

GROTON ASSEMBLY OF GOD

APRIL 2025 NEWSLETTER

PASTOR'S PEN

Never Heard That Before...

"It's a very painful death," my doctor told me and Penny yesterday during my annual appointment. He is the surgeon God used to save my life in 2018 from an aggressive form of prostate cancer.

Usually, the doctor looks at my records and says, "You're a very lucky man." In God's mercy and by His guidance, doctors had discovered the cancer early, before it had spread. Seven years later, having had no radiation, no chemo, no hormone treatments, I'm enjoying a pretty normal life.

But yesterday my doctor made that statement, which he'd never made before. He's retiring, so his words will stick with me a long time. They make me very thankful, but also cause me to pause and ask, "Why me?"

Since answering God's call to ministry, I've done many funerals and celebrations of life. The majority of people I've helped through their time of grief lost their loved ones to cancer.

Again, I ask, "Why me?"

I know that my work is no more special than anyone else's. I'm certainly no more righteous or holy than other people. In fact, I've known some very kind and gentle people who loved the Lord but who have died quite young.

I also know that God is sovereign, His ways are mysterious, and He is good. He is trustworthy, wise, all-knowing. So despite wondering, I must leave it in His hands, and try to be faithful to Him and His people, to do the most with the time I have left.

And I wish to continue to be thankful. Paul tells us to "give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20, MEV). By God's grace, I will remember to thank Him in all circumstances, remembering not only that He has saved me eternally, but also that He has spared me much pain here now.

Don't be afraid to remind me when things get difficult to be thankful. And permit me to do the same for you.



"It is Finished!"

During the service on Easter morning, in addition to worshiping God, we will enter into the lives of various people to see in a drama what difference Jesus' words, "It is finished," makes to them.

Easter Refreshments

After Sunrise Service, 8:45-9:45 a.m., we will be fellowshiping and sharing refreshments in the Fellowship Hall.

He Arose!

At 7 a.m. we will be gathering at Stonehedges Golf Course for our annual Sunrise Service. Join us for some singing and a brief devotional.

**COMING: SUNDAY, JUNE 8
HOME MISSIONS**

Spring Missions Convention

Our guest speaker, Pastor Jerad Stevens, who is working with Hope Foundation of Binghamton, NY, where they are rebuilding broken lives.

April Service Schedule

Sunday, April 6

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

10 a.m. – “God’s Blessing”

Sunday, April 13 (Palm Sunday)

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

10 a.m. – “Chosen”

Sunday, April 20 (Easter)

7 a.m. – 7:30 a.m. – Sunrise Service at Stonehedges Golf Course

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. – Breakfast

10 a.m. – Easter Drama: “It is Finished!”

Sunday, April 27 (New Sermon Series begins: Money: Friend or Foe?)

9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. – Life Groups

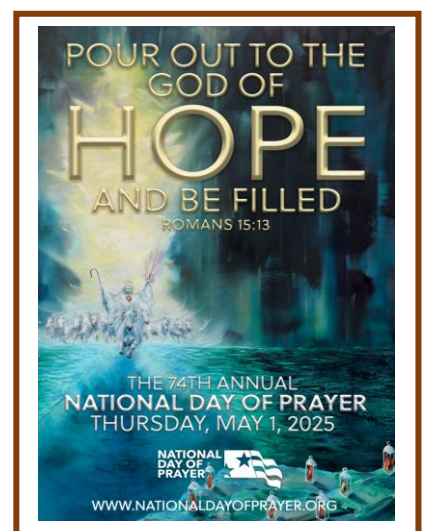
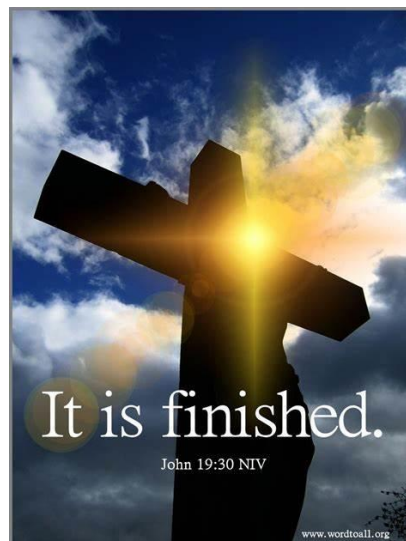
10 a.m. – “Mammon”

April Birthdays

- 1 Diane Costa
- 2 Jackie Baxendell
- 3 Lonnie Hinkle
- 10 Bec Groves-Haley
- 14 Edison Scott
- 15 Linda Competillo
- 17 Della Lovelace, Deborah Reeves, Eric Peck
- 20 Olivia Clark
- 27 Trude Morse, Serina Craig
- 28 Kylie LeFever
- 29 Paul Bateman
- 30 Melissa Besler, Raybert Patterson, and Mary Flach

April Anniversaries

- | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| 4/2/1966 | Earl & Diana Buckingham |
| 4/14/1984 | Mark & Jackie Baxendell |
| 4/18/1999 | Paul & Trude Morse |
| 4/25/1981 | Paul & Pam Bateman |
| 4/30/1983 | Clif & Debbie Todd |





Who? Youth Fine Arts Talent Show

When? Friday, April 25, 6:30 p.m.

Where? Sanctuary, Groton AG

Donations will be accepted.

What more can you do?

Don't come alone. Bring your neighbors, friends, and family!

FLPC Fund-raiser

Finger Lakes Pregnancy Care

The deadline for turning in a baby bottle was March 31. If you filled a baby bottle with change, please bring it to church and give it to Laurie Wright. She will take the money to the pregnancy center in Cortland. If you want to write a check, please make it payable to FLPC. Offerings for this fund-raiser are not run through our church. Thank you.

Community OUTREACH



Cookies to our Neighbors

**The more cookies
we bake,
the more homes
we reach!**

Choose one (or more):

Bake cookies and bring to church by April 11th. *(Please homemade cookies only.)*

Bag cookies, Saturday, April 12.

Deliver cookies with invitation, Sun., April 13.

For More Information/Contact:

Sara Ostrander (607) 592-1390

We need bakers, baggers, & deliverers.

We need you.

Groton AG Board Briefs:

At the Annual Business Meeting (ABM), it was mentioned that we want to include a brief explanation of what was discussed at the monthly board meetings. Here is a summary for January, February, and March:

January: The meeting was opened in prayer, and a devotional was shared. A motion was made to receive the minutes from the previous month's meeting. A financial report was given. Pastoral care reports were given to P. Sam. Staff job description updates were discussed. Plans for the ABM were discussed, jobs were assigned (registration and tellers for the voting), and information about what would be discussed under New Business was covered. The board discussed and approved using ~\$20K from a CD that was coming due to be put toward the renovation project in the fellowship hall. A benevolence policy was discussed. P. Sam shared his vision for 2025, including his sermon schedule and his desire to re-introduce evangelists this year.

February: The meeting was opened in prayer and a devotional was shared. A motion was made to receive the minutes from the previous month's meeting. A financial report was given. Pastoral care reports were given to P. Sam. There was a debriefing of the ABM, including a brief discussion about changing the date for this meeting. Meeting quorum has not been an issue, so we will leave the meeting date the third Sunday of January. The benevolence policy update discussed last month was approved. The senior pastor evaluation was done, and each person had an opportunity to share. The schedule for the board members to do the offering counting and who would present the devotional and

provide snack each month was assigned. Alan Kress shared about establishing a church softball team, and the registration fee of \$350 was approved, providing the church can field a team. Information was shared about a general treasurer's meeting that would be held in March, and a motion was made to cover the \$25 registration fee for anyone who wanted to attend.

March: The meeting was opened in prayer and a devotional was shared. A motion was made to receive the minutes from the previous month's meeting. A financial report was given. Pastoral care reports were given to P. Sam. Information was shared about the general treasurer's meeting that was held. The fellowship hall renovation schedule was discussed. The orange peel, painting, and floors are tentatively scheduled to be completed at the end of March through the middle of April with the goal of completing the work before Easter. There was a debriefing of the evangelistic services with Joe Chamberlin. A resolution was discussed to close our safe deposit box and put the contents into the safe that was purchased for that purpose. There was a lengthy discussion about buying or leasing a copier for the church with a final decision to lease. P. Sam shared the plan for the Easter drama and asked the board to be in prayer for it. There was a brief discussion about installing a more secure offering box, which will be done soon.

NOTE: New members were approved, and pastoral care assignments were discussed. If you were reassigned to a different person, you would have received a letter in March. If you did not receive a letter, your pastoral care person remains the same. If you have a question about who is responsible for your pastoral care, please speak with Laurie Wright, Church Secretary.

Debbie Todd God With Us 40 Years

Back in 1973, I received Jesus as my Savior for the first time at Snyder Hill Baptist church. This was during my first marriage. Floyd and Fran Sears [Editor's note: Fran and Floyd are Mike Sears' parents] influenced my life at that time.

The church had a bus that came and picked you up, so I went and took the kids. I was water baptized in a pond there. Unfortunately, the church collapsed, and my marriage fell apart.

When I met my husband Clif Todd at Smith Corona, we were both backslidden. We both still believed in God, but we weren't serving Him. We married in 1980 at the Community Church in Groton, and we wanted to give our lives back to the Lord.

We decided to get in church with the kids and started attending Groton Assembly of God. Pastor Bob Richardson was the pastor then, and we became members. The minute I walked into the church I felt the love of God. Clif came from a Pentecostal background, and I didn't know what to expect when I chose to attend there. That's when I really got saved.

I was so in love with Jesus. Through the years, I have served as a Sunday School teacher for 4 & 5 year olds; as an usher; as a nursery worker and as a Missionette's leader with Laurie Wright. Today, I continue to serve in the nursery with my granddaughter, Caylin Todd.



In between this time, I received the Baptism in the Spirit at a revival service with evangelist Joe Chamberlain. We have been attending Groton Assembly of God for 40 years. Praise God we are still at Groton AG under Pastor Sam. We love our Lord. We have gone through good and bad times, and the church family has been there for us. And we have experienced God with us.

Adopt-a-Missionary Program

Laurie Wright, Missions Secretary
If you have participated in this prayer ministry in the past, you should have already received an email or hard copy with information about committing for another year. If you would like to pray for a missionary or missions program that we support, please speak to Laurie Wright. We support over thirty missionaries who serve here in the U.S. and around the world, as well as a variety of ministries (addiction recovery, children's programs, and evangelistic outreach to those incarcerated). Our missionaries and their families need prayer coverage. No one is too young or too old to be involved.

FLPC Fund-raising Banquet

This year's banquet will be held at Greek Peak Resort on Saturday, May 3, with keynote speaker, Dr. Anthony Levatino. As a former abortionist, he will share his unique perspective about why a physician who has been trained to give life would take it away. The story of his journey from performing abortions to seeing the value of every life has educated and motivated audiences worldwide. If you are interested in attending, please speak to Laurie Wright, who is serving as a table host and can assist you in registering for this event.

AG U.S. MISSIONS

Into the Swamp, Pastor Dave and Tammy Houck's Quest to Light Florida's Darkest Places



Pastor Dave has parked the van outside Rosie's home—a decaying trailer-turned meth lab. Rosie's mother is inside, passed out from another weekend of partying. She doesn't even make an appearance today as two of her children, Rosie*, three years old, and James*, 7 years old, run outside and scramble on board. Some Sundays she staggers to the door to see them off in the same disheveled, partially dressed condition the previous night's party left her in.

Rosie clutches her necklace protectively. "Mine," she fiercely tells Pastor Dave Houck. "Mama gave it." Pastor Dave tells Rosie that he won't take her necklace. Reassured, she lets him look at the sinister pendant around her neck. It is ugly—a pentagram etched with ominous, satanic symbols. "My dollies talk to me at night, so Mommy gave me this necklace to protect me," Rosie mutters. "She sticks needles in my dolls so they'll stop." James, who hurried back to the van after being sent to search for his ragged shoes, hitches up the backward swim trunks that serve as pants. "Yeah," he jabbars, "Rosie's Barbies talk at night, so Mommy threw them in the fire."

Rose and James don't faze Pastor Dave. He lives in their Florida community—called the Forest—with his wife, Tammy, and 10 children (four biological, six adopted). He

and Tammy deal with the horrors of drug abuse, witchcraft, poverty, sexual dysfunction, domestic violence, and racism in ways few others could bear.

The Forest is hidden deep in the swampy thick of Ocala National Forest, about an hour from

Daytona Beach. It is a strange, secluded place that even people living just outside Ocala often don't know exists. Legend has it the community was first discovered around the time when President Theodore Roosevelt established Ocala National Forest in 1908. As federal foresters moved through the area, they came upon an isolated, reclusive cluster of people who were outraged at having been found. The conflict escalated, and the National Guard became involved. But the furious, heavily armed Forest people held the outsiders at

bay on two separate occasions. The government finally agreed to let the Forest people remain as residents of the national park. The land itself—2,000 square miles—is beautiful and renowned for excellent hunting and fishing. Over 3,000 black bears roam the woods. Close by is the

famous Silver Springs State Park, where films, including the original *Tarzan* movies and *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, were filmed.

But many of the 45,000-plus residents of the Forest live in poverty and squalor. Superstitions run deep and education levels are low—in many cases only to elementary or middle school. Many do not have birth certificates or Social Security cards. Many Forest people live in decrepit mobile homes, and few have jobs, opting instead to make money by collecting scrap material or by bartering, trading, or hunting. Many homes

"Around here we don't spend our Sunday mornings getting fixed up pretty, sitting in service, then going home," says Donna Rondo, a longtime friend of Pastor Dave's and a member of the congregation. "This is a place where our hands get real dirty."

do not have electricity. Meth grips the Forest with an iron fist.

Pastor Dave and Tammy and their ministry, the Help Agency, are the only social group serving the Forest. Other agencies ask Pastor Dave to accompany them on their business in the swamp. When he was 8 years old, Dave's family moved into an old, unheated mobile home in the Forest after his father experienced a devastating work injury and subsequent job loss. Food was scarce, and Dave remembers wearing shoes cobbled together with duct tape and glue. He swore to himself that once he escaped the Forest he would never return. Years later, living in California and far from God, Dave was unable to deny that God was calling him back to Himself and back to the Forest. Dave answered both calls.

In 1993 Dave and Tammy returned as missionaries with the Assemblies of God U.S. Missions to found the Help Agency. Since then, their work has exploded, growing to include Camp SoZo, a 72-acre camp located by a lake; a food bank that serves 40,000 meals per month to 7,000 people; a restaurant and culinary school called the Filling Station; mentoring centers; and a church of around 150 people that meets in a rented VFW hall. A staff of about 18 runs the Help Agency. Like Pastor Dave, many of them have personal histories that render them uniquely qualified to work in such a challenging environment.

Living in the Forest, Pastor Dave and his team can't afford to tiptoe around issues or ignore the harshest realities of life. Though Pastor Dave is daunting in size, he is always armed, not only for his security but also for his family, team, and congregation. "Meth is everywhere here," he explains. "And when these guys have been using meth they have superhuman strength. You can't overpower them." One night, just outside the entrance of Camp SoZo, Pastor Dave happened upon a man beating his young daughter to the point of killing here. When

the man refused to respond to Pastor Dave's intervention, Pastor Dave pulled his gun. "Man, you're rough," complained the child beater. Pastor Dave helped the young girl to his car to get away. "No," he replied. "I'm Pastor Dave."

Tackling issues of domestic and sexual abuse and pedophilia are routine occurrences for the Houcks. Many underage Forest girls—some as young as 11—are pregnant. The fathers are often in their 20s. "The parents of these poor girls just sit back and do nothing," Pastor Dave explains. "They say these men will make good fathers one day if allowed to lie low until the threat of jail blows over." Attempts at creating stronger bonds between fathers and their children are filled with obstacles. The church's first attempt at a Father/Daughter banquet ended abruptly after the fathers used the gathering as an opportunity to discuss pornography in detail in front of their teenage daughters. Pastor Dave and Tammy work hard to instill in girls and young women the value they have in Christ.

The Houcks use a mobile dental care bus and plan to use a mobile pregnancy care bus in their ministry. They also want to open a pregnancy care center in the Forest. In that area, they say, pregnancy care is a form of disaster relief. "If we can help a mother to understand her value, eventually her baby will grow up to understand his or her value," Pastor Dave says, "Our goal is to let pregnancy care and education create generations of believers, not generations of atheists." The Help Agency's ministries—particularly its mentoring centers—exist to provide education that will equip the Forest children to break out of the poverty mindset, get out of the Forest for further education, and later return to help other Forest residents. The Help Agency partners with local beauty shops, churches, and other sponsors to provide haircuts, hygiene items, clothes, backpacks, and school supplies to hundreds of kids with annual

back-to-school outreaches. Besides meeting immediate physical needs, the Help Agency teaches older children life skills for independence and to eventually handle money and business matters correctly. Each outreach exists to provide relief and build a bridge to salvation and a better way of life.

No matter how sordid the behaviors may be, he and Tammy are dedicated to finding the explanations and dealing with them at their sources. "Cutting is a big problem in teenagers here," Dave says. "I've had calls in the dead of night from others or grandmothers to tell me their kids are slicing up their arms. When I get to the homes, I find them sitting there, dragging on meth pipes, just watching while their kid bleeds out on the floor." Kellie* was once a cutter. Her scars go deep, both emotionally and physically. But today, sitting at dinner with Pastor Dave and Tammy, she giggles and crinkles up her face when Pastor Dave reminds her that she is beautiful and valuable to God. "I used to be an atheist," she says. "But now I believe in God, even though that means I lost all my old friends." Finding Christ was a process for Kellie, just as it was for a man named Hank*.

In a profane tirade, Hank confronted Dave, screaming, "I don't believe in your God or your church!" "That's fine!" Pastor Dave snapped back. "I haven't invited you to my church yet!" Hank was startled into silence. Soon, he started showing up at church. For weeks he marched in, sat sullenly on the back row for 10 minutes, and then stomped out. One day, he didn't stomp out. In the middle of the service, Hank's hand shot into the air. "Hank? What are you doing?" Pastor Dave demanded. "Are you getting saved? That means you must believe in God!" "I do," Hank rasped out. And just like that, Hank—a confessed murderer of five men—was redeemed. "We joke that we have over 200 combined years of prison time in our church," Pastor Dave says.

"People here are getting saved who have never been into a church in their lives. Several have been in prison for many years."

Every Sunday, Pastor Dave wakes up early, meets at the church to pray with his team, stops by a gas station (run by a Hindu family to whom he also ministers), buys dozens of donuts, and makes rounds through the Forest in his church van. He pounds on doors of numerous doors until residents, passed out from days of partying, respond. Then he waits while they get semi-dressed and crawl into the van. He provides them with donuts and continues his way, filling the van again and again with reluctant church goers. Others, many of them children, are waiting expectantly for Pastor Dave to arrive.

"Around here we don't spend our Sunday mornings getting fixed up pretty, sitting in service, then going home," says Donna Rondo, a longtime friend of Pastor Dave's and a member of the congregation. "This is a place where our hands get real dirty. Dave helps people no matter what they look like. This is rewarding work."

"Ours is a missions church," he continues. "We only do two things with our money: pay our bills and give to community and missions outreaches. Jesus is becoming famous for loving the unlovable in the Forest."

**names have been changed. Salt Life Church of Silver Springs, Florida, is responsible for planting David and Tammy Houck's church. Reprinted from ag.org*

**COMING: Sunday, June 8
HOME MISSIONS SPEAKER**

Spring Missions Convention Our guest speaker, Pastor Jerad Stevens, who works with Hope Foundation of Binghamton, NY, where they are rebuilding broken lives.