

# Groton Assembly of God

AUGUST 2024 NEWSLETTER

## PASTOR'S PEN The Unexpected

As I sit at our dining room table writing this, we are under a tornado warning, and thunder is booming outside. The Weather Channel page on our smartphones has turned from a blue background to red. Am I worried? No. Excited? Not really. I'm anticipating that the storm will mostly miss us because it has more of a northerly track. Do I think we could see a tornado? Well... in the overall scheme of things, anything is possible.

If we lived in Kansas or Oklahoma, I'd be more concerned. Why? Because those are areas that see tornadoes much more often. Around here—yes, they occur, but not with much frequency, and not huge ones like we hear about out west.

But could a tornado destroy our home? When I was a boy, my dad took my sister and me into a room in our cellar where lots of canning jars filled with peaches and cherries lined the walls, a room that my parents called our fruit cellar. He pointed to a steel beam that ran across the ceiling and said that if there were ever a tornado, we should come there. My dad believed we might see a tornado.

Why do I bring this up? Because we all live with a sense that some things will never happen. We believe that a part of an airliner will never fall out of the sky on us, for example. We don't feel as though we'll die someday. We don't believe anyone will ever stand up in a public place in which we're sitting and begin shooting people.



Is it wrong to believe these things? I don't think so. If we worried about all of the things that could happen, we would become anxious wrecks.

But would you like to know something interesting? Since I began writing this piece, seven tornadoes did touch down in our state. That means that in seven different towns, people like us who didn't believe they would ever see a tornado did

see one.

No, we should not worry about things outside of our control. But I believe wisdom teaches us that because God has warned us of some things—such as that we will die and face Him in judgment—we need to live purposefully, keeping those important matters in view. Certainly, many things can distract us from those important matters—getting gas for the car, mowing the lawn—but we really do need to keep focused on what's important, even if it doesn't seem urgent.

Jesus gave us a clear word picture of this warning when he told of a man who built a big barn to make life easier down the road, but then suddenly his life was demanded of him (Luke 12:13-21).

Let us draw near to Jesus and stay close to Him.

### VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

**August 11-15, 6:00-8:30 p.m.**

Invite & bring children! Pray for salvations and recommitments!  
Ask God to move.

## August:

### Birthdays -

- 3 Elizabeth Ballistrea
- 4 Mark Manzari  
Murphy Webb
- 6 Christyn Garrow  
Bonnie Besner
- 9 Adele Rinchack  
Hannah Ward
- 10 Shelley Jackson  
Zoe Boothroyd
- 11 Annette Twitchell  
Blanche Volbrecht
- 12 Christopher Hacker
- 14 Ingrid Cash
- 15 Dora Mae Cole
- 18 Lily Manzari
- 19 Timmy Bliss  
Shirley Sherman
- 20 Tammy Conner  
Bob Costa
- 24 Brooke Ostrander
- 26 Joel "Joey" Rivera
- 28 Liam LeFever
- 29 Brenda Bennett
- 30 Sandra Phillips  
Sage Diaz
- 31 Brooke Twitchell



### Anniversaries-

- 8/5/1978 Rick & Peggy Cortright
- 8/5/1979 Gunner & Bonnie Kress
- 8/5/1989 Brian & Annette Twitchell
- 8/9/1985 Lonnie & Julie Hinkle
- 8/16/2008 Mark & Suzanne Manzari
- 8/18/1979 Ron & Nancy Woodard
- 8/26/2000 Brian & Karen Scott
- 8/26/1979 Dave & Linda Hull
- 8/29/2003 Jeff & Bec Haley

## August Service Schedule

### Sunday, August 4

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups  
10 a.m. – Rev. Cliff Ostrander

### Sunday, August 11

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups  
10 a.m. – "Breaking Barriers"  
Noon – Membership class at Pastor Sam & Penny's

### Sunday, August 18

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups  
10 a.m. – "Breaking through Hostility"  
Noon – Membership class at Pastor Sam & Penny's

### Sunday, August 25

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups  
10 a.m. – "Jesus Himself Baptizes"



## VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

**August 11-15, 6:00-8:30 p.m.**

Invite & bring children! Pray for salvations and recommitments! Pray for workers! Ask God to move.



Thrive is discipleship. It is one-on-one *Biblical mentoring using a handbook. The mentors are called faith coaches.*

**Faith coaching** is one of the most powerful ways to invest in a believer's life. It moves beyond group gatherings to develop one-on-one relationships.

Notice two steps in coaching:

1. **Mentoring.** Paul told Timothy to entrust the gospel "to reliable people." In other words, Paul was challenging Timothy to take what he had learned and invest it in others. Having mentored Timothy, Paul expected Timothy to mentor others.
2. **Multiplying.** The people Timothy taught would "also be qualified to teach others." Paul invested in Timothy, who would then invest in reliable people, and those reliable people would invest in others. Growth didn't die with Paul. He had a vision for multiplication that would continue far into the future.



**First, contact Penny Neno, 607.279.0921.** You will be connected to a coach (men with men/ women with women).



**Life Groups** is small group discipleship for the entire family of God.



## Beginning in September

Life Groups for Youth & Adults  
Course descriptions in foyer

**Beginning 9/8/24**

**Sunday mornings, 9:00 a.m.**

**Alan Kress**, Godly Choices, book of Ezekiel  
**Gabriella Kress**, Practical Christianity, book of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

**Pastor Sam**, Rebootd: Trauma Recovery

**Beginning 9/8/24**

**Sunday evenings, 6:45 p.m.**

**Brian & Annette Twitchell**,  
Experiencing God's Dream for Your Marriage.

**RSVP Annette, 607-745-5077**

**Beginning 9/10/24**

**Tuesday evenings, 6:30 p.m.**

**Steve Chandler**, Wisdom from Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes

## Steven Millahn Jesus is my Friend

My pathway to Christ began in Connecticut at St. James Church as a young child. I loved church and Sunday School with my cousins: Dave, Bill, Barb, and Carrie. I was an altar boy and attended Youth Group when I was in high school during the charismatic movement or "Jesus Revolution," from 1970-1976, when it went through St. James Church. Our youth group was on fire for the Lord. We did Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar for Youth Sunday. We asked the Holy Spirit to join us, and some spoke in tongues. We also had a "prayer group," at my high school. We prayed for our school and each other. I was saved in 1974 at a Youth Group retreat. I knew I needed Jesus in my life, and I wanted to serve people. After high school our youth group split up, some went away to college. I moved to Cannan, Connecticut, for a job at a nursing home in 1981.

I worked in Canaan, went to nursing school, and became an LPN in 1987. I then worked in a nursing home for 28 years. I married in 1987 and joined the Seventh Day Adventist church at my wife's request. In 1990, we had Sara, our daughter, and I now have 2 grandchildren, Ellie is 6, and Landon is 2. In 1990, I was also water baptized at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. We moved to Union Springs in 1992 and attended the Union Springs Seventh Day Adventist Church, but in all this time something was "missing" in our church life. We were active with church offices, but still, divorce hit in 2009, and I left the Seventh Day Adventist Church and went to Trinity United Church of Christ in Union Springs. Yet, there was still that one thing "missing," although I didn't know what it was.



Two years ago, my daughter asked me to move to Groton to be closer to her and her family. One day at the food bank in Groton, I glanced over and saw Groton AG Church. I was "drawn" to it, so I headed over and went in the downstairs foyer. I met Pastor Joe, Pastor Sam, and Steve Chandler. It felt like home. It has been almost two years now, and I am so

happy I came to Groton AG. It has changed my life! I was baptized again in 2023 at Groton Assembly.

Jesus is my friend. I recently completed Thrive with Steve Chandler. It was fantastic. I learned so much about Groton Assembly, and so many foundational teachings like prayer, tithing, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

One day God showed me a vision of many hurting people, and I understood that I needed to help them. I talked to Pastor Sam, so I am now in the AIMS program. I enjoy meeting weekly with people in the Cortland nursing homes. I love the work God has given me to do. I feel that the Lord is blessing me and my nursing home people. I am so glad I found Groton AG and that the Lord found me! God bless!



## Erвина Lavender

### God Has Given Me the Victory

*Erвина lives on the White Mountain Apache Reservation. Submitted by John Flood, U.S. Missionary to Native Americans (supported by Groton AG)*



"It's hard to overcome addiction. I had to get to know God. The storms of life have come, and I have been shaken, but God has given me victory." Erвина's life has been filled with hurt, heartache, loss, and struggles with drug and alcohol addiction. Her grandparents were pastors at East Fork Miracle Church on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and always warned, "You better be in church." This struck fear into Erвина's heart; she saw God as unloving and judgmental.

Both her parents were severe alcoholics, and domestic violence was common. By the time she was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, her parents separated. Her father remarried and moved on, so she saw little of him. Her mother would go on 1-2 day drinking binges, leaving Erвина and her siblings alone. There was always food in the house, but it was not a healthy situation. It did not go well when her mom tried to discipline her and the other children. Eventually, her mother also remarried.

Because of their drinking, Erвина lost her first home. They and the children had to live with other relatives. Erвина lived mostly at her grandmother's along with other cousins. She was angry with God because of the outcome. She began hearing inner voices stating her cousins were smarter and prettier than her. She felt she did not belong. Erвина began drinking when she was around 14. "Drinking helped ease my tensions and helped me forget my problems." When she was 15, she became friends with a drug dealer's daughter who gave her crystal meth for the first time. When she was 16-17,

she wanted to leave home. She dropped out of high school and began living with her first boyfriend. "I felt protected around him. He did not talk at me. He talked with me. I thought, 'If I give myself to him, he will love me and not leave me.'" Her mother wanted her to return home, but she refused. She had four children by her first boyfriend, but they were both drinking a lot. They

tried to work out their relationship, but he became physically abusive. The first time, he beat her so badly that she did not recognize herself in the mirror. She was pregnant and tried to return home, but her mother said, "No, you figure it out." Her boyfriend's upbringing was worse than hers. He was raised in a traditional home (worshipping the mountain spirits and engaging in Native spiritual rituals). Erвина turned to drinking and meth to cope with his verbal and physical abuse. They promised each other they would change but always fell back into the same habits. She lost her home, car, and job. Her boyfriend gained custody of their first three children, and she left pregnant with their fourth child. He told her she needed to go to a rehab. They had been together for 12 years. He moved on and started another family.

She entered rehab at the Rainbow Treatment Center at the Rez. Her mind was filled with thoughts like, "You will never amount to anything. You are no good. No one will want you and your kids." She became suicidal. She returned to her grandmother's house with her fourth child, a little girl. However, she feared dragging this daughter into the chaos of her lifestyle. She stayed at home raising her daughter for the next 3 years with the help of grandmother, sister, and mother. She ended up in another abusive relationship worse than the first that left physical scars all over her body. She ended that relationship, while trying to maintain her sobriety, she started working, and life was content again, but later she struggled and fell back into her addiction. "By 2020, I was going down. I lost my car and job. I lived under the threat of losing

my daughter. I was very depressed with thoughts of suicide. I stayed in my room and did not care for my daughter."

All this time, God was at work. When 17 and pregnant with her first child, her mother came, gave her a Bible, and encouraged her to read it and seek the Lord. Ervina said, "this was hard to receive. I was angry. Why are you telling me this now? But she was persistent in telling me about Jesus, and her words lingered...'God loves you and wants you back.'" While at her grandmother's, her old friend Shawn came by. They hung out together, and he began telling her about Jesus as they both struggled with addiction. She started watching sermons on YouTube, including Joyce Meyers, who spoke on abuse and how God had helped her. Ervina's father also came and encouraged her to talk to God, but she didn't want to listen.

One day after finishing her laundry at her neighbor's, she saw a man with a backpack. She tried to avoid him, but he came and asked if she knew the Lord and knew she was going to heaven. She answered, "Yes." He persisted, "How do you know you are going to heaven?" She replied, "Because I am a good person." He showed her that God's grace and love save us, not our good works. He led her in the sinner's prayer. She says, "I felt a heaviness released. I opened my eyes and felt peace. It was sunny but sprinkling lightly. It never does that here." The man told her, "God's favor is on you, Ervina," then he walked away. However, this was not the end of Ervina's struggles.

She relapsed again. She decided to kill herself but became physically unable to move. She told her mother and father. They helped her get into a rehab in Phoenix. "October 4, 2020, is my sober date." After completing the program, Ervina returned to the Rez. Sometimes she found it hard to get out of bed, but she realized she was under spiritual attack and needed to get back up.

She has now regained custody of all her children. Ervina is pursuing credentials to minister through the AG Native School of Ministry on the Rez. She is also leading a Faith Recovery class for those struggling with addiction. She says, "I can't stay down, I have to get back up and keep marching on. I have a mission to complete. I have to keep marching forward. I am clinging to God amid the storms. I am holding onto God. God is faithful, but the enemy attacks quietly. I have been walking this Christian walk for four years. The storms of life have come, and I have been shaken, but God has given me the victory."



**"The Spirit of Death/Suicide"**  
**Pastor John Flood, U. S. Missionary to Native Americans,** *Supported by GAG*  
 Ervina Lavender, White Mountain Apache, experienced the presence of a tangible entity repeatedly—the spirit of death. She alluded to it repeatedly when discussing a voice or voices encouraging her to commit suicide. Many experience this, and it is vital to recognize that such a voice does not originate from us. These are demons that whisper in our ears. This is a glimpse behind the spiritual curtain. After her grandmother's death, she describes an "entity that would enter my room. Its presence was paralyzing. I saw its form bend down over me. In the ugliest, creepiest voice I have ever heard, it said, 'Hello.' I cried out to Jesus, and it disappeared." It reappeared after she received a phone call from her aunt asking about her father's whereabouts. On this occasion, Ervina began crying out to God on behalf of her father, and God responded, "He is home." She thought this meant the Rez, but he was found dead on a

trail in mid-December. After her father's death in the last week of January, Ervina and her boyfriend, Shawn, moved into a new home. The entity reappeared. She told Shawn that she could feel "death" again and went to church to be prayed over. Someone else visited their home and stated that they could "feel something in the room." On February 1<sup>st</sup>, returning from work, Ervina discovered Shawn dead of an overdose. Ervina's daughter, Julia, is now hearing voices, as her mother has, encouraging her to take her own life. Not all who hear voices are schizophrenics. Doctors have labeled Julia a schizophrenic, and she is on heavy medications for this disorder. It is just as likely that she is under the same spiritual attack that her mother has often experienced. Please pray for Julia.

You can feel a great spirit of depression and darkness when you enter this Rez. Those living there talk about it and know it needs to be broken. You can also see its effects across the Rez and sense a spirit of hopelessness, which is closely associated with the suicide spirit.




### **Jan and Eric Muzart Budapest, Hungary**

*Supported by Groton AG*

In June we led another seminar for the Middle East Technical University Bible Club in Northern Cyprus (east of Greece, west of Lebanon and Syria). We also met with the leaders to help them begin strategic planning for the next year. One thing we discussed is how to be more strategic in assimilating the METU students who are already Christians into their fellowship. Pray for wisdom and courage. The mosque that was being built just outside the campus gate is now completed. We could hear the call to prayer as we gathered in a student apartment off-campus.

### **Counseling Coaches**

This spring we finished more coaching courses with the American Association of Christian Counselors [Editor: This is the same program that Pastor Sam and Penny are studying]. These skills come in handy in many conversations, such as when we meet our Hungarian friends, Boti and Dora Rohodi. Praise God they are expecting their first child! Also they have been asked by the national Pentecostal movement to plant a church for university students in Budapest. The Rohodi's plan to attend Connect, the Students for Christ, European leadership training week in Germany later this month. We will be there, too—leading workshops on pioneering. Pray that we will all be attentive to God's voice.

### **Ukraine**

International Christian Assembly regularly assists a small church in a war-devastated village. In May, Eric joined ICA for an outreach that included art therapy for women. ICA bought the art supplies for the outreach. The Ukrainian women went out and painted flowers in the village, and in the center of each flower is a bullet hole.

### **Mike and Tina Hook, Scotland**

*Supported by Groton AG*



We enjoyed hosting Mike and Tina for a time of fellowship and missionary tales!

Plan now to attend the next gathering! Bring a dish-to-pass and enjoy hearing from our missionaries.



## Talk About Jesus to Me: Revival in Iran

news.ag.org

Centuries before Christ, the Persian Empire ruled more than 40 percent of the known world. Persian kings like Xerxes and Darius played integral roles in Jewish history — particularly Cyrus, who contributed to the rebuilding of the temple and the return of the Jewish remnant from captivity. What was once Persia is now modern Iran.

Christian missionary work in Iran started in the early 1800s with missionary Henry Martyn. Dedicated Presbyterian missionaries followed in the 1900s, which resulted in a very small group of born-again believers from Islam.

Iran's Pentecostal movement was initiated by Armenian and Assyrian minority groups. In a remarkable act of sacrifice, the tiny group gave up worship in their own languages and held their services in Farsi, thereby reaching out to the Muslim majority community. But by 1970, when veteran AGWM missionaries Jim and Eloise Neely arrived, it is estimated that less than 1,000 Christian believers of Muslim background existed in Iran. Response to the gospel was minimal. They persevered through the Islamic revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini's takeover in February 1979. That summer, when they left for furlough after their second term, Jim and Eloise and their children were the last AG missionary family to leave the rapidly changing country. The Neelys joyfully report that today God is doing remarkable things among Iranians, both in Iran and worldwide.

By 2007, the number of Muslim-background believers in Iran had risen to 100,000. Today, estimates place the number somewhere between 350,000 and 600,000. Jim and



Eloise recently purchased over 2,000 New Testaments for distribution. "Iranians are open to receiving Scripture," Eloise says. "Scripture really speaks to them. One of the greatest ways to bring them to Christ is giving them the Bible in their own language, as they are a poetic people and value artistic language highly. The Holy Spirit uses it to stir them deeply."

"The Bible is powerful," Jim agrees. "Though Islam claims the Old Testament belongs to the Jews, the New Testament to the Christians, and the Koran to Muslims, we believe that if Muslims get into the Bible — God's Word — it will draw people to Christ."

Despite martyrdoms and persecution, hundreds of thousands of Iranian Christians still meet in secret. Iran boasts the fastest growing Christian population of the Muslim world — estimated to be growing by nearly 20 percent each year, despite a government that stands in vehement opposition to Jesus Christ.

Even within Iran's Islamic military, the Neelys are aware of at least one Iranian Muslim who, after being drafted, encountered a fellow soldier who had become a believer. His restless soul found rest in the presence of the Christian man, and soon he accepted Christ for himself. "The Holy Spirit is drawing Iranians to himself in unprecedented numbers," AGWM Communications Director Andy Raatz says. "When our workers begin the conversation, countless Iranian hearts are immediately ready to respond and receive the message of Jesus' grace. Reflecting on history reminds us that borders are not truly closed to the gospel when the Holy Spirit is at work."

Raatz shares a story from a Christian Iranian man serving his home country with an AGWM team. An elderly Iranian gentleman he met while traveling appealed urgently to him, "I really want to know Jesus. I have seen miracles, but I do not know God. I want to know Him. Talk about Jesus to me."



## Half-Sight, Full Faith: Trusting God through Life's Challenges

### Jodi Detrick

*Jodi Detrick, an ordained AG minister, shares about her ongoing experience with her loss of sight and how such challenging times help Christians come to more fully understand "walking by faith."*



[news.ag.org](https://news.ag.org)

Dabbing a tissue at my watering left eye, I wondered what was going on.

May 11, 2021, had been a lovely day in Washington state, giving me a chance to spend some time outdoors. When the search for an errant eyelash or other visible debris yielded nothing, I concluded my eye irritation was simply the result of spring allergies. Applying eyedrops before bed that evening, I hoped sleep would bring relief. However, I spent the night tossing and turning in increasing discomfort.

By morning, my eye was red and inflamed. I quickly made an appointment with my optometrist, who diagnosed a corneal abrasion. The doctor explained that dry-eye syndrome may cause the cornea and lid to stick together during sleep. This can result in a painful tear upon opening the eye.

The doctor put a contact bandage in my eye to protect it and prescribed some antibiotic drops. I went on my way thinking the problem would soon resolve. When my local pharmacy didn't carry the prescribed drops, it was frustrating, but not overly concerning. Neither the pharmacist nor I could reach the doctor to ask about a substitution. However, the pharmacist ordered the medication and assured me it would be ready the next day. I told myself I could manage one more day.

I picked up the antibiotic eye drops the following day and used them as prescribed, but the searing pain continued. That night, I held my head in my hands and rocked back and forth in increasing anguish, praying for daylight. The next day, I returned to my optometrist. He took one look at my eye and sent me to an ocular specialist in Seattle. By that time, a virulent infection threatened not only the loss of my vision, but also the eye itself. Without the benefit of antibiotic drops, the contact bandage covering the abrasion had acted as a petri dish, allowing bacteria to multiply and the infection to blow up.

The agony was indescribable. And, I realized with growing alarm, I was completely blind in that eye. Thus began the long, painful journey that continues to this day. It has included a seemingly endless series of appointments, scans, tests, and medications. I have endured everything from injections in my eyeball to eye drops that had to be administered hourly around the clock. I have had three surgeries, including a cornea transplant. The newly colored blue eye on my left side is a striking contrast to the original brown on my right. At this point, I have some peripheral vision in my left eye, but everything in the center is gone. As I write this, I'm facing a fourth surgery that might restore some centric vision. Unless God miraculously heals me, however, it's unlikely I will fully regain my vision. Of course, I believe He can and does heal. Like the man in [Luke 18](#), my prayer has been, "Lord, I want to see" (verse 41).

Meanwhile, I've been learning how to maneuver life with half-sight. Don't get me wrong. Half-sight is better than no sight! In fact, I believe we all stumble through life with half-sight at times. As Paul told the Corinthians, we don't have perfect clarity

on everything this side of heaven. *The Message* puts it this way: “We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Everyone experiences life’s gut punches. It may be a troubling diagnosis, a baffling hurt or loss, a loved one’s addiction, or a friend’s betrayal. During such times especially, we can feel like we’re in a fog, groping our way toward a seemingly too-distant hope.

But it is also during such seasons that the biblical concept of walking by faith steps off the page and into the flesh and blood of our real-world experiences. These half-sight times are when we experience more fully what it means to trust an unseen, compassionate God with our most tender wounds.

Somehow, I think this trusting in the dark thing might be part of what Peter was referring to in 1 Peter 1:8: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”

We have not yet seen the Lord. And we don’t always understand all the hurtful stuff life throws at us. But we love and trust Jesus — which leads, inevitably, to joy and a new way of seeing. Somewhere in the mists of an unseen future, full sight is waiting for those who believe.

## NEW LIFE GROUPS

NEW GROUPS FORMING SEPTEMBER 8  
Sundays & Tuesdays



## WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL & RADICAL GENDER IDEOLOGY

Are your children being exposed to inappropriate materials on sexuality and gender?

Do parents have the option to opt their kids out of such curriculum?

Does the school have a secret policy to “transition” confused students without the knowledge or consent of their parents?

Government officials are using our education system as a platform to introduce lies to children, including lies about the fundamental nature of their biology. This push to enforce radical gender ideology is harming children, destroying families, tearing away at the truth and dignity of human nature, gender differences, marriage, and the family.

Alliance Defending Freedom is committed to defending the right of parents to raise their children, and we want to equip you with the tools and resources you need to protect your child from the dangers of gender ideology.



Download FREE  
BOOKLET from Alliance  
Defending Freedom:

<http://adflegal.org/resources>

3 WAYS TO NAVIGATE  
DESTRUCTIVE GENDER IDEOLOGY IN  
SCHOOLS.