

Announcement Letter March 2011

Dear Brethren:

This letter provides an opportunity for your devoted servants to greet you each month and to provide material which hopefully will encourage and inspire you in your continual efforts to grow in Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Soon-coming King. So with this new issue we do indeed greet you, and we do indeed express our sincere love and most high regard for you, because you are the children whom God has singled out for special attention at this very crucial time in history. We pray that you are finding strength to fight forward spiritually—even in spite of periodic setbacks—and that God's Truth will continue to be the shining beacon providing clear direction and comforting hope.

It was, in fact, the month of March in which Mr. Raymond Cole first addressed this remnant body with a church-wide mailing. That was March of 1975, exactly thirty-six years ago. How very much has changed over all of those years. While a few of the original recipients of that first letter are still on the mailing list today, many have either died or departed, and so our membership now certainly looks very different. Yet God has preserved this little fellowship and allowed us to thrive in spite of volatile changes, while many hundreds of other groups which likewise formed out of our parent affiliation have long since expired. Yes, we have been subjected to many changing factors, but what has never changed is our undying commitment to a singular body of belief. Mr. Raymond Cole defended that revealed doctrine unerringly for the first twenty-five years, and your servants today continue that very same defense of Truth without compromise. *In that* there has been absolute continuity, and our writing and preaching since 1975 confirms that fact.

But much has changed since 1975, both within and without the church. Over that time, the proportion of our total fellowship concentrated within Oregon has declined, and increasingly our membership has become more widely dispersed, not only around North America, but around the world. Great advances in modern technology—especially the Internet—have played a major role in encouraging that change in demographics, since more of God's scattered sheep have been able to find this little remnant by means of our electronic presence.

The advent of e-mail and other forms of "instant" paperless communication have also increasingly affected the way we interface with many of those scattered brethren. Years ago, an expensive, long-distance phone call was virtually the only means by which to communicate with Mr. Cole other than by written letter ("snail mail"), and visa versa. Now there are so

many new ways to make contact between ministry, laity, and church staff, it is amazing. Likewise, computer technology has now made it easy for individuals and small groups to produce very professional-looking newsletters—products formerly available only through professional print shops. The increasing smorgasbord of new options available—especially within the last decade—has forced the church to make continuous decisions about which new tools we will use, and which ones we will choose not to use. As those options continue to expand and change, and as God's people continue to change their own personal habits in using those tools, we seem always to be assessing how best to respond to our changing environment and to continue providing effective support for our increasingly far-flung and technology-savvy membership.

In many ways, we have kept pace with the times and "embraced" technology. In other ways, we have intentionally resisted new advances. What are some examples of each type of decision?

This very *Announcement Letter* has changed very little over the years. In spite of new software tools which would allow us to transform it into a more "modern" newsletter (with text columns, images, etc.), we have preserved the simple "old-fashioned" format of a personal letter, very similar to that which Mr. Cole used at the very beginning. While there could always be future developments which might make us consider a change, to date we have felt that the current format works just as well as it did in 1975. And, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

But one of the new innovations we have embraced is offering this *old-fashioned letter* in the form of an electronic document for those who have the capability and prefer to receive it immediately, rather than wait for it to arrive in the mail. Because of unreliable and often very delayed mailing times—especially with international deliveries—this is an example of new technology which truly enhances our level of service to God's people.

Obviously, changes in recording technology over time have greatly affected the means by which we offer recorded sermons to our scattered members worldwide. When Church of God, The Eternal assembled in Eugene for the very first Sabbath service in 1975, there was no thought by Mr. Cole at that time about recording the live sermons (even though he did begin thereafter to make special studio recordings to mail out to others). In fact, the only reason we have that very first message (and many of the subsequent messages) in our recording archive at all today is thanks to a little widow lady who sat in that first service and recorded Mr. Cole's message with a hand-held cassette unit in her lap from her usual seat in the second row. How times have changed! Now, not only are we recording every new sermon given in Eugene with advanced audio equipment, we are also capturing digital video and making those video messages available on our Internet website for anyone in the whole world to view.

Another change being thrust upon us all is a topic which is sensitive to some of you. We have addressed the issue of cassette tapes vs. MP3 CDs with you many times before, so we will only mention it briefly here. Cassettes are now considered *two generations* behind the current standard for recording and playback equipment. That is the same difference as was the old gramophone of the 1920s to the 8 Track tape of the 1970s. Today, *even CDs are quickly becoming dinosaurs* (replaced already by more reliable and affordable solid state players which have no moving parts). It is not only that the church would prefer to reduce the significant expense associated with offering cassettes, but that very soon we may find it *impossible* to continue providing them to you, even if we wanted to do so. Why? It is getting very difficult to find any repair company who, 1) has the expertise, and 2) the willingness to repair our highspeed cassette duplicators. Without technicians to maintain them, it will become physically impossible for us to keep them active. No one is training to do that work, because there is no real market for cassettes anymore. (After our local long-term technician died recently, we have had a terrible time finding anyone who is willing to fix and maintain our cassette duplicators. We have our two primary machines with a man in New Jersey right now. Think about it: it took us *weeks* to locate anyone who was *willing* to take the work, and then we had to pay to ship those heavy units all the way across the country!) Thankfully, more than 80 percent of our members have made the conversion to CDs. As much as we hate to force the rest of you to give up your beloved cassettes, just be aware that the day is soon coming when you may not be able to receive our sermons if you do not make this change. It is another example of changes this church has faced which are not of our making, but one which must be faced by all of us.

What is another example of communication changes over time? Years ago, personal announcements (deaths, births, marriages, prayer requests, etc.) were first communicated by the ministry to the local Eugene congregation in the weekly Sabbath service. Thereafter, those major announcements were "officially" included in the next issue of the monthly *Announcement Letter* for the entire church. For a long time, the process for receiving and making announcements was informal and haphazard. Mr. Raymond Cole would often carry with him a handful of different paper scraps collected over the previous week to be read before the congregation at the next Sabbath meeting. Sometime around 1995, Mr. Cole began to formalize that process to make it more manageable, and a secretary in the church office was assigned to collect new announcements and type them into one single sheet every Friday called the *Sabbath Announcements*. It was still just a simple sheet designed to organize the minister's notes for him for the announcement portion of the weekly service.

But a number of years ago—given 1) the advent of personal computers, 2) the resulting increase in instant communications between members by e-mail, etc., 3) the increase in the number of our members meeting in designated groups *outside of* Oregon, and 4) the changing expectation of getting news more rapidly than once a

month—this began to change. Outlying members began to hear unofficially more often about announcements *just reported* in Eugene. Lead men of our growing fellowships in other areas began to ask if they could be added to a distribution list, so they could likewise relay these announcements each week to their groups. So we set up a small e-mail distribution list of lead men and began sending those announcements to them on Friday afternoons. Then members who are geographically isolated and not able to meet with others each week began to find out that others were getting announcements that they too would like to receive more frequently than just once a month. So slowly we began to add new e-mail addresses to that list, one at a time.

Because we do not intend to turn our *monthly Announcement Letter* into a *weekly* issue, we have tried to prevent this from morphing into a time-consuming and costly function. At the same time, we have wanted to accommodate our beloved brethren who have told us that it makes them feel "more connected" if they can be included in some of those more frequent communications. This is a classic example of the way technology has affected our communications over time and driven us to make certain changes.

By the way, we are still grappling with finding a happy medium concerning the use of these *Sabbath Announcements*. It is still—first and foremost—a tool for the Eugene congregation, not for the entire church, because it includes many announcements relevant to local brethren only, like choir practices, dates for potluck meals, etc. But to the extent that communicating certain information (like prayer requests) to other lead men through this document is beneficial also, we will continue to send that to them by e-mail on Fridays. We will also keep those of you with individual e-mail addresses on that list, *if you are ones who do not have a local group to meet with each Sabbath*. However, if you *do* have a local group with which to meet, you should be able to wait and receive those announcements from your lead man during the Sabbath service.

This leads us to another issue which is being driven by new technology. Today, social networks using the Internet and cell phones have become "the way" by which many choose to communicate. Even if you do not know what *Facebook* and *Twitter* are all about, it is certain that many of your family members do. These applications providing "instant updates" to friends and associates are now all the rage. We have commented on the pitfalls of these new "time devourers" in times past, but it is important to comment on it here in the context of *the church*, and our choices in providing services to our members. Church of God, The Eternal does not have a *Facebook* page or a *Twitter* feed, and we do not intend to offer them. That is because they are not needed, and likewise because we do not want to encourage our members to run over the cliff like lemmings with everyone else in this world who are being seduced to waste their time. Technology is not evil if used in a proper way.

But who really *needs* to be able to post photographs taken five minutes ago immediately on the Internet to the whole world? Who really needs to read a "tweet" real-time about what you are now eating for breakfast? The whole idea of making your daily life a "travel blog"—sharing moment-by-moment updates of every thought and action, and likewise wasting your time reading a dozen other people's *inane and unending updates*—is truly ridiculous. It is one more example of technology being used as an addictive drug to waste your time and turn your mind to mush.

The problem is, it is likely that some of you already may have become so used to having "instant updates" on everything that you may have begun to treat this as a necessity. But it is not. And the church surely does not want to encourage that false notion. If something really rises to the level of an emergency, we can indeed get information out to most of you almost immediately, thanks to current technology. But very little information really requires that kind of immediacy. That is why our faithful old *Announcement Letter* provided once each month is still our primary tool for communication. We will always be sure to evaluate new needs and opportunities, if they might truly be a blessing for our members, but we want to be sure to avoid using technology only for its own sake. God guiding us, technology will be a continuing tool in our hands to accomplish *His will*, not the master which dictates to us *against* His will.

Remember, *frequent* communication is not synonymous with *quality* communication. Sending out "blanket messages" over social networks is not personal. It is great to be able to share interesting information with many all at once, and there is certainly a proper place for that. But be sure not to allow it to replace the idea of one-on-one communication of love, support, and fellowship. A truly personal letter never goes out of style, even if you deliver that letter electronically.

Personal Announcements

In keeping with the concepts above, we want to provide some guidelines concerning our collection and reporting of announcements to the church. We have never really had an "official" procedure before, but it probably makes sense to offer some suggestions now.

First, please note that the church does not intend to become a "reporter" to ferret out news and then disseminate it automatically to our membership. We take your privacy very seriously, and so we want to be sure that *you* are the ones in control of what is announced and not announced. One of the many serious pitfalls of electronic social networks is the tendency to publish "news" without consideration of others. Just because you become aware that someone else is ill, had a baby, etc., does not mean you should immediately post that tidbit in a public or semipublic

forum. That is one of the inconsiderate side effects occurring more frequently today. The church is certainly not going to set a bad example by falling into the same trap.

This means that if you have an item you would like the church to publish, please contact the church office and specifically ask us to include it. First, we will review your request to make sure it is in keeping with the kind of announcements we are willing to make, and then, if so, we will be sure to provide it in a way with which you are most comfortable. Some members may be very private and choose not to have items of their news announced. Even if you get married (for example), if you choose not to announce it, you have that right, and no one else should have the right to usurp your news just because they have a *Facebook* profile. You should have the right to control your own announcements, and we will respect your right to make that decision. So if you would like to have us make an announcement for you, please just be sure to contact us specifically with a request.

There are certain things we want to avoid in our announcements. We do not use our *Announcement Letter*—as do many other churches—as a means for members to "send well wishes" to the whole church. If we started doing that, we would be inundated with requests. In exceptional situations, we have included thank-you messages from those who have faced serious trials and are appreciative of the prayers and kindnesses of the church brethren. This is still very appropriate, and we are eager to make these kinds of special announcements.

We also have never used our letter as a list of hundreds of prayer requests. We will not get caught up in the pagan "prayer circle" mentality of many deceived churches (please review the 2010 Feast of Tabernacles sermon on that topic). Church-wide prayer requests are reserved for those exceptional situations in which a prayer request can make a trial known to others, not as a way to *gang up* on God with our requests to try to get *Him* to do something more than He has already, but more so to provide *brethren* a chance to know about and to express love and support for the one in serious need. With these simple guidelines, we can assure that our published announcements are helpful and respectful to all.

Birth

Mr-s. John McNeil of Damascus, Oregon, would like to announce the birth of their third child (first son), Isaiah Blake. Isaiah was born at home Tuesday, February 8, and weighed eight pounds, two ounces. Mother (Charisse) and son are doing well.

Death

It saddens us to announce the death of Mr. Sandor Balo of Elizaville, New York. Mr. Balo died December 13, and was seventy-one years of age. Though Mr. Balo was not a member of the church, he "loved the church people." We offer our sincere condolences to his wife, Monika.

New Moon

The new moon, Adar II (thirteenth month), will begin on the evening of March 6. The new moon day is March 7.

The new moon, Nisan (first month), will begin on the evening of April 4. The new moon day is April 5.

Holy Days

Lead men should be making appropriate preparations for these days:

Passover (evening)	Sunday, April 17
Night to Be Much Observed	Monday, April 18
1st Holy Day—Days of Unleavened Bread	Tuesday, April 19
2nd Holy Day—Days of Unleavened Bread	Monday, April 25

Trip Schedule

Mr. Brisby:

March 12	Baltimore, Maryland
March 19	Paarl, South Africa
April 16	Phoenix, Arizona
April 17–19	Stephenville, Texas
April 23, 25	Maryville, Tennessee

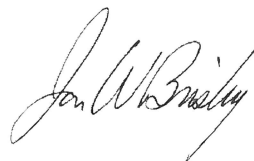
Mr. Robert Litz:

April 16–19	Mansfield, Massachusetts
April 23, 25	Maryville, Tennessee

Recorded Sermon Schedule

Sermon #	Mailed	Played	Title
CL 1-15	02-03-11	02-26-11	What Does God Require of Us? Attitude, Belief, Denial, Offense (#2)
WSE-JB 22-123-25E-9	02-03-11	03-05-11	Fund. of Belief #25: Marriage and Divorce: God's Marriage in a Song #9
CL 1-16	02-24-11	03-12-11	What Does God Require of Us? Attitude, Belief, Denial, Offense (#3)
WSE-JRB 1	02-24-11	03-19-11	Pre-Passover Examination: Many are the Afflictions of the Righteous
WSE-JB 22-124-25E-10	02-24-11	03-26-11	Fund. of Belief #25: Marriage and Divorce: God's Marriage in a Song #10
Holy Day Sermons	03-10-11	—	Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread
CL 1-17	03-17-11	04-02-11	What Does God Require of Us? Attitude, Belief, Denial, Offense (#4)
WSE-JB 22-125-25E-11	03-17-11	04-09-11	Fund. of Belief #25: Marriage and Divorce: God's Marriage in a Song #11
WSE-JB 22-126-25E-12	03-17-11	04-16-11	Fund. of Belief #25: Marriage and Divorce: God's Marriage in a Song #12

In Christ's service,



Jon W. Brisby