

Announcement Letter July 2017

Dear Brethren:

It is a special blessing once again to be able to address all of you this month, and to reaffirm our love and special affinity for those who support this little remnant group and make it possible for us to do this work of service.

We hope that your Pentecost celebration last month was a blessing, and we now automatically look forward to the next Holy Day season, when we will keep the autumn Feasts that have so much meaning in God's Plan. We hope you are fully engaged in planning for that Feast season since time always passes so quickly, and it requires a real sense of urgency to be sure we can make the required trip to appear before God in one of those designated places for the Feast of Tabernacles. More than ever, the people of God need to pull out all stops to put God first, to ensure that we will have God's special intervention to see us through the difficulties confronting us in this world. None of us can afford to take any shortcuts.

Six years ago, in the March 2011 *Announcement Letter*, we published comments about our administrative orientation concerning the preferred means and frequency of church communications with our laymembers. Much of that material is still as valid today as it was six years ago, and so it seems valuable to republish that information for all of you now. Only a few modifications have been made from the original, and hopefully it will be of value to all of you to understand our history and reasons for our current approach.

Church Office Communications

The advent of email and other forms of "instant" paperless communication have increasingly affected the way we interface with many of our scattered brethren. Years ago, an expensive, long-distance phone call was virtually the only means by which to communicate with Mr. Raymond Cole other than by written letter ("snail mail"), and vice 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 that 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 that truly enhances our level of service to God's people. (If there are any of you who would benefit today from receiving these mailings electronically rather than through the mail, please contact us to have that change made.)

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 handheld 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. We also have

our entire archive of digital sermons available by logging into a special file server. If you are interested in that service, please let us know.

Another change we made several years ago was to eliminate cassette tapes and move exclusively to mp3 CDs. This was a traumatic transition for some of our members, but one we hope that most of you have embraced by now. Today, even more of you are beginning to eliminate the need for receiving "hard media" in the mail, and are choosing to download sermons from the church website. These are all examples of our use of new technologies over time to improve our communication delivery systems.

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. In the early years, 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 every Friday into one single sheet 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 email, social media, 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 email distribution list of lead men and began sending those announcements to them on Friday afternoons (Pacific Time). 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 individual email 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 for church staff. 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, it is still challenging sometimes to find a happy medium concerning the use of these weekly *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 email on Fridays. We will also keep those of you with individual email 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*. We will continue to use this policy as a means to emphasize God's command concerning holy convocations. When one of those designated places of worship is available in your local area, *God wants you to be there*, and staying at home is not pleasing to Him. So even though it would be easy for us to add your name to an email distribution list, we will not do so if you should be able to get those announcements at an official church service on weekly Sabbaths. This is not intended to offend anyone, but derives from our own conscience before God. We hope all of you affected will understand and heed this admonition.

This leads us to another issue that is being driven by new technology. Today, Internet *social media* has become "the way" by which many choose to communicate. Even if you do not know what *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Snapchat*, or *WhatsApp* are all about, it is certain that many of your family members do. These applications providing "instant updates" to friends and associates are now standard tools for communication. 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 nor 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 into wasting 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 that dictates to us *against* His will.

Recently, the death of certain church members pushed this issue once again to the fore. We were questioned why we did not immediately send out announcements when ones had died, or even were seriously ill. This is a case where our orientation has not changed since the early days of this remnant body. In the "old days," to announce a death immediately would require calling every member by phone. That was never expected because it was highly impractical. But even though it is easier to do so today, *instant announcements* are no more necessary today than they were forty years ago. Please be careful how you may be allowing *social media habits* to influence your sense of priority.

And concerning your own choices, remember, *frequent* communication is not synonymous with *quality* communication. Sending out "blanket messages" over social networks is "easy," but 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. Many of you are benefitting from a stronger sense of fellowship by using "group" communications. That is not wrong! 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—especially an old-fashioned, snail-mail letter—never goes out of style.

And please be sure to go the extra mile to avoid using *group* communications for "inspirational" messages. They often look like *sermonettes*. Laymembers are not authorized to preach, so please be sure you are going out of your way to *avoid an evil appearance* of usurping ministerial duties. Some of you have done this unintentionally,

and it makes your brethren uncomfortable. Don't preach, just communicate one-on-one in a way that uplifts and provides genuine, godly fellowship.

If we all keep these principles in mind, we should be able to move forward together with a sense of unity. As technology continues to change rapidly, please continue to provide us your feedback and input so that we can weigh our communication methods for the future. The children of God are worthy of our greatest efforts to serve.

New Moon

The new moon, Ab (fifth month), begins Sunday evening, July 23. The new moon day is Monday, July 24.

Camp Tejas

This year Camp Tejas for the teenagers is being held June 29–July 10 in Camas, Washington, and we are asking you to keep it in your prayers so that it may be an enjoyable, successful and safe experience for everyone involved.

Excess Second Tithe

This is a reminder of the yearly need for second tithe to cover administrative and facility costs for the Feast. We want to reserve adequate for an enjoyable and meaningful Feast. At the same time, we all must remember, to keep the Feast requires the rental of halls, transportation, aid to those who are deserving, etc. If we all contribute, the burden for each is relatively small. A huge thanks to those whose hearts and minds are willing. May God richly and abundantly bless you in all ways.

Second Tithe Requests

Please be reminded that requests for second-tithe assistance for the Feast of Tabernacles need to be in by September 1. Any who need assistance should notify us in ample time.

Trip Schedule

Mr. Jon Brisby

July 1, 8 (Camp Tejas). Camas, Washington

Recorded Sermon Schedule

Sermon #	Mailed	Played	Title
CL2-RC 152	06-01-17	07-01-17	Principles of Christian Living (Series 2): Humility #15
CL2-RC 153	06-22-17	07-08-17	Principles of Christian Living (Series 2): Humility #16
CL2-RC 154	06-22-17	07-15-17	Principles of Christian Living (Series 2): Humility #17
CL2-RC 155	06-22-17	07-22-17	Principles of Christian Living (Series 2): Humility #18
WSE-JWB 198	07-13-17	07-29-17	The Lord Delayed His Coming?
WSE-JWB 199	07-13-17	08-05-17	Gone in an Instant
CL2-RC 156	07-13-17	08-12-17	Principles of Christian Living (Series 2): Humility #19

In Christ's service,



Jon W. Brisby