson said, they have also not been paid in 2021.

Sheard will have to look for other ways to save money as he sets the budget for the coming fiscal year. Top leaders in COGIC have expressed confidence, however, that he is the man for the job.

Bishop David Hall, pastor of Temple Church of God in Christ in Memphis, called the new presiding bishop a “visionary.”

“He can see beyond those things that are immediate,” Hall said, “and he puts a long plan to them.”

April 15, 2021

The following article is located at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/april/sex-abuse-church-crisis-best-response-tates-creek.html>

*Christianity Today, March, 2021*

# A Kentucky Church's Secret to Handling Abuse Allegations: Humility

Tates Creek Presbyterian won praise for its transparent investigation. Then it had to do it again.

MEGAN FOWLER/POSTED MARCH 16, 2021

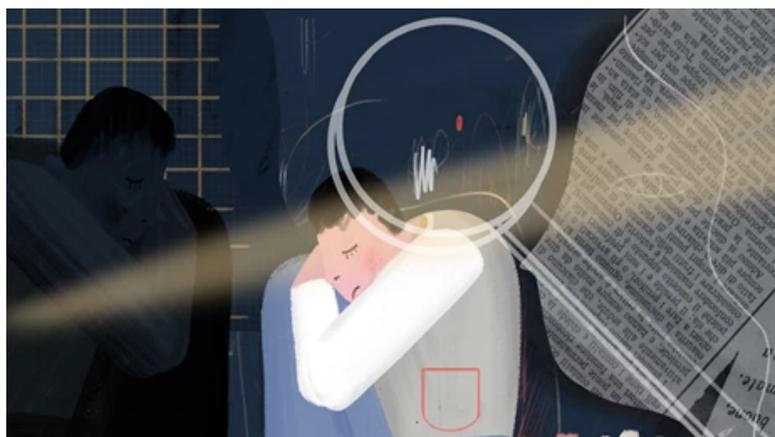


Image: Illustration by Michela Buttingol

Of all his ministry duties, Robert Cunningham most enjoys the academic responsibilities: reading, crafting sermons, writing on faith and public life, and working on his dissertation.

But the Lord had other plans for the senior pastor of Tates Creek Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Over the past three years, his congregation has undergone two independent investigations into separate allegations of sexual abuse from its past.

Cunningham had no special training for abuse cases or familiarity with best practices for handling abuse allegations. But he had a deep awareness of what he didn't know and a sense of responsibility to lead his church through scandals it did not ask for. For three years, he has worked to build a culture of openness, care, and justice.

In a landscape marred by cover-ups, incomplete investigations, victim blaming, and denial, Tates Creek has emerged as a model for how churches should respond to allegations of sexual abuse.

Cunningham was in his sixth year as senior pastor when the first case emerged in 2018.

The 1,000-member congregation—large by Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) standards—was healthy, growing, and planting churches. The Savannah River Presbytery, the PCA's governing body in southern Georgia, told Cunningham that former Tates Creek youth pastor Brad Waller had confessed to inappropriately touching young men at a Savannah-area church.

By then, Waller's time at Tates Creek was a distant memory for the church. He had left over a decade before, and most of his students were long gone, too.

"It would have been easy for us to say, 'Okay, that's weird. Hate to hear that. Let's just keep moving on,'" Cunningham said. Instead, leadership decided to give the accusations a second look.

Cunningham has been involved in Tates Creek since his college days and knew the former pastor. He spent one summer as an intern for Waller before replacing him as youth pastor when Waller moved ...

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