



Barbara Watts
Aurora, Colorado

Beginning Tuesday, December 27, 2022, believers began arriving at the American Union headquarters on the Norman College campus. Some had not seen the campus before and rejoiced at the wonderful facilities that God had given His people.

The American Union delegates began their meetings at 9:00 a.m., on Wednesday, December 28, and continued through Thursday, December 29. Some delegates were affected by severe winter storms that developed over the previous week, even to the point of having their flights canceled. But the weather was pleasant during the week of the conference, for which we praise God.

There are a number of videos of the meetings that one can watch by going to the YouTube page of the Huntington Park, California, church. The link is: <https://youtube.com/@LosAngelesIMSchurch>. Elder David Moreno provided a wonderful service by recording most of the meetings. Depending on the speaker, the videos are in either Spanish or English with translation.



Elder Idel Suarez, Jr., opened the conference

A youth conference and a children's conference were held simultaneously with the public conference.

Elder Idel Suarez, Jr., opened the public conference early Thursday evening in Hope Chapel by welcoming those who were present and introducing the theme of the conference, which is found in the letter of the apostle Paul to the Philippians.

Elder Suarez spoke about **The Saints at Philippi**, reading Philippians 1:1. This city was named after the father of Alexander the Great, King Philip of Greece, also known as Macedonia. The city of Philippi was wealthy, with a lot of gold, which is spiritually a symbol of love and faith. After Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia, "saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9), he and his companions immediately "endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." This is where the first European converts were found. Lydia, who was from Thyatira, was the first one to be baptized, and she offered her home for the benefit of the missionaries and the gospel work.

Acts 16:16-23 tells how Satan created chaos through a woman who was possessed and practiced witchcraft. Nevertheless, the demons were cast out of her in the name of Jesus, and she became a child of God. This was followed by Paul and Silas being publicly beaten and imprisoned through the accusations of the woman's master and the uproar that was caused. But God's emissaries sang at night in the prison, and the Lord caused an earthquake, leading to the jailer and his family being converted and baptized. Let us also be used as missionaries for God and rejoice in Him.

After dinner, the evening worship, titled **God Our Father**, from Philippians 1:2, was

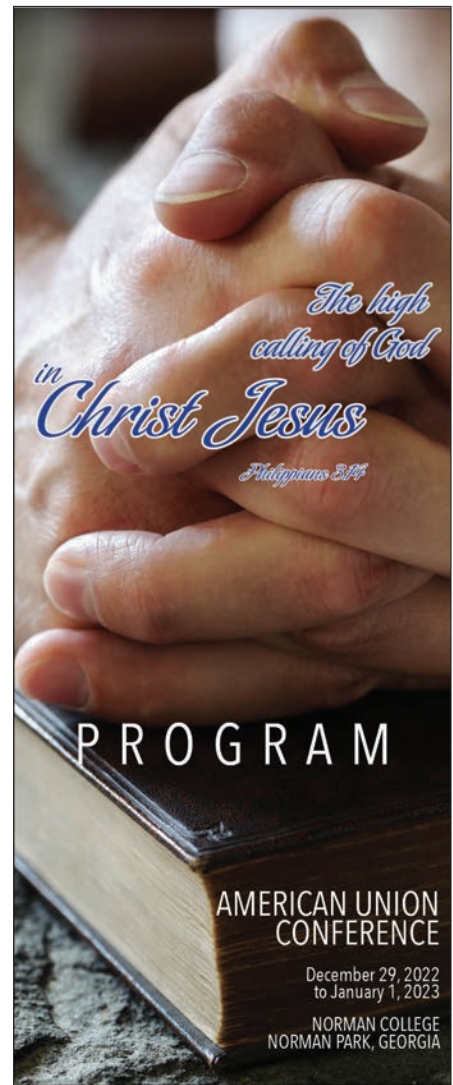
SUMMARY

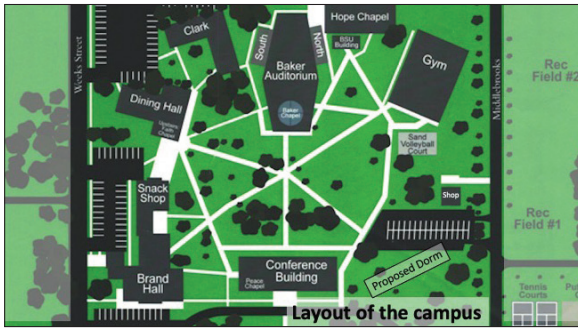
AMERICAN UNION CONFERENCE

December 29, 2022, to January 1, 2023
Norman College, Norman Park, Georgia

"The High Calling of God in Christ Jesus"
Philippians 3:14

presented by Elder Uldarico Alejos. It is a sublime experience to connect with God our Father! He is totally loving, and there is no one who is comparable to Him. He can be found by anyone in the world, for He is calling everyone to be part of the heavenly family, which is characterized by one faith,





Map of the Norman College campus

heart, and motive. The Father's love creates love in His children, who cherish and keep His holy word. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35.

When a person walks in a wrong way, God is dishonored and suffers. But the parable of the prodigal son shows that He is moved by mercy and is ready to rejoice when the one who was lost returns home. He not only celebrates the joy that His son who was lost is found but also that he who was dead is now alive! The question is whether one who is called a son of God really is. Jesus told the Jewish leaders that they were sons of the devil, because they did not obey Him as did Abraham but followed their own evil inclinations. Either we are totally God's children or we do not belong to Him at all. It is through one's personal battle against sin that victory is obtained through the grace and power of the indwelling Christ. Let us grow our relationship with Him more and more through His love that draws us to Him.

Thursday's program finished with a **testimony and music hour** full of experiences and praise to the Lord in instrumental and vocal music under the leadership of *Brothers Paulos Haile* and *Jonathan Figuereio*.

Friday, December 30

Elder Joel Barnedo presented the morning worship, titled **The Spirit of Jesus**, from Philippians 1:19: "For I know that



Elder Joel Barnedo presented morning worship

this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Elder Barnedo shared some experiences, including the missionary outreach conducted by the Western Field in Sacramento, California, last October. Recently he traveled to Israel, where three sisters were rebaptized in the Jordan River.

Life is all joy in Christ's service. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18. Paul considered his suffering light and soon to pass. But he rejoiced that his labors would produce blessings forever in eternity, just as Jesus would see the travail of His soul and be satisfied in the eternal fruit of His sacrifice. It is dangerous to have too much comfort. The message of the cross inspires those who respond to the love of God to partner with Jesus in winning precious souls.

There were three services presented after breakfast. The first message was given by *Elder Carlos Diaz*, titled **Timothy, the Servant**, as found in Philippians 1:1, where the apostle Paul wrote that Timothy joined him in writing to the Philippian believers. The servant is not greater than his master, and he follows his guidelines. Furthermore, no man can serve two masters but is submissive, obedient, and loyal to the one whom he serves. Jesus is the suffering Servant—"despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him: and with His stripes we are healed." "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities." Isaiah 53:3, 5, 11.



Elder Larry Watts spoke about Epaphroditus

One who does not serve is worthless! Jesus "took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men;" "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:7, 8. What He did for us we do not deserve. He actually did more than become man, for He became a Servant, meek, and lowly. When Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, "Lord, what



A quartet played guitars and sang a special song before Elder Watts' service

wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) were his first words. He immediately began to take orders; he changed completely from being the proud Pharisee to being willing to do the Lord's will.

The servant has a commitment, and this was true not only of Paul but also of Timothy, whose name means "one who fears God." Others in the Scriptures demonstrated a similar commitment, including Obadiah, Elijah, and Job. It is a very great commitment to serve God, to be afflicted, to despise apostasy, to keep His com-

mandments, and to have faith in Jesus. Let us earnestly carry out this commitment every moment.

Elder Larry Watts presented the next service, titled **Epaphroditus, the Messenger**, as found in Philippians 2:25. Verses 26-30 tell what this brother did for the apostle Paul, who was in prison. Roman prisons were horrific, and the prisoners would not even receive food unless friends or relatives would bring it to them or they could buy it. But Paul still counted it all joy for Christ. The believers in Philippi always had the apostle on their minds and had a special bond with him, like a spiritual father. Now Epaphroditus was commissioned by the church to take money from it to Paul and to minister to him. The messenger had to travel through hostile territory and find his own lodging and food. It was very dan-



Young people worked together on lessons

gerous, and the church needed someone whom they could trust to carry out this responsibility. Epaphroditus had proven himself faithful in the past. Now He was willing to risk his life for Paul.

In the Lord's supper, the bread represents our willingness to share God's many blessings with each other; and the cup means that we are willing to die for each other. Sometimes people see trouble in the church, so they leave. But Jesus did not do that, and neither did Paul. As the first among many brethren, Jesus gave the example of what it means to be a brother, a fellow soldier. The attitude is that "I have your back." I will take care of you before myself, and I will take the blows for you. In this instance, Paul was concerned about this brother, because he became very sick, primarily because he was greatly concerned about trouble in the church in Philippi. How would Paul feel if this messenger died while ministering to him? So, this story is the center of the letter that Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi, urging

them each to esteem others better than themselves. They were to be fellow soldiers.

Because of the risks that he took, Epaphroditus was called a gambler—God's gambler—and became famous in the early church. He was willing to hazard his life for Jesus, and so was Paul, who sent him back to the church in Philippi as his messenger, saying in essence, "God will take care of me." Others in Christian history did the same, such as the missionaries during the Black Plague in Europe, who risked their own lives to minister to the sick and took and buried the dead. They reached out to those in trouble. When Jesus was on the cross, there was gambling below Him, and He took a huge risk also to leave heaven and come to this earth. What will we do with what we have been given? Philippians 1:28 says, "In nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God." When we are not afraid of anything on earth, and when we know that God will take care of us, we will be ready to meet the Lord. All glory be to Him!

In the following service, Elder Pablo Hunger spoke about **Paul the Pharisee**, based on Philippians 3:4, where the apostle wrote, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man think that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." In the time of Jesus and Paul, the Pharisees were considered elites, and saw themselves as such; they liked being at the top of society and able to lord it over others. But God's purpose for man is that he be repentant and serve



The Hunger family performed a special song

others, as shown in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Luke 18:9-14. We are managers of the Lord's word and are to bless our neighbors. We are not to be served but to be servants, as Jesus was not only in His earthly life but also in His heavenly ministry.

The question is, What is in my heart? How is one changed from being a Pharisee—a whited sepulcher? Matthew 23:27. We need to pray that God will reveal to us what we really are. "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:4. We tend to be confused because of our own condition, often judging others by their actions. Instead, may the Lord help us to analyze correctly our own experience with our families, neighbors, and fellow believers. It is very easy to fall in this area.



Part of the congregation in the Auditorium

What does God mean when He says He wants mercy, not sacrifice? Paul understood that he needed to change by having an experience with God, particularly through suffering. In fact, unless we are ready to suffer and die for Him, we are in danger. Paul changed, and we also must be transformed. Jesus needs to be the center of the church, our lives, and our homes. Let us be happy to suffer and to share our blessings.

For the next service, *Elder Ciro Arevalo* examined the strong verse found in Philippians 3:2, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." The title was **Beware of Evil Workers**. All who are



Sister Persia Suarez made a presentation to the youth

baptized, all who receive Jesus into their hearts, are missionaries—workers for the Lord. In Luke 20:9-16, Jesus related the parable of the man who "planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time." These hired workers were unfaithful. They were evil. In Israel's history, there were priests who were commissioned to gather funds and repair the Lord's house. 2 Chronicles 24:5; 2 Kings 12:4-6. But they were unfaithful workers, for they gathered the money but did not repair the house. More examples of such unfaithfulness are recorded in the Scriptures, and some of them are even named, including Judas Iscariot and Diotrephes. 3 John 9, 10.

Sister Ellen G. White wrote that we should make sure that God's work is not placed in the hands of men who work according to their own judgment, not being responsible to anyone, having the spirit of control and lacking the divine unity of spirit. The apostle Paul had trouble with people like this, for he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:13, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." The prophet Isaiah wrote similarly about such people: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they

are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." Isaiah 56:10, 11. Such people do not present the message, perhaps for fear of rejection. They see someone sinning, and do nothing, so God's work is not done. Let us place ourselves in God's hands and be transformed. Our responsibility is to prepare to meet Jesus at His coming, to save souls, and to be good, faithful servants, being led by the Holy Spirit.

After lunch, the afternoon was given to prepare for the holy Sabbath day. *Elder Humberto Avellaneda* presented the Sabbath opening service. This was the first time that a meeting had ever been held in the Auditorium. All of the rest of the meetings on the Sabbath were held there as well. The subject was **Be Careful of the Window**, from the story found in Acts 20:9. The apostle Paul and his companions were in Troas, where he preached until midnight after the Sabbath ended. "And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead."

Perhaps Paul's preaching was boring to Eutychus and he started to look down at the street below. Very likely he was not very interested in what Paul was saying. For



Elder Henry Dering spoke Friday evening

sure, he was not concentrating on it, and he fell asleep. This young man had placed himself in a very vulnerable situation. Others in the Scriptures faced similar dangers on different levels, such as Samson and Judas Iscariot. It is dangerous when life is abundant and comfortable, for Satan causes distractions, and one can be overcome. It is unsafe to play with sin or danger. Satan wants to destroy every person, so he does everything possible to divert one's attention from right things.

What did Paul do after the young man fell? "And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him." Acts 20:10. If people fall, we need to do as Paul did. We need leaders who can lift up the fallen and revive them. The apostle did not just leave the young man lying on the ground but took him in his arms and warmed him up. Likewise, we need to give Christian warmth to those who are discouraged. God bless every Eutychus and those who help them!

The service to follow was presented by *Elder Henry Dering*, based on Philippians



The young people enjoyed a creative activity during the youth conference

4:2 and titled ***Euodias and Syntyche: To be United***. The verse says that these two believers should “be of the same mind in the Lord.” Unity is possible only through the love and grace of Christ. Through His grace, eternal life is offered as a gift to all. Grace changes and empowers everyone to be saved—when he accepts that grace through faith. The world’s many religions teach that a person is saved by his good deeds; think of Hinduism and Islam. But the Scriptures teach that no one can be saved by his good deeds. Indeed, nothing a person can do will make God love him more than He already does; His love is infinite.

punishment of sin (the second, eternal death); paid the price of sin; gave up His glory, power, and rank as God in heaven to tabernacle with human beings as a man; was born in a lowly manger; and was poor and remained poor, as were His disciples. Therefore, all people—both Jews and Gentiles—were and are encouraged. He was silent when He was beaten, flogged, and pierced. He never complained when He suffered excruciating pain and agony. His Father gave Him to be afflicted for sin in many ways. As blood was put over the doors of the Israelites in Egypt on the night of the Passover, Jesus’ blood was shed

Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-11.

A **song service and testimony hour** followed, along with a thanksgiving offering gathered to support the remodeling and development of the Norman College campus, led by *Brother Elvis Feliciano* and *Sister Athai Ramirez*. A variety of solos, instrumental specials, and duets were shared. Experiences of victory in Christ gladdened the hearts of all who attended. Thank you to all who spoke, sang, played instruments, and gave their generous offerings!

Sabbath, December 31

The program on Sabbath began with morning worship as *Sister Margie Seely* spoke about ***Those Women Which Labored***, as given in Philippians 4:3. She told the story of a young Indian woman, Sacagawea, who served as the translator between the United States Government and the Indian tribes following the government’s purchase from France of the Louisiana Territory in 1803. The government wanted to find out exactly what all was included in what had been purchased, so it created the Lewis and Clark Expedition to find out. Sacagawea, only about 16 years old and a slave with no formal education, served as an interpreter for the expedition. History books remember her as very knowledgeable and brave, never complaining and always being a blessing to others.

The apostle Paul wrote about women who helped him and whose names are recorded in the book of life. Christian



Entrance to the Auditorium, southwest of Love Chapel

The great Reformer Martin Luther tried to be saved in many different ways, but he came to the conclusion that salvation is a gift of Heaven through Christ alone. The devil can be overcome only through grace by faith, which embraces trust in God. “... The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Romans 5:5. God always forgives the repentant believer, but that forgiveness cost all of heaven in the blood of Jesus Christ. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17. Soon Jesus will come and remove all sickness, sorrow, tragedy, and death. There is hope for all, as shown in the words of Paul to the jailer in Philippi: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Acts 16:31.

The **evening worship** was given by *Elder Inayat Daniel* under the title ***He Humbled Himself***, from Philippians 2:8: “And being in found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” What did Jesus do? So much! He endured the

on the cross of Calvary so man could be saved. The Jewish leaders and Romans did not know whom they were slaying.

After Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, the song of victory rang out in heaven. He was seated on the throne of glory. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted



A group of young people acted out a Bible story during the youth conference



women are especially able to accomplish important tasks in the home, in schools, with children, and as witnesses. There are important differences between the work that men and women can perform for the Master. The promise in the Scriptures is: "Write: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their la-

hours; and their works do follow them." Revelation 14:13.

After breakfast, *Elder Benjamin Alejos* shared thoughts about the Sabbath school work in a meeting for those who teach in the Sabbath school. This was followed by a half hour of instrumental music before the **Sabbath school** began at 10:00 a.m., under the leadership

of *Brother JD Thornton* and *Sister Kaila Suarez*. The Sabbath school classes met with their teachers, as follows: English class, Elder David Moreno; Spanish class, Elder Abel Gutierrez; Youth class, Elder Joami Baredo; and Children's class, Sister Lorena Ajucum.

The adult Sabbath School Lesson, titled "We Will See His Face," was the last les-



son in the half year on the subject of “Help from the Sanctuary.” It is God’s greatest desire to complete His work of redeeming man. Psalm 132:13, 14 says, “For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.” All who connect with Heaven and are guided by the Holy Spirit will be cleansed and pre-

pared to live in the heavenly kingdom forever and will inherit the new earth. Jesus wants that more than anything else. He prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.” This evil world will soon pass away. “To those

who are tired of a life of sinfulness, but who know not where to turn to obtain relief, present the compassionate Saviour, full of love and tenderness, longing to receive those who come to Him with broken hearts and contrite spirits. Take them by the hand, lift them up, speak to them words of hope and courage. Help them to grasp the hand of Him who has said, ‘Let

him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.' Isaiah 27:5." —*Counsels on Health*, p. 539.

The main **Sabbath service** was blessed by a lot of special music and choirs. The American Union officers, who had been elected by the delegates prior to the opening of the public conference, were presented before the congregation. The oath of office was administered to them as they raised their hands in a pledge to be faithful and defend the *Principles of Faith* and be guided by the *Church Manual*. Elder George Gowie administered the oath.

The American Union officers for the 3-year term of 2023 through 2025 are as follows:

President: Idel Suarez, Jr.
 Vice President: Larry Watts
 Secretary: Margie Seely
 Treasurer: Enid Tapia
 Treasurer Assistant: Lisbeth Hunger
 Auditor: Evelyn Arevalo
 Missionary Leader: Joami Barnedo
 Family Leader: Ciro Arevalo
 Music Leader: Melite Hunger
 Health Leader: Erica Murua
 Youth Leader: Cadmiel Hunger
 Education Leader: Beatriz Cabrera
 Good Samaritan Leader: Wendy Paz
 Publishing House Leader: Samuel Alejos
 Canvassing Leader: Joel Barnedo
 Multimedia Leader: Addin Ajucum
 Orion Christian Academy Leader: Margie Seely

Executive Board

President: Idel Suarez, Jr.
 Vice President: Larry Watts
 Secretary: Margie Seely
 Treasurer: Enid Tapia
 Member: Pablo Hunger



The Northeastern Field choir sang a beautiful song

American Union Full Board

President: Idel Suarez, Jr.
 Vice President: Larry Watts
 Secretary: Margie Seely
 Treasurer: Enid Tapia
 Northeastern Field President: Pablo Hunger
 Puerto Rican Field President: Humberto Ajucum
 Southeastern Field President: Uldarico Alejos
 Western Field President: Joel Barnedo
 Finance Board Member: David Cabrera

Finance Board

President: Idel Suarez, Jr.
 Treasurer: Enid Tapia
 Member: David Cabrera
 Member: David Moreno
 Member: Marcio Paz

Literature Committee

Annemarie Petrovich
 Henry Dering
 Samuel Alejos
 Evelyn Holmstroem
 Carlos Diaz

Delegates to the General Conference

Ciro Arevalo
 Humberto Ajucum
 Larry Watts

Alternate Delegates to the General Conference

Joel Barnedo
 Uldarico Alejos
 Margie Seely

Elder Danilo Monterroso, president of the South American Division, presented the service on the conference motto, **The High Calling of God in Christ**, found in Philippians 3:14. Elder Monterroso expressed his gratitude to God that his wife and son were able to be with him at this conference. Using the apostle Paul's analogy of the Christian walk as a race, he showed slides as he spoke of the obstacles that one must overcome. In a worldly race, only one person can win a race; but praise God that in the spiritual race everyone can win. Right from the start, preparation is critically important. Paul stressed how important it is to God that we reach the final goal. Another important requirement is that one must strive lawfully, as told in 2 Timothy 2:5. Even in the Olympic Games, people who have won have later been stripped of their medals because it was eventually discovered that they had cheated. So, the question is, How are you running the race? Are you running legally? Does your family see that you are running the race lawfully, in all truth and honesty? We are privileged to have in the Scriptures



Some young people had a chance to experience blindness in an activity during the youth conference

many examples of those who ran lawfully, and there are also sufficient examples of those who did not. We need to learn from both classes. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Corinthians 10:11. God leaves nothing to chance; He has done and is doing everything possible so that all may be saved.

The example of Israel's exodus from Egypt, as well as the obstacles they encountered on the journey from there to Mount Sinai, shows that God wants not only to give liberty to His people but also to perform miracles for them. At the Red Sea and forty years later at Jericho, the Israelites really did not understand the deep meaning of



The children's choir was joined by a few young people to praise God with a song



Before giving the sermon, Elder Danilo Monterroso told the children a story

Elder Monterroso told about being at a youth conference in Mexico in which 30 ministers were challenged by 430 young people to climb to the top of a mountain. After a while, the ministers began falling behind. One minister came to Elder Monterroso and said, "Let's finish together." They were able to make it to the top, where it was very cold. But it was wonderful to reach the peak. Now the question is, How many of us will reach the heavenly peak? It is not about how fast we go, nor how much knowledge we have. It is about perseverance and patience. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." Matthew 24:13; 1 Timothy 6:12. And, at the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Hence-

His incredible miracles. Because they did not understand that God was calling them to the greatest height of spiritual, intellectual, and mental excellence, they made huge mistakes in their decisions. Some of them even gave ear to those who said they would prefer to go back to Egypt rather than to continue the way that God was leading them. Nevertheless, Moses told them, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." Exodus 14:14. What will faithful people receive after successfully overcoming the obstacles? Immortality, eternal life, and new names. They will have their Father's name written in their foreheads. They will be kings and priests and receive crowns of gold. The Bible declares the overcomers to be citizens of heaven!



Sisters Esly and Evelyn Arevalo sang "Come to Jesus/Ven a Jesús"; Elder Danilo Monterroso is at right

forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only but unto all them also that love His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

Soon heaven will be silent for “about the space of half an hour.” Revelation 8:1. Why? Because heaven’s inhabitants will come to take to the celestial city all who reach the final goal and receive the prize. God is calling us on high. Elder Monterroso called for all who wished to express their devotion to God and declare their intention to accept the high calling of God in Christ to come forward. A large group of youth and adults filled the stage. Elder Idel Suarez, Jr., prayed for all who thus expressed their decision to be prepared for Jesus’ soon coming.

After lunch, *Sisters Damaris Hunger and Persia Suarez*, led a **testimony and song hour**. We heard an amazing story about how God brought a brother in connection with a person to whom he was able to witness with wonderful success. Information was also given about what the young people studied and their projects during the youth conference. “For God hath not give us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” 2 Timothy 1:7; 2:3. Special instrumental and vocal music pieces were presented, often accompanied by guitars.

The **Sabbath closing** meeting was presented by *Elder Yoni Delgado*. He told an experience about making choices, especially encouraging the young people to be obedient and follow good advice. His family owned fruit orchards, and one day his mother asked him to carry some heavy boxes to a customer who lived a fair distance away in the city. His mother told him



Elder Idel Suarez, Jr., prayed for those who answered the altar call for dedication and rededication

to take the boxes to the customer’s home and then return home. When he arrived, it was getting dark, and the family offered him some juice, which he accepted, since it would not take too long. Then they invited him for dinner, and more time passed after he accepted that invitation. He was then invited to stay overnight, since it was late; he accepted that as well. But then, when he wanted to sleep, he couldn’t. Finally he told the family that he had to go, because his mother would be waiting up for him. As he got outside the city, there were no lights. He heard someone behind him, and he began to run. Then there were several people behind him who said, “Wait for us, and we’ll take you home!” But he ran even faster all the way, until finally he reached home. His mother was at the door, and she opened it. “I told her to close the door, because some people were following me and I was uneasy about them.”

This was a lesson in obedience and working out one’s salvation. The apostle Paul’s counsel in Philippians 2:12, 13 is: “... Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” We need to be busy with those things that are related to our salvation. And we need to “cash the check” immediately that Heaven offers by giving us salvation full and free. God is the one who both wills and does the work in His children. What is that work? To surrender our free will at His feet. When we attach our purposes to God’s will and desires and allow Jesus through the Holy Spirit to work His purposes in us, we will be guided by His will. We should fear to follow our own ideas and, instead, labor for those things that lead to eternal life. We cannot overcome by fighting against bad habits; rather, we need to surrender to Jesus and be clear in our minds about

what the way of salvation is. Obedience is our hope, and His righteousness will accomplish His will in our lives. May this be the most important thing for us in the new year!

Elder George Gowie presented a New Year’s talk bearing the title **Let This Mind Be in You**, as found in Philippians 2:5. What can we say to those who have read the Bible and studied it all of their lives? We read that in the beginning God created man in His own image and gave him dominion over the animals and the earth. We are created in His likeness—balanced, with the mind controlling the body, righteous, and perfect. When man was formed in God’s likeness, “His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure, his appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

Satan, the intruder, entered that holy place; and his ideas were accepted. Because of his selfishness and wanting to be first (Isaiah 14:12-15), he planted this evil seed in humanity. He wanted to be the center of attention. He deceives people, so they strive to make an impression and be remembered, to make a name for themselves. By nature, we are all part of this, our minds tend to go against God’s will, and we fall short of His grace. What will we do in 2023? Let us resolve now to be like Christ, to have His mind, to let our hearts be filled with Him by the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, because we have a sinful nature, we love to condemn others, and we become high minded. There are several incidents in the Bible that relate to this. One is about the woman who was found in adultery.



Elder Joami Barnedo sang a song with his sons

The Jewish leaders sought to condemn her, and they brought her to Jesus to be judged. They questioned Him about this sin and said that the law of Moses commanded that she be stoned. This is how we are as human beings; this is how we think; we tend to throw verbal stones and are quick to condemn others. But we must learn to have a new mind—the mind of Christ. These leaders were not concerned about the kingdom of God; they presented this woman before Jesus to see what He would say about having her stoned. But there was something that these men did not understand. He who gave Moses the law was the One standing there. The Creator of heaven and earth was standing there. And more. The Saviour of mankind was standing there, the One who would carry the sin of the world to the cross. He was and is man's Intercessor, the Mediator between God and man. He came into the world not to condemn but to seek those who were lost. Imagine this woman coming before Jesus with her face covered in shame. Jesus said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." John 8:7. No doubt she thought her death was imminent. But not a single stone

was the best day of her life. The so-called righteous men who had condemned her thought that they had trapped Jesus. They thought that He would have this woman condemned. But this day was the day of "Hallelujah" for her, for this was her day of deliverance from sin. Coming from a place of love and forgiveness, a place of compassion, the Saviour asked, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." John 8:10, 11. She was set free, because she met the Saviour and believed on Him. That is the power that we can receive by remaining in Him.

After supper, a **concert** was held in the auditorium under the leadership of *Brother Wikler Moran* and *Sister Melite Hunger*. It opened with the congregation singing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness;" and then Ian Lucas Hernandez, the young son of Brother Elder Hernandez and Sister Raquel Sosa, played "More about Jesus" on the violin with Elder Larry Watts. He had only been playing the violin for about four months, but he played the song firmly and

YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5gi_hPOfNI.

A brother and a young sister played two instrumental songs, she on violin and he on guitar. This was followed by a flute choir playing "When I Come to the End of the Road." There were 11 flutes and 1 clarinet.

A men's quarter composed of Brother Wikler Moran and Elders Larry Watts, Pablo Hunger, and Cadmiel Hunger sang "Where He Leads Me I Must Follow." Then the choir from the Northeastern Field, composed of adults and children, sang "Crown Him."

A trio played "You Are My Hiding Place" beautifully on the violin, cello, and flute. Following this, another instrumental group of 13 guitars and 3 flutes played "Light Your Holy Fire." The same group then played "When I Think about Your Magnitude" with Elder Larry Watts playing the melody on the violin.

A Spanish song was sung and played on guitars and flute by Brothers Jonathan Figuereo and Elvis Feliciano, and Sister Damaris Hunger.

The Hunger and Moran families combined to sing a very pretty song titled "Jesús, te agradezco por ser mi gran amigo." Elder Idel Suarez, Jr., followed with a solo, "He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels."

Elder Danilo Monterroso played "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross" on the trumpet. A group of children then sang the final song of the concert. Elder Monterroso offered the closing prayer to a very beautiful concert—a real delight. Many thanks to all of the musicians!

Sunday, January 1

The morning worship service, held in Hope Chapel, was presented by *Elder Samuel Alejos* under the title **Caesar's Household**, from Philippians 4:22. The apostle Paul's epistle to the Philippians closes with salutations from "they that are of Caesar's household." Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome. His crime was that he spoke in the name of the Lord. This was the time of the emperor Nero's reign, which was characterized by cruelty and lies. He was only 16 years old when he began to rule Rome, and he died when he was 30. Despite his imprisonment under very mean conditions, the apostle did not complain or offer any kind of excuses. He used his influence to build spiritual bridges to estranged believers. Those in Caesar's household were unique in living a life worthy of what God chose them for. Although they were



During the concert on Sabbath evening, a flute choir played "When I Come to the End of the Road"

was cast, for the Saviour, who is able to read every mind and heart, stooped down and wrote in the sand. One by one, the leaders backed away and left. The woman was left alone with Jesus; when such a thing happens, great miracles take place in one's life.

This year, spend time with Jesus; because, when you spend time with Jesus, He will set you free. No matter who you are, where you are, or how far in sin you are, grace is greater than all your sin. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of forgiveness. This woman thought it was the end of her life, but this

accurately, without being swayed by the harmony part.

Without being able to tell the names of all of the people who performed music or the titles of especially the Spanish songs, here is a list of the music that was enjoyed. Accompaniment on the pipe organ and piano was provided by Sister Karola Kraenzmer, and Sister Melite Hunger played the piano for quite a number of the songs. If you would like to watch the concert on YouTube, the recording was provided by Elder David Moreno of the Huntington Park (Los Angeles), California, church at the following



The baptism was held at the beautiful lake in Reed Bingham State Park

surrounded by opulence, intrigue, and deception and were exposed to the greatest possible dangers, they spoke of Christ.

We, too, each live a life that God has chosen us for. Here in Norman Park, we are restoring and improving buildings, even as we restore our relationship with Him. Let us realize that at any moment everything can be taken away from us except one thing—our freedom to choose how we deal with circumstances. Like Paul, it is both important and a blessing to learn to be content in whatever state we find ourselves—in his words, to be exalted or abased. Elder Alejos’ mother told him about a conference in Nicaragua at a time when the believers in the country had to endure food rationing. The brethren reduced the amount of food they consumed to save their rations for the conference. Indeed, they went hungry to host the conference. Today, in contrast to that, most of us have an abundance of food and other things and do not have to work physically for our livelihood. Let us learn to be content—at peace—regardless of our circumstances and do everything we can to uplift the holy cause of the Master.

For the **baptism**, with reference to Philip-
 pians 2:13, *Elders Pablo Hunger and Idel Suarez, Jr.*, presented four baptismal candidates. The topic title was **God Worketh in You**. The candidates were asked questions concerning their commitment to the Lord, and then they each gave a testimony, praising God for bringing them to this moment.

Elder Hunger read John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Although this verse refers to Jesus and His supreme sacrifice, it is also necessary for us to ask ourselves for what we are willing to die, as well as for what we desire to live.

Elder Suarez read 1 Peter 3:15: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” The candidates were urged to take time every day to study, to pray, and to witness for God. Elder Suarez also encouraged everyone to reach out to those who have left the church or who do not regularly attend the services.

The baptism took place at the lake in Reed Bingham State Park, about thirty minutes from Norman Park. The four souls were immediately accepted into church fellowship at the water’s edge.

After returning from the baptism, *Elder Idel Suarez, Jr.*, gave his final thoughts to **close the conference** in the dining hall where the conference attendees gathered for lunch. Much gratitude was expressed for all who attended, all who helped with the organization on many levels, including the concurrent youth and children’s

conferences, and all who worked hard to make the conference run smoothly. The kitchen staff prepared delicious, healthful vegan meals; and volunteers performed numerous tasks for the preparation of the food, as well as for the cleanup after every meal. Thank you!

Gratitude was also extended to those who worked on many repair, remodeling, and maintenance projects throughout the Norman College campus over the past two years. In addition, those who made contributions of time, skill, and money were thanked for their loving gifts. The speakers, teachers, and translators, and musicians all devoted time and energy in preparing and presenting inspiring thoughts and music for the spiritual blessing of the attendees, and they were also thanked very much. May you all be rewarded from on high for every effort. It is greatly appreciated.

And we thank the photographers who submitted pictures for us to share with all who read about the conference in these pages—Sister Angelica Haile, Sister Athai Ramirez, and Elder Larry Watts. God bless you and all who came to the conference, all who gave, and all who will continue to do so in the future, to the honor, glory, and praise of the God of heaven.

On a personal note, since I was unable to attend this American Union Conference, I had to take notes from audio transmissions. Therefore, I thank my husband for putting his phone on the pulpit for each meeting so that I could hear the message, and also for transcribing the Sabbath service. Thank you to Sister Athai Ramirez for summarizing Elder George Gowie’s New Year’s Eve talk. Thank you also to Elder David Moreno for recording the meetings on video. God grant every one of you His richest blessings!



Baptized (left to right) were Lina and Eddie Rodriguez, Joela Hunger, and Beatriz Coronado