

GROTON ASSEMBLY OF GOD

JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

PASTOR'S PEN

It's Easy

It all began with a conversation. Only God knew we would end up here. In the first instance, I talked to a girl. It was natural. She came into my dorm past my office to get a newspaper from a box of them in our foyer. As she walked by, I said hello from my office because my sister had introduced us months before. She got her paper, stepped into the door of the office, and chatted with me for a couple of minutes. I invited her to my apartment to discuss training to become a teacher. That's what I did as a graduate student serving as dorm director. Now 40 years later I look at my marriage as having begun with a conversation.

In the second instance, my salvation story is similar in that it began with a conversation. A year or two before Andy and Gailanne Barber began pouring stories about Jesus into my soul, I had had class with them—a creative writing class. Our class had been small, so we'd all talked among ourselves. Andy and Gailanne and I had struck up a friendship. Then two years later when I returned to the college to see my sister graduate, there were Gailanne and Andy graduating also. When I went over to them to say hello and to congratulate them, they invited me to dinner, which led to lots of time with them that summer, and their witnessing to me. Their witnessing was simply



their telling me stories about Jesus, about what He had done in their lives. No, they didn't use scripture, no they didn't use some special technique. They just told me what He had done in them, through them, around them. Their stories were about Him and how He had changed them. They weren't preaching at me, just sharing about their best friend through the hours that we visited together that summer—over meals, during trips to the grocery store, as we watched professional wrestling on television.

In today's world, we become anxious sometimes when we think about "having to witness." But actually, it can be very easy. How? Just begin a conversation with someone. It can be a cashier, with a question such as, "How is your day going?" Or it can be a neighbor you run into somewhere, with a question like, "How did you fare when the power went out the other day?"

Focus on building relationship, on listening to people, on just asking a question or two that are harmless. If a person engages and joins you in a conversation, see how it goes. The person might offer something worthy of offering prayer for. They might seem downcast, giving you an opportunity to ask, "Can I tell you about the person who helps me most?"

Friends, the witnessing that builds the church all begins with a simple

conversation. Some conversations are just for getting to know people, letting them know we care enough to ask about them and care enough to listen to what they say.

If we remember that Jesus is our best friend and wants to be theirs, too, and if we remember that they face many of the same challenges we do—body aches, family struggles, questions about where society and the country are going—it makes talking with them easier. And it is easier to talk with them about Jesus if we've been talking with them about other things and listening to them. Then speaking about Jesus becomes more natural, and often they will be a little more open to it. Being a good listener is a good way to open the door to a person's willingness to hear something about our best friend.

January Service Schedule

Sunday, January 4

9 - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

New Sermon series: Revival

10 a.m. – “Getting Back to It”

Sunday, January 11

9 -9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

10 a.m. – “Here”

Sunday, January 18 (Annual Business Meeting)

9 -9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

10 a.m. – “Fear Helps,” with water baptisms

11:30 a.m. – Fellowship Meal

12:45 p.m. – Annual Business Meeting

Sunday, January 25

9 - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

10 a.m. – Syracuse Teen Challenge

Birthdays

- 1 Robin Elliott
Karin McCadam
Franz Pomianowitz
Judy Barron
- 3 Gunner Kress
- 5 Jennie Rinchack
- 9 Debbrah Fernandez
- 12 Tess Gudbranson, Natashaly Torres
- 13 Laramie Starner
- 14 Shawn Miller
- 18 Nancy Woodard
- 22 Sue Sears
Rebecca Lanzilotta
Zachary Hurlbut
- 25 Julie Hinkle
- 26 P. Sharon Newman
- 27 Nancy Flood
- 28 Mira Neno
- 29 Cayleann Garrow
- 30 Penny Hendrickson
Earl Buckingham
- 31 Caylin Jacquith
Ricardo Fernandez



Anniversaries:

- 1/1/1986 P. Sam & Penny Neno
1/24/1981 Bob & Diane Costa
1/28/2006 Joe & Erin Wright



Join us for Prayer

NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES OF GOD **Congregational prayer gathering**

Sunday evenings through JANUARY.
Beginning Sunday, January 4, 6-7 p.m.

Sectional Prayer Meeting, Thursday, Jan 08, 10-11 a.m.

Prayer at Center Village Court,
Groton, NY, Every Thursday, 1-2:30 p.m.

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING:

Annual Business Meeting: Sunday, January 18, 2026

Our annual business meeting will be held at 12:45 p.m. on Sunday, January 18, 2026. We will hold a dish-to-pass after the service just prior to the meeting.

This year the meeting will *not* be live-streamed.

We will be electing four board members: One trustee and three deacons. There will be three ratification votes during the meeting. The elections will be held as follows:



- 1 Trustee for three years
- 1 Deacon for three years
- 1 Deacon for two years
- 1 under-30 Deacon for three years by ratification vote.
- Board Secretary for one year by ratification vote.
- Church Treasurer for one year by ratification vote.

Justin Besler will be stepping down as trustee. Current deacons Jim Hacker, Caesar Torres, and Brian Twitchell will be allowing their names to stand.

Additionally, the following will be candidates for trustee and two of the deacons' positions: Robin Cargian, Erin Neno, Mike Rinkchack, and Matt Starnier.

Lucas Rivera is allowing his name to stand for under-30 deacon (ratification vote); Laurie Wright is allowing her name to stand for Board Secretary (ratification vote); and Amy Lanzilotta is allowing her name to stand for Church Treasurer (ratification vote).

While only members may participate in the meeting, others may attend. Please pray faithfully in advance of the meeting.

Month-Long Corporate Prayer Meetings Sunday Nights,

January 4 - January 25, 2026



We will join together every Sunday evening in January from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the church sanctuary to pray. We encourage all members to fast in some manner during the month—whether it be a meal a week, a day a week, some other type of fast (such as not watching TV or a certain program) so as to spend more time in prayer during the month.

We will be joining with other Assemblies of God churches in humbling ourselves before God and in intercession—for our nation, for our communities, for our families, and for our church.

God wants to hear from us, and He wants to hear from our corporate voices, for He loves unity (Psalm 133).

2 Chronicles 7:14, NKJV: if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Baby Bottles

It's that time again when you have an opportunity to donate toward the Pregnancy Center in Cortland. Please take a baby bottle located inside the sanctuary doors on the stand. When you take a baby bottle, please sign your name on the sheet attached to the clipboard, as it's helpful for follow-up to know who has each bottle.

Fill up the bottle with your gift (coins, dollars, or a check*) and return it to Laurie Wright by Sunday, March 29, 2025. There is a label

attached to each bottle. It's optional to sign your name, but if you want giving credit, please sign your name. Laurie will take your gift directly to the pregnancy center in Cortland. Speak with her if you have any questions.

*NOTE: if you write a check, please make it out to FLPC (Fingerlakes Pregnancy Center) NOT Groton AG. We do not run this offering through the church checking account.

Enoch's Testimony, "In My Brokenness"

**Submitted by AG Global
University Europe
Coordinators, Robert &
Lynn Rose**

*Supported by Groton
AG*

[Enoch is a recent Bible Global University graduate from a small town near Bangalore, India. Enoch stopped using his Hindu name and goes by a biblical one now.]

My parents were Hindu and observed all religious traditions. We kept sacred idols in our home and worshipped them. My father died when I was four, and due to financial hardship, I was sent to live in an orphanage. I was in such pain and confusion. I was so alone and became angry at the gods and searched for the truth in many religions. When I was 18, I attended a leading university and ultimately received a master's degree in data science. After this time, I was offered a job in Rome, Italy, as a data scientist in the European Space Agency. Although I had never been out of my country, I knew this opportunity would be advantageous for my future.

When I arrived in Rome, I encountered many internationals including Indians. They helped me adjust to the new culture and surroundings. What I didn't know is that these Indians were Christians. They held a

worldview that was so foreign to me. There were no idols or holy places...simply their great love for God. As a Hindu, our deities demanded for us to perform duties. But after hearing these Christians talk about their God, I decided to attend church.

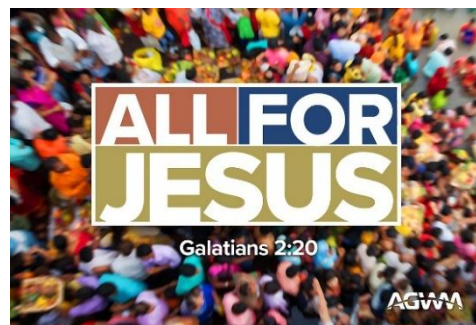
What a shock to see hundreds of people singing with joy, worshipping loudly and praying without the use of prayer tools. I couldn't help myself but returned to the church repeatedly. In my brokenness, I

opened my heart to God's message. I felt such love, comfort and hope that I had never experienced before. I learned that it was the Holy Spirit calling me to give my life to God and accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. In that moment I knew that I had to forsake all other gods. I finally found a vibrant, living faith that

was not based on idols, images, or philosophy.

I hungered for God and His Word! I enrolled in Global University courses and studied diligently. I graduated on September 27, 2025, and felt so humbled as Dr. Robert Rose (AGWM Missionary & Global University Europe Coordinators supported by Groton AG), gave me my certificate. God blessed me with a partner as well. He called us to serve Him and win souls for His kingdom. My wife, Sirsha, is also enrolled and will graduate next year. We serve actively in the church. I lead the media team, am a youth counselor, teach classes and am helping raise up leaders for God's kingdom. My life, my career, my ministry, and my marriage stand as testimonies to God's grace. My wife and I have both committed ourselves to full-time ministry.

God orchestrated our lives and brought us to a country to find the One true and living God. Please pray for my family back in India. They are disappointed in our decision to serve Christ. But we know if God orchestrated a way for us to become believers, He can do the same for them.



Names withheld, India

Supported by Groton AG

We would like to ask you to pray for our safety. Many people in the Northern part of India and Western part of Nepal are experiencing leopard and tiger attacks in the last year. The attacks are progressively increasing and happening closer and closer to towns, not just in the jungle. Their habitats are being disturbed due to housing developments and natural disasters.

Our state in India has had multiple attacks in the last month, causing deaths and major injuries, mostly to children. In the last week alone, there have been 4 leopard attacks. Our district in Nepal had a leopard attack last week that killed one woman. Today, December 11th another death by a tiger has caused fear to rise. It is the 36th death by tiger in 5 years in the Bardiya District alone. Size wise, that would be like one NYC borough among the state of New York. It is hitting closer and closer to home. People are encouraged to walk with sticks and metal pipes to defend themselves. Ownership of guns in both countries is illegal.

Our family has invested in installing a high fencing around our property to protect our kids when they are outside. We also have metal plates outside our door to grab quickly in an emergency. But in a country where the majority of the people don't own a bike, much less a car, they depend on walking for transportation. By sunset, the chances of leopard sightings increases. You can only imagine the fear for those that get done with work at 6:00 pm and must walk home.



Please pray that the government and wildlife officials have wisdom to control this problem and catch the deadly animals. Pray for protection to civilians and their livestock, which they depend on for income. Pray against the fear that is rising in our area, but also that people would have discernment and keen attention to their surroundings.

Joe and Mary Benecasa, Italy

Supported by Groton AG

It's been a good year. We hate to report that for the first time since we've been on the field, our monthly faith promises have dropped. And not just a little: they are down by over \$1,000 a month. This drop, along with the weaker dollar and the fact that our church rent and utilities are not covered in our budget are contributing to our shortfall. We are not panicking, but it is a serious situation. God has been faithful, and we don't want to leave Italy while the church is experiencing growth, and so we are believing God will provide for us.



We have also had some trips home for medical issues. Joe was home twice to address concerns with the arthritis in his back and hip, as well as severe acid reflux.

While there, his doctor discovered that his liver is severely damaged to the point where he had to start medical treatments right away. Fortunately for us, the Lord provided a doctor here in Italy that is overseeing those treatments. Mary went home three times to help with her mom's illness. Pray for strength, good health, and anointing to continue with the ministry.

We thank you for praying and know that you will bring these needs before the Lord on our behalf. Thank you! Buon Natale!

The Call

to Missions in Mexico.

Paul and Sandy Kazim have served as Assemblies of God World Missions global workers in Mexico for 24 years. They are committed to seeing Mexico won for Christ. The Kazims have engaged in various ministries including medical outreaches, teaching, speaking, and university ministry. Though their ministries have shifted throughout the years, their commitment to Mexico remains the same.



finished my master's degree in family medicine and was working in family practice, I began to realize that there was a need for my giftings and abilities among other people- and language-groups. I just

wanted to please the Lord in following His direction.

What is the key to success for longevity in missions, and why is longevity important?

How did you come to know Jesus, and how did God call you to missions?

PAUL: I was born into a culturally Muslim family and had little to no religious training. Coworkers at my father's restaurant befriended me and shared the Christian faith. I asked for a New Testament and read it. From there, I learned about salvation, and I told Jesus I wanted to have a relationship with Him.

My call to missions happened while I was on a trip to Kosovo and Yugoslavia. I thought I would continue my theological studies, but God impressed on me that I needed to serve where there was a need instead of working on a Ph.D. I later obtained my doctorate in response to the need for well-prepared teachers in higher levels of theological education in Latin America.

SANDY: I was born into an Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) missionary home in Cuba. I grew up in a lifestyle of following Jesus. I don't remember having a definite, one-time decision. To not follow Jesus made no logical or spiritual sense to my scientific mind. My parents always modeled a way of thinking and living that was in sharp contrast to my friends' families. I concluded that to walk away from my parents' faith and value system was to walk toward a path of failure and destruction.

My call to missions was a process. After I

SANDY: Longevity involves putting down roots. That implies learning the language, attending, and participating in people's social gatherings — whether it be school, religious, or family gatherings. Longevity means learning their music, making and enjoying their food, learning their cultural value system, honoring the people around you, and inviting them into your home. It is practicing the mindset that this new place, with its new language- and people-groups, is now your home. It includes finding the good in that culture and place and applying it to your life. Every culture has values that are Kingdom values, as well as ways of life that are contrary to God's commandments. This means that sometimes you must reject cultural things that are displeasing to the Lord or do not contribute to Kingdom life. It implies a lifelong mindset of learning. Longevity is important because it takes time to build bridges of trust so you can introduce people to one eternal, countercultural Truth. It is also an opportunity to represent God by loving, valuing, and honoring them.

PAUL: Part of longevity is learning that sometimes people have a different understanding of life, how things work, what's valuable, and what's not valuable. Developing a cross-cultural understanding is a challenge. I once considered myself adept at cross-cultural activity. After one year, I was sure I understood the culture of the people I was called to work with. Thirty

years later, I'm still learning.

How do you disciple new believers? How do you bridge the gap between your beliefs as a missionary compared to the beliefs of those you minister to?

PAUL: For most people, the idea that today is the day of salvation doesn't work because they bring a lot of cultural and spiritual baggage with them. People take three steps toward Jesus and then take four steps away from Him until they realize they can't go back to who they used to be.

In discipling someone, the most significant factor is time. You must invest time. Nothing's going to happen quickly. Going where people live and sitting at the table, eating with people, walking down the street, and going for an ice cream is important. Presence and a willingness to adjust to the norms of the other is where it all begins.

SANDY: Discipleship starts by inviting someone to be your friend and looking for ways to grow that friendship through time, conversation, and food. It begins with asking about herself, her family, her past, her present, her goals, and her dreams for the future. Once she is comfortable with us, we ask her if she will allow us to pray and bless her.

In that process, we interject what our lives looked like before we accepted God's provision through Jesus and what it looks like now because of that provision. We can share the hope we have for eternity with God.

Once we have established a friendship and shared our testimony, we ask her if she would like to continue meeting to study a book of the Bible together. We like to start with Matthew or John. Depending on the person's history, interests, or needs, we also use the letter to the Ephesians.

After we have formed a pattern of Bible study with this person, we ask her if she

would like to pray a prayer of commitment to continue to follow Jesus as her Master and Savior.

What are some cultural challenges in ministering in Mexico?

SANDY: Catholic dogma pervades the evangelical way of thinking — that holiness can be compartmentalized. For many, the church is holier than your home. Even inside the church, the altar area is holier than where the congregation sits. People often perceive that being inside the church is more conducive to spiritual growth than looking for ways to bless families and neighbors.

PAUL: Sometimes when you start talking to someone, and he expresses interest in spiritual things — and in life with Christ — he is fine and will follow you all the way through your comments. However, when it comes to the Virgin Guadalupe, the conversation changes. You respond with the typical Protestant answer by saying that Mary is most highly regarded among women and the mother of our Savior, Jesus. You try to give her the proper place that she has in salvation history. But, as soon as you tell this person that you don't pray to Mary, the conversation is over.

People are willing to learn about Jesus. They're willing to learn about His teachings. They're willing to experience His love. However, for the most part, they are not willing to cut ties with praying to the Virgin and severing ties with their family.

The second area where we feel challenged in cultural adaptations is the strong influence the family has on an individual. Each family member is necessary to keep the family unit intact. As a result, recruiting pastors to leave their families and serve as pastor in another area or respond to the call of God to go to another country is difficult. To do so implies that you leave your family, and that seems almost impossible to these people. (continued on next page...)

SANDY: Family relationships become strained when someone other than the lead matriarch accepts Jesus. Accepting Jesus is to walk away from the divine powers that the Virgin holds, according to Catholic tradition in Mexico. It means possibly being kicked out of the home, losing one's job and friends, or being ostracized in school. When the oldest person in the family sees the truth and accepts Jesus as their only Savior, it is easier for the rest of the family to follow.

PAUL: We are not in the U.S. anymore. We are not living in a textbook of cultural values. We had to unlearn many things others had taught us about Mexico. We have had to learn many social customs to help us adapt to Mexican culture. This includes learning what time to arrive for a birthday party, a funeral, or a dinner. We have discovered that saying a proper goodbye is more important than saying hello.

What is Central Mexico's greatest spiritual need? How might this contrast with common misconceptions about Mexico?

SANDY: Central Mexico's greatest spiritual need is to recognize that believing in Jesus is the only way to have an eternal relationship with God. Salvation does not come through good works or the Virgin Mary's intercession. I think many people outside the U.S. believe that Central Mexico recognizes the supremacy of Jesus but chooses not to make following Him a way of life. They don't realize how pervasive is the idea that Jesus is an afterthought. People look at Jesus as an insignificant, small, defenseless baby that only Mary can care for. Mexican culture communicates that Jesus is a baby, cared for by His mother, or He is a Suffering Servant. Each December companies manufacture and sell baby Jesus dolls. This reinforces the concept that Jesus remains a baby. Mary also had to suffer as she watched her Son die. According to some Mexicans, Jesus is not the One who answers prayers, reigns in heaven, and receives all glory and honor. They also see God the Father as an absent, harsh Judge — a Supreme Being who they should fear.

PAUL: In the mad rush in Mexico City, many people have no time for God. I sense a growing rejection of belief in any god. Atheism is a growing concern.

One thing that misleads people, especially people from the U.S. who come and travel to Mexico, is that they go to two areas. They go to the border, and the border is very different. You'll find churches, ministries, and orphanages. They also go to the Native American areas such as Oaxaca, and Chiapas in the South. Those places are likely 35-40% evangelical.

SANDY: Central Mexico is between 2-3% evangelical.

How can believers in the United States pray for you and your ministry in Mexico?

SANDY AND PAUL: We ask believers in the United States to pray for Jesus to reveal himself in dreams and visions to those blinded by their devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe — that these dreams and visions would be powerful enough to make them hungry to learn more about Jesus, even if it disrupts family unity.

We also ask believers in the United States to pray that Mexican churches would be willing to sacrifice to plant new churches in unreached areas or other parts of the world, even if pastors must leave their extended family. Lastly, ask them to pray for workers to reach university students. University students are a lost generation. They are missing in our churches, and that hole needs to be filled. The Mexican church has children and older adults but very few university students.

Although Mexico is marked by its devotion to Catholicism, Sandy and Paul Kazim believe there is hope for the people of Mexico to understand that Jesus as the One True King. Transformation doesn't happen overnight, but through Paul and Sandy's longevity in missions and commitment to reaching those in Central Mexico, they have seen people come to know Christ as Savior.