

# Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

## BARRY GRIDER AND *THE FOREST HILL NEWS* HAVE DONE IT AGAIN

Charles Pogue

After more than two years, while some of us are still shaking our heads in amazement at the February 10, 2009, bulletin from the Forest Hill Church of Christ (FH), 3950 Forest Hill-Irene Rd, Memphis, TN 38125, Barry Grider has once again shown a lack of judgment, his liberal leanings, or both.

The July 12, 2011, *Forest Hill News (FHN)* was almost totally given to an article by Rob Hatchett [this is the way the name appeared in *FHN* and *Think*, however the actual name of the author is Rob Hatchett] titled, “Where Are the Future Leaders?” (A fitting name for the article, given the hatchett job he does to the Truth.) [*Hatchett’s article with Barry Grider’s remarks about it begin on page 13—Editor*] All of us are surely concerned with that question, and while there are a few good things said in the article, overall it is totally shocking and incredible to believe that a congregation of the churches of Christ, that even claims to be sound and conservative, would print an article so expressing the sentiments, if not the very tactics, of typical self-declared change agents.

The third paragraph in the article’s introduction is full of overblown arrogance and replete with unfairness to brethren who are both concerned with losing many of our youth to the world, and with seeking to find solutions to the problem that are in accordance with New Testament doctrine. The author states:

A few years back, the church I was attending held a congregational meeting after a number of young families with children had left. I spoke up at this meeting and asked, “Are we going to evaluate why these people left and see if there are any changes/improvements we need to make?” That question was quickly met with the response, “Worship is not entertainment, and we don’t come here to be entertained.” If I’ve heard this response once, I’ve heard it a thousand times. This has become a generic response to try to doctrinally avoid any discussion of improvements in various aspects of our congregations.

Obviously, the author of this statement leaves out a good deal of background information, such as, why the brethren responded to the query in the manner they did. When we examine some of the subsequent statements in the article, the possibility certainly exists that they responded that way because they suspected Hatchett was not all too concerned about retaining doctrinal soundness in order to make changes/improvements.

The balance of the article asks three questions in response to which we will briefly comment.

1. “Does your church have a system to track the kids that have graduated from your youth group over the past ten years?” Let me say first, I do not have a church! The Lord does, and I am a member of it, but I neither have nor am I authorized to have my own church.

The author asserts that most children who leave home for college do not place membership in a congregation in the city where they attend school. Whether that is true or not, I could not say, but when the author goes on to tell us that congregations should keep a list of every former youth group member, which list includes information on addresses, emails, and phone numbers, if one wishes to drive away young people, this is as good an approach as any one could imagine. These lists, we are told should cover the past ten

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# Contending FOR THE Faith™

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## Editorial...

### “WHAT WILL THEY DO NOW?”

This is not only my editorial for the August issue of *CFTF*, but it also serves to introduce the timely article by brother Dub McClish that immediately follows. The question serving as the title of this editorial is that used by brother McClish for his excellent front page article in the July 2011 *CFTF*. When it comes to those who fellowship Dave Miller of Apologetics Press in his re-evaluation/reaffirmation of elders error, his false “marriage intent” doctrine, and the marriage, divorce, and remarriage errors of Stan Crowley, the preacher for the Schertz, Texas Church of Christ, et al., *do these brethren have an absolute objective stopping point as to whom they will and will not fellowship?* In answering the preceding question, let us review some pertinent history these matters that should help introduce brother McClish’s article as it reviews some events dealing with whom all may be included in their ever growing fellowship circle.

Our readers will remember that in 2005 the elders and preachers of the Forest Hill (FH) Church of Christ, along with the faculty of the Memphis School of Preacher (MSOP), endorsed the fellowship of Dave Miller and Stan Crowley in their errors. The Southwest Church of Christ (SW) and its work, the Southwest School of Bible Studies (SWSBS), did the same. Several other brethren and brotherhood works, such as The Gospel Broadcasting Network (GBN) followed suit. (It was recently announced that GBN is now under the oversight of the Southaven Church of Christ, Southaven, MS, the home of the annual Power Lectureship, and also that GBN would build new facilities near the MSOP. Thus, they are looking for a couple of million dollars to build their new home).

In February of 2009 brother Barry Grider, preacher for the FH congregation wrote an article entitled *I Got Used To It*. In it Grider defends the concept of certain elements of change using as an example of becoming reconditioned to accept the singing of the song *Sweet, Sweet Spirit*. This specific song advocates a direct influence of the Holy Spirit on Christians today. In that same bulletin (February 10, 2009) Grider printed an article written by brother Tyler Young, entitled: *Binding Where God Has Not*. In it Young attempted to defend canceling or else rescheduling the evening worship assembly of a local church to accommodate those who wanted to view the Super Bowl and those who absent themselves from the local church’s assemblies convened for religious devotion in order for brethren to participate in a sporting event. Young also attempted to defend the willful absenting of brethren from Sunday evening assemblies of worship while traveling. Further, he argued for substituting small group meetings on Sunday evening for the whole church assembling in one place for worship. Do Tyler Young and Barry Grider value the Community Church model over the New Testament pattern found in the authority of the New

Testament (Col. 3:17; Heb. 8:5)? Clearly, in certain matters they do respect some pattern (authority) more than the New Testament pattern (authority), whatever loud protests they may make to the contrary notwithstanding.

In the same bulletin with Young's article Grider printed the old worn out article "I Drew My Circle Again." The article makes light of recognizing fellowship restrictions. It has long been used by those brethren who teach doctrines that when believed and practiced loose the church from the obligations that God in His Word has bound on it. Further, various and sundry denominations of every description have long employed it in their efforts to fellowship whomever suited them. My first exposure to it came from a teacher on the Bible faculty of the then Harding College in 1967 while I was a student there. It implies that we should make no judgment in the matter of whom to and whom not to fellowship. But, as is usually the case with those who write such articles, they contradict themselves in at least one area—it *urges its reader to exercise one's judgmental powers to conclude that one should not use those same powers in judging what persons ought to be fellowshiped and what persons ought not to be fellowshiped.* The article completely ignores God's Truth as the only standard for determining to whom fellowship is to be extended and from whom it is to be withdrawn (1 Cor. 1:10; Col. 3:17; James 1:25; Phil. 3:16b). Therein lies the fundamental reason that Grider, the FH elders, and the MSOP, et al., some time ago *arbitrarily* chose to withdraw their fellowship from brother Dub McClish and me. Grider cannot conceive of a fellowship circle big enough to include the likes of McClish and me. However, as predicted, he continues to draw his fellowship circle larger and larger to include brethren who teach doctrines that in time past were strongly opposed by said church, elders, and school as shall be clearly shown. With little to no thought on his part of allowing the Truth of God's Word to be the only standard of measurement used in determining the boundaries of his fellowship circle, he draws his fellowship circle larger and larger.

As a case in point, McClish's July article referenced the Sherman Drive (formerly Pearl Street) Church of Christ, Denton, TX. This is the congregation where brother Mac Deaver preached for several years. Sherman Drive is one of Mac's longtime and preeminent supporters in propagating his erroneous doctrines of (1) the direct work of the Holy Spirit on the inward man of the Christian for the purpose of supplying divine wisdom directly to the mind of one and divine strength to the Christian's inward man when his human strength is insufficient and (2) that one must be baptized in the Holy Spirit while under the water being baptized for the remission of sins. Mac erroneously teaches Holy Spirit baptism is essential because the very essence of one's human spirit was contaminated by the sins that alienated one from God. Thus, the human spirit must be made holy and a fit place for the Holy Spirit to directly indwell and work when

one is raised from water baptism for the remission of sins.

Mac Deaver was succeeded as the preacher for the Sherman Drive congregation by his son, brother Weylan Deaver, who continues in that capacity and believes the same as his father does regarding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's direct work on the saved human spirit. Incidentally, Weylan received his master's degree in 2009 from the Bear Valley Bible Institute (BV). He is also the son-in-law of Rudy Cain, founder, president, and director of World Video Bible School, Maxwell, TX.

In said July article McClish cited brother Neal Pollard's May 2011 Gospel meeting with the Sherman Drive Church of Christ, Denton, TX, as to how far said brethren will go in fellowshiping error. Pollard is the preacher for the Bear Valley Church of Christ, Denver, CO, the church that is directly involved with the BV. He also works with BV. In his last appearance before the Sherman Drive church during his recent Gospel meeting with them, Pollard said that his time with them had "forged a bond that will continue to grow." Concerning Weylan Deaver, Pollard also remarked to the audience, "What a wonderful preacher...you have here at Sherman Drive...We respect the depth of spirituality and Bible knowledge that is evident."

In my July 2011 editorial I pointed out the following:

Neal Pollard is in fellowship with the Memphis School of Preaching (MSOP) and they are in fellowship with him. In the past Jerry Martin of MSOP has taught at BV. Moreover, Brad Harrub, one of the editors of *Think* magazine, is an adjunct teacher in BV's master's program. Every one of these men is in fellowship with each other. Thus, they have no problem of bidding God's speed to Mac and Weylan Deaver and Sherman Drive's Holy Spirit error as they practice their own unity in diversity in obligatory matters. But 2 John 8-11 still says what it means and means what it says, the previous brethren notwithstanding (p. 2)!

Which one of the faculty members at the MSOP or the SWSBS will publicly declare that he is not in fellowship with Neal Pollard or Brad Harrub? But Neal Pollard is in full fellowship with the Deavers. And, Curtis Cates wrote a book condemning the Deaver doctrine regarding the direct work of the Holy Spirit.

In his July 2011 article brother McClish wrote of Pollard and other brethren who continue to fellowship Dave Miller, et al., in their errors:

These brethren, whether or not they have ever faced it, have rationalized their selective endorsement of error and its advocates. They are practicing situation ethics relating to Truth and error. *They have reached the point of choosing which false teachers they still oppose and which it is permissible to embrace and defend* (Italics mine, Editor). ...

In order to maintain their agenda, those who cast their lot with AP/Miller had to marginalize those of us who refused to "go along" with a false teacher and his institution in order to "get

along.”...

Almost simultaneous with their new policy of exclusion, the Miller/AP acolytes began a new policy of unprecedented inclusion. While they pushed us out the back door and slammed it, they opened wide the front door to a new group of brethren. Almost simultaneously...they began almost feverishly to embrace those whom they had formerly not only not included in their work, but whom they criticized and scorned. *Moreover, they have left that front door open, and one wonders just*

*whom all it will eventually admit* (p. 5. Italics Mine, Editor).

***In the following article brother McClish clearly shows that the church was not left long to wonder concerning whom Grider and friends would admit through their own fellowship front door.***

—David P. Brown, Editor



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# “NEXT TIME” HAS ARRIVED

Dub McClish

After various signals of a growing spirit of compromise on the part of the Forest Hill (FH) congregation (Memphis, TN), it was predictable that others would follow. While brother Barry Grider, FH preacher, has been the “point man” in these indicators, the conference table in the FH elders’ meeting room nonetheless bears the sign—figuratively if not actually—“The Buck Stops Here.” Whatever happens in the congregation or in the Memphis School of Preaching (MSOP), which it operates, is ultimately their charge.

They have apparently given their preacher carte blanche to forge ahead with his agenda. Said agenda has manifestly included enlarged fellowship boundaries, as evidenced by invitations to several speakers who were formerly (pre-2006) out of favor (and rightly so) with FH/MSOP, but who have magically come into favor since.

Then there was the disgracefully compromising edition of the *Forest Hill News (FHN)* (2/10/09) in which brother Grider wrote an article, published a separate article by Tyler Young, and printed the silly, touchy-feely, loosey-goosey “fellowship circle” article—all three of which announced boldly to perceptive readers that he (Grider) was “pushing the envelope” on fellowship. In reality, he pushed a bit beyond the theme of broader fellowship in that material, advocating the use of practices that Bible-loving brethren cannot abide (see the April 2009 edition of *Contending for the Faith* for coverage of the 2/10/09 issue of *FHN*).

With no public repudiation of this material from either the FH elders or any of the MSOP faculty, what could the FH preacher (and all brethren who read what he wrote and printed) conclude but that his elders and fellow MSOP instructors agreed with the material and that he should forge ahead, and go even further next time? In brother Grider, we have the change agent *modus operandi* on display:

1. Push the boundaries until there is resistance
2. Ease up until resistance subsides

3. Push the boundaries further next time
4. Keep repeating the process

“Next time” arrived with the July 12, 2011 issue of *FHN*, in which he published an article—without editorial comment—by Rob Hatchett, titled, “Where Are the Future Leaders?” (see: [http://www.foresthillcofc.org/Bulletins/2011/July\\_12\\_2011.pdf](http://www.foresthillcofc.org/Bulletins/2011/July_12_2011.pdf)). It originally appeared in the June issue of *Think* magazine (edited by Brad Harrub, Glenn Colley, David Longley, and David Shannon), from which Barry Grider obtained it (incidentally, both *Think* and *FHN* misspelled Hatchett’s name as “Hatchet”). Both the article’s content and those who have endorsed it by publishing it raise some significant considerations.

## The Author of the Article

Some Internet research reveals that Rob Hatchett lives in the Chattanooga, Tennessee, area and is a member (but not one of the “ministers”) of the Clear Creek Church of Christ in nearby Hixson. He is a Freed-Hardeman University alumnus. The Clear Creek Website reveals a church in the advanced stages of acute liberalitis, a deadly spiritual malignancy, complicated by raging social gospelitis. It lists various liberal speakers who have been there recently or who will be coming (e.g., Randy Lowry [pres. of Lipscomb U.], Johnathan Stormont [Richland Hills], Randy Harris [ACU], Tim Woodroof, et al.). Books by denominational authors are the bases for at least some of their “Bible studies,” including one by Francis Chan, who is involved in the universalistic Emerging Church movement.

This congregation is at least refreshingly honest about its gymnasium; it calls it a “gym,” bypassing the family-life-center subterfuge of most congregations that have joined the entertainment/recreation craze. Clear Creek also fields teams in basketball, softball, and flag football. It openly solicits funds indiscriminately (from members and non-members alike). Among its seven “ministers,” three are women, and, of course, how can a liberal church exist without its “Chil-

### The Content of the Article

From the title of the article (i.e., "Where Are the Future Leaders"?), one might expect it to address the problem of leadership failure in the Lord's church. (Had congregations and schools had the strong, Scripturally-qualified leaders the Lord intended, the church would not be in its present sad state of apostasy and compromise—as exemplified by Clear Creek.) However, incredibly (given the article's title), Hatchett never even gives a wave of the hand to that important subject, but launches immediately into the typical non-thinking/liberal blame game for the loss of so many young people when they reach college age and young adulthood: "Where did the church go wrong?"

He tells of being in a previous congregation from which several young families with children departed. He implies that the congregation was at fault for not making its worship "entertaining" enough to keep the defectors from leaving. When he was told that worship is not for the purpose of entertaining, Hatchett retorts, "If I've heard this response once, I've heard it a thousand times" (a bit of a hyperbole, perhaps?). In Clear Creek, brother Hatchett has found himself a congregation that appears to major in the entertainment field.

He proposes three questions for "self-evaluation" of "your church." Question 1: "Does your church have a system to track the kids that have graduated from your youth group over the past 10 years?" Imagine how that would go over with "kids," especially when they get to their mid-twenties, are married, and perhaps have started their families. I concur with his claim that congregations far too often segregate "youth groups" from adults—which is almost the very purpose of the hired "youth director" or "youth minister" and the "Children's Bible Hour" program (all very visible at Clear Creek). Many of us have been opposing this mentality and setup for decades, and it's surprising to hear a liberal agree with it (did he slip up without realizing it?).

Question 2: "Is your congregation 'relevant' to Christians in their 20s?" He defines "relevance" as (among other things) singing "newer songs" and using "technology" (I suppose he means such things as Power Point sermons, projected announcements/songs, and podcasts). Then he asserts that we should compete with "relevant" "community/non-denominational churches" (notice he refers to denominations as "non-denominational," a description that fits only the church of the New Testament).

The article gets more interesting: Per Hatchett, congregations need to learn from the McDonalds hamburger chain the way to attract young folks (they're spiffing-up some of their stores to make them "trendy/modern/relevant" [his words] with two-way fireplaces, stone exteriors, and granite countertops). Since he advises "conservative" congregations

to heed Hatchett or die, would the FH preacher have the least objection to replacing the pews at FH with recliners and inviting Starbucks to set up shop in the foyer? In this context, Hatchett feels the need to deny he is calling for a change in the Gospel, but he is contending precisely for that. The Gospel is not about superficial appeals to the flesh. Furthermore, congregations that have implemented his approach are unrecognizable as churches of Christ—and Hatchett's Clear Creek "Church of Christ" is "Exhibit A" in proof thereof.

Hatchett then makes another of several sweeping generalizations (all of which are devoid of any research/documentation):

Those leaving the church in their 20s are consistently saying it's because the congregation where they worship, though doctrinally sound, is out of touch with what they face and their needs in their Christian walk of life.

So it is clear that being "doctrinally sound" is secondary to being "relevant" (as perceived by today's typical 20-some-things). Brother Hatchett then delivers this liberal chestnut: "The greatest need for people today in their 20s is the need for social interaction and social connection." Silly me, but I thought the greatest need for people, whether they are 15 or 115 years old, was for salvation, spiritual development, and faithfulness to the Lord every day (which are available only through knowledge and practice of Biblical doctrine [Mat. 4:4; John 6:26–27; Acts 20:32; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Heb. 5:12–14; Jam. 2:22–25; 2 Pet. 1:5–11; 3:18; et al.]).

At Clear Creek, when they greet a visitor or approach a "20s person," they invite him to play basketball, take a mission trip, play on one of the church's three softball teams, meet with the young professionals on Thursday night for dinner, or do chores for the widows (note the implied equivalency of playing basketball and softball with a mission trip and helping widows).

Question 3: "Does your congregation put more focus on simply filling a pew on Sunday or on being a Christian?" Brother Hatchett reports to us that being "the most doctrinally correct church" is a downer for the 20s crowd. Skip that old fogey stuff. They want a church that will help members "truly develop a relationship with God." Talk about liberal-speak, here we have it on display. This nonsense is not only an unscriptural (i.e., false) dichotomy between doctrinal soundness and creating/maintaining a "relationship with God," it is an anti-Scriptural one. There is no right relationship with God apart from doctrinal soundness: "And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3, emph. DM). But he's not through: "Those leaving the church are saying that women's role, musical instruments, denominations, baptism, etc., were forced on them so much that they never learned how to truly develop a relationship with God...." Remember, to brother Grider, it's follow the Hatchett program, or perish for "conservative congregations."

Brother Hatchett may think he has come up with something new and revolutionary in his three questions. Not so. Liberal change agents have been urging these failed inanities for four decades or more, assuming that social and entertainment activities will develop spiritual growth and maturity in young people—and the change agents got them from the denominations in the first place. He further implies without warrant that elders and/or congregations have the responsibility to teach, train, and rear children and, if children go astray, it is the fault of the elders, the church, or (gasp!) even the preacher. While congregational activities can and should be supportive, the last time I checked Ephesians 6:1–4, that responsibility still belonged to parents.

### **The Original Place of Publication and Its Editors**

As previously mentioned, Think magazine originally published the Hatchett article. Brother Brad Harrub began this publication and the company that publishes it a few years ago after leaving Apologetics Press. I am acquainted with only two of the four editors of Think—brethren Harrub and Colley. They represent themselves as being “conservative” relative to the Scriptures. However they have both confuted that representation by their willingness to consort repeatedly with rank liberals on such the Lake Tahoe Family Encampment and other venues in recent years. That aside, their publication of this article is sufficient to discredit any serious claims of “conservatism” for themselves or for their magazine.

Editors have choices when they receive an article for publication:

1. Reject it outright (because its content, poor quality of writing, etc., render it unacceptable)
2. Return it to the author for suggested changes
3. Publish it either with editorial disclaimer or rebuttal (if the editor disagrees with the content)
4. Publish it as submitted, implying full endorsement by the editor(s)

It obviously was not rejected outright. It may have been returned to the author for suggested changes (but if so, one must wonder how even more blatantly anti-Biblical the original submission was). The Think editors published it with no disclaimer or rebuttal. Therefore, this article represents the convictions of the editors of Think magazine (I can’t resist asking what these “conservative” “thinkers” were “thinking”).

Additionally, the editors either (1) did no “vetting” of Rob Hatchett’s background or congregational affiliation, or (2) if they did so, they cared not that he represented an off-the-wall liberal church that wears the designation Church of Christ in sacrilege—to which they gave an implied approving nod. Either option leaves the Think editors grossly inexcusable and culpable. The defenders of Brad Harrub’s

and Glenn Colley’s “conservatism” in the face of numerous fellowship compromises over the past 6 years—and now this—have some more egg to wipe off their faces.

### **The Secondary Place of Publication and Its Editor**

It was only mildly surprising that this doctrinally off-color article appeared in Think. Its appearance in *FHN*, however, may (and should) raise the eyebrows of discerning brethren far and wide. Due to various statements and actions of brother Grider (editor of *FHN*) over the past several years, at least some of us did not doubt that he holds such convictions as set forth by the liberal Hatchett. My source of surprise is in the brazenness of his moving this fast and this openly to advance the next phase of his liberal agenda. He compounded his bold publication of the sorry article by orally endorsing it in a preface to his July 17 evening sermon (see: <http://oabs.org/archives/foresthill/2011/asx.asx?link=5&mon=july>). (His compulsion to mount the pulpit and defend the article’s content raises the question of how much criticism he has received over the article. Perhaps “the [gentleman] doth protest too much, methinks” [with apologies to Shakespeare’s Hamlet].)

Publication and endorsement of this liberalism-laced article in *FHN* reveals far more about Barry Grider than it does about Rob Hatchett. The errant Hatchett is apparently not pretending to be something he is not—he obviously and openly embraces the liberal milieu of which he is a part. At this point, our brother Grider is still putting up a “conservative” facade, but it is slipping increasingly with each of his stunts. As in politics, so in the church: When one embraces liberalism, he just can’t seem to keep himself from moving ever more leftward and seeking to drag others into the same maelstrom.

By publishing—and orally commending—this article, warning “so-called conservative churches of Christ” and “every congregation, conservative in nature” to take heed or face doom’s day, brother Grider has implicitly stated his agreement with the following:

1. Entertainment should be a significant factor in determining the character of our worship assemblies
2. Faithful congregations are to blame when entertainment-seekers depart
3. Elders should track young people for 10 years when they leave home for college
4. Congregations must become “relevant” to the “needs” of the 20-year-old crowd
5. “Relevant” worship assemblies include “newer songs” and using “technology”
6. Congregations must see what “community/non-denominational” churches are doing and compete with them to reach the 20s crowd
7. Congregations must ape McDonalds restaurants to

learn the way to be “relevant”

8. “Relevance” is more important than being “doctrinally sound”

9. “Social interaction and social connection” are the greatest needs of the 20s crowd

10. Congregations should organize/sponsor football, basketball, and softball teams

11. Congregations should build gymnasiums to attract/hold young people

12. Being a “doctrinally correct church” will not help members “truly develop a relationship with God”

13. Elders who “force” such subjects as “women’s role,” “musical instruments,” “denominations,” and “baptism” on young people are “completely out of touch”

14. Doctrinal sermons and learning the way “to truly develop a relationship with God” are incompatible

15. We are doomed to lose all of our young people if we fail to provide entertainment, recreation, “social interaction,” “newer” songs, and “technology”

16. If congregations will follow the Hatchett prescription, they will produce mature, stable, spiritual, and above all, Scripturally-sound leaders

17. Faithful brethren should learn—from a member of an ultra-liberal church and from that church’s programs—the way to interest, attract, and hold young people

Brother Grider did not commend brother Hatchett’s liberal advice and “wisdom” in a personal “white paper” or publish it as an independent personal opinion on his personal Website. Rather, he advanced his unseemly convictions through the principal publication (*FHN*) of the congregation for which he preaches. As much as its pulpit, *FHN* is a public representative of a congregation whose reputation for faithfulness and soundness was unquestioned until a few years ago. Moreover, the July 12, 2011, edition of *FHN* carrying the Hatchett article and Grider’s July 17 oral commendation of it are both on the FH Website, accessible universally. Grider’s “Hatchett edition” of *FHN* and his oral commendation publicly represent the position of the FH elders and congregation until the FH elders tell us otherwise.

It is no coincidence that these untoward tendencies by the FH church and MSOP began appearing within a couple of years of brother Grider’s employment by the FH elders. The earliest of these signs of which I am aware (2004) was the appearance of some Grider-suggested speakers on the MSOP Lectures that so alarmed and disgusted some of the alumni that they boycotted the assemblies when these men spoke.

### How Many Will “Go Along To Get Along”?

I earlier observed that, although Barry Grider has been the leader of FH’s leftward tilt, “the buck stops” with the

FH elders. Brother Grider has been able to do and say what he has pleased only because his elders have so permitted. While it hardly seems possible that these men have no concern about the slipping level of confidence in them and the congregation’s already tarnished image, what can one conclude when/if they allow such mayhem to go unchecked?

It is precisely by this means that hundreds of congregations have been lost to apostasy over the past forty-fifty years. Elders hire a preacher whom they trust. Unknown to them, he has some “strange” ideas (Lev. 10:1–2). As he gradually introduces them, the elders, perhaps fearing a rift in the congregation because of brethren afflicted with preacheritis, do nothing. “After all,” they tell themselves, “these changes are very minor and are matters of opinion.” Then, after ignoring a few such changes (as the preacher is gaining an even greater “fan-base”), the elders themselves become so desensitized by the “small” changes that they are blind to the fact that they have allowed some not-small changes to occur. They then end up defending the very things (and worse) that once disturbed them, aggressively denying any suggestion that their preacher has led them down error’s primrose path—and giving him even further liberties.

Just as elders could and should have prevented liberalism’s capture of many hundreds of congregations over the years, so only the FH elders can put a stop to the direction in which their preacher is leading them. Their responsibilities of overseeing and guarding the flock demand no less (Acts 20:28–31). This latest move by their preacher, if unaddressed—and publicly so—by the FH elders, can mean only one thing: They are in full agreement with their preacher’s liberal agenda. In response to their preacher’s previous adventures in compromise, their response has been two-fold: (1) Utter silence regarding the errors brother Grider has promoted, implying their support, and (2) “marking” as unworthy of fellowship two of the many brethren who have dared publicly to hold them accountable for their behavior. Will these men continue to “go along to get along” with their preacher and his admirers?

Where is the MSOP full-time faculty in all of this? Are they one with the FH preacher (and their fellow MSOP instructor) who holds forth in the building across the driveway from their own domain where others and I were once so cordially welcomed? It was my high privilege to be invited to deliver the MSOP graduation sermon several years ago (1998, I believe). From the FH pulpit, I addressed my challenge not only to the graduates, but also to the elders. I praised them highly (and deservedly), but I also challenged them to “take heed unto themselves” to remain faithful, emphasizing the weighty responsibility on their shoulders, both for the congregation and for MSOP. I stressed that, if they faltered, both the church and the school would be lost to the Cause. I distinctly remember the “amens” that were uttered to that challenge. The FH elders commended my sermon

highly. I particularly recall the fact that long-time/full-time MSOP instructor, Keith Mosher, enthusiastically told me my remarks were the best he had heard delivered to any of their graduating classes. The Lord knows I do not relate these matters to boast, but to underscore the significance of the very phenomenon I described that is unfolding concerning this very influential eldership, church, and school.

How can brethren Liddell, Elkins, Mosher, Bland, Martin, Cates (father and son), and Clarke be in agreement with the untoward words and deeds of brother Grider? (If they are still warning their students about change agents and the way to recognize them, a good beginning illustration can be found across the driveway from their classrooms.) Have these once-stalwart men so invested their support and defense of one impenitent false teacher (brother Dave Miller) that it has caused them to ignore and muffle their opposition to error right under their noses? I dearly love and once respected these men who formerly so openly and impartially stood for the Truth and opposed error and its champions such as Rubel Shelly and Mac Deaver. It is bad enough that they embraced the multiple Miller errors, but that their voices have fallen silent on the error in their own house is beyond amazing—and disgraceful.

I find it hard to believe that none of these men had any concern over the February 10, 2009, edition of *FHN*. If any of them expressed any disapproval of that material privately, it had little effect (as evidenced by the latest Grider propaganda piece). Do they not lose any sleep over the fact that the elders under whom they work apparently have given their softy preacher license to take the once-stalwart FH church where he wants it to go (dragging the school with it)? Who would have thought 6 years ago that even one of the MSOP men would put up with what brother Grider is increasingly advocating next door? Observe it, read about it, reflect on it, pray over it, and weep because of it.

Until these men tell us otherwise, I have no choice but to assume they subscribe to the 17 points of the Hatchett-Grider plan listed above. They need to realize that their personal reputations are on the line in these matters. If the FH elders allow Barry Grider to destroy this congregation, once known worldwide for its soundness, MSOP—and its faculty—will go down in flames with it. The MSOP faculty may be the only force with sufficient influence on the FH elders to effect a course-correction, but if it has any such intention, it needs to move quickly. Will these men continue to “go along to get along” with elders who are seemingly complacent/complicit regarding their preacher’s errors?

Do the new Gospel Journal and its board (Ken Ratcliff, Tommy Hicks, John Moore, Paul Sain, Curtis Cates) subscribe to the Grider-Hatchett plan for salvaging young people? Its editor, brother Curtis Cates, is still intimately associated with FH by means of MSOP, of which he is “Director Emeritus.” I know from personal conversation with him in

March 2005 that he was not happy with the Grider influence on the FH elders that caused them to spend a considerable sum on equipment that would allow them to broadcast over the fledgling Gospel Broadcasting Network. It would appear that this Grider-led non-doctrinal matter was of greater concern to brother Cates than Grider’s subsequent dangerous doctrinal moves have been. Until he announces otherwise, we must assume that he and his fellow board members of the new Gospel Journal have no problems with the publication of the Hatchett article in the *FHN*. Will brother Cates and his new Gospel Journal associates continue to “go along to get along”?

The MSOP alumni are also “on the spot” because of brother Grider’s latest exploits. The vast MSOP Alumni Association once so esteemed me that it awarded me honorary membership, and I once wore my pin very proudly. MSOP directors and teachers helped these students to understand the Truth and instilled in them the Scriptural obligation to defend it and to oppose error without fear or favor. I am now wondering how long and to what degree this great body of alumni will tolerate what they see happening in the church that oversees their alma mater, and which must affect their school if unimpeded. Doubtless, MSOP faculty members have correctly emphasized to their students the danger, error, and folly of loyalty to a school that surpasses loyalty to the Word of God. I pray that a large number of MSOP alumni will rise up and say, “This far, and no further.” A sufficient number of alumni could very well encourage the eldership to reconsider its course. Will the bulk of the alumni “go along to get along”?

Yet another group must seriously contemplate the uncertain sounds emanating from the FH preacher, and (by implication of their silence), from the MSOP faculty. I refer to the financial supporters of the school. It takes large amounts of money to operate an enterprise as large as MSOP has become. Accordingly, the appeals for support have been and continue to be many, and Truth-loving brethren have generously responded over the years. I would be greatly surprised if all of those who have contributed or who are now contributing to MSOP agree with the 17-point Hatchett-Grider program. In fact, I would be surprised if some support has not already dried up at the latest Grider-inspired incident. By his own admission, a threat of financial loss for the school in 2005 heavily influenced the decision of brother Cates, director of MSOP at the time, in reference to the editorship of *The Gospel Journal*. Perhaps it will take a similar threat to influence MSOP’s current director and the eldership that oversees it. Will the financial supporters of MSOP “go along to get along,” or will they make their objections to the Grider agenda known?

I am not unconscious of the predicament and conundrum in which both the FH elders and the MSOP faculty find themselves:



1. They decided 6 years ago to give one prominent false teacher (brother Dave Miller) a pass, embracing, endorsing, and defending him and his errors

2. They have been called to account repeatedly for choosing which (and whose) errors to ignore and which (and whose) errors to oppose

3. They have resisted and vilified those who have sought their repentance, attempting to destroy their reputations and to marginalize their influence

4. They have allowed various acts and statements of compromise by their preacher/fellow instructor to go unopposed over the past few years

5. These acts and statements have now become so blatant that even these men must recognize that they are undeniably subversive to the Truth

6. These acts and statements now pose a real threat to the FH church and MSOP

7. However, if these men now admit and deal with this genuine problem, they will expose once more their partiality in opposing error in one of their own while continuing to ignore it in brother Miller

8. Further, admitting the doctrinal problems of their preacher/fellow instructor will constitute a bitter admission that the several warnings concerning him were valid and that their “marking” of two brethren who tried to tell them so was unjustified (not to mention unscriptural)

9. However, if they harden their resistance and rally behind brother Grider, they risk further tarnishing their reputation and losing support of alumni and contributors, to say nothing of signaling “full speed ahead” to brother Grider in his departures

It is evident that FH elders have painted themselves into

an unenviable corner. It will take humble and spiritually-mature men to do what needs to be done to preserve the congregation and the school for the Truth. I pray that they will understand, however, that putting the brakes on their preacher is only part of what they need to do to remove all doubts. Whoever advised the elders to rally behind brother Miller and pretend his errors are of no consequence gave them atrocious and anti-Scriptural advice indeed. I implore them to correct that original misstep, which I believe to have been the initial compromise that has led them to their present predicament.

I have no personal axes to grind with any of these brethren, including brother Grider. The FH eldership was for decades as steady and predictable as Gibraltar in its stand upon and for the Truth. These men have overseen a great congregation and an outstanding school for those years. Through its graduates, MSOP has made an impact for the Truth on the world and the church in general that only eternity will reveal. They had no more enthusiastic promoter and admirer than I was for many years. Some of my most cherished memories involve associations with the FH elders, the church, and the school (faculty, alumni, and lectureship). I cannot fully express how deeply it grieves me to say it, but someone simply must do so: The eldership, the congregation, and the school are on the verge of squandering and forfeiting that immense brotherhood trust it has taken many years and lives to create. I ask readers to join me in praying that these elders will heed the Lord’s warning to the Ephesian church: **Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent** (Rev. 2:5).

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years. In other words, an individual who is almost thirty years of age, may have a family, and live in a different town, is still presumed to be under the oversight of his home congregation! One person who read this commented that it smacks of Catholicism. Whether it does or not, those who have been gone for ten years and who no longer live in the area would likely consider such activity an invasion of privacy. Who could blame them? Regardless of that, *there is no scriptural authority for an eldership to retain its oversight over those who are no longer members of the congregations in which they serve in the eldership.*

The first question is the most innocuous portion of the article. The writing goes downhill with the speed of a bullet from a high-powered rifle in question two.

2. Is your congregation “relevant” to Christians in their 20s? In a sermon that Rubel Shelly preached at the Missouri Street Church of Christ in West Memphis, Arkansas, in April of 1990, he said, “My children will not stay with the church I grew up in. They will not be a part of an irrelevance.” In this writer’s two years at MSOP (1993-1995), I heard that statement of Shelly’s referred to frequently. Back then the sentiment was sometimes put in the form of a question: “How could anyone refer to the church as an irrelevance?” Now, sixteen years later, to think the FH elders would allow an article with such a question raised is inconceivable. The author of the article makes the same point Shelly was making, the church must change or, at least to the younger people, it will be an irrelevance. Thus, the same worn-out liberal message, the church must change.

Hatchett goes on to opine his belief that we have for so long heard in the church that we are not “consumers,” that it has become an excuse for not attempting to be attractive to the younger generations. With all due respect, the church is to be adorned as a bride for her husband, who is Christ (Rev. 21:2), not adorned to appeal to any generation of human beings, including the younger one!

Hatchett then writes:

Have you seen one of the new buildings that McDonalds is building for their restaurants? It is much more trendy/modern/relevant than its older buildings. They have two way fireplaces, stone exteriors, and granite countertops throughout. However, it’s still serving the same burgers, fries, and McNuggets that McDonalds has always served. The product is the same—the look and feel of the restaurant is just more relevant to today’s society.

Hatchett goes on to admit that while we cannot change the Gospel, he feels his way to the conclusion that those in their twenties, who are leaving the church, are doing so because it is out of touch with what they face and their needs in the Christian walk of life.

Are we to suppose if we had fancier buildings the young people would stay? While we are at it, maybe a pool table, a jukebox, and a video arcade would help. But no, among

other things, we learn that what the young people need is to play basketball on Tuesday night, and have three softball teams at the church. Hatchett must not have thought of the pool table and video games. Perhaps Barry Grider will.

The author concludes his discussion of this question with this jewel: “By fulfilling the relevant social needs, it will give more opportunities to develop relations, and share the Gospel through Bible study and service projects.” Knock, knock. Who’s there? Social Gospel. Social Gospel, who? The social gospel that seems to be replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ at FH!

3. Does your congregation put more focus on simply filling a pew on Sunday or on being a Christian? Hatchett laments he has heard from people who formerly attended the church that the congregations were more concerned about doctrinal correctness than with helping members truly develop a relationship with God. This brother, and I neither know him nor had heard of him until this article ran, needs (and perhaps Barry Grider does too) a good healthy dose of studying the Scriptures. The words of Jesus would be good for a starter. **“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode (John 14:23).** There is no way to have a relationship with the Father other than by keeping His commands: doctrinal correctness, if you please.

One of the most appalling statements in the whole sad writing then followed.

When discussing with one elder the topic of losing our youth, he told me the reason we have lost so many is because they didn’t hear enough sermons about things like “Women’s Role in the Church.” I told him that he just proved he was completely out of touch.”

We have to quit preaching, Hatchett claims, so much on the subjects of instrumental music, denominationalism, and baptism, because these subjects prevent the young people from truly developing a relationship with God through worship, prayer, service, and meditation. Pardon my asking, but, why? Isn’t it ironic that three of the biggest problems we have in the church today are instrumental music, compromise with denominationalism, and denials of the essentiality of baptism? Add to those three that many congregations are insisting on an expanded role for our women, and we would ask just who is it that is out of touch? I would affirm that Hatchett, for writing such tripe, and Grider, for printing it, are the ones who are out of touch.

Hatchett closes his article by making the claim that we can answer questions about doctrine well, but we are not able to give a reason for the hope that we have. He tells us he learned this reality by asking questions in a class. The first week he asked about the doctrinal questions, and next week about reason for the hope they have.

I was raised on a ranch in Central Texas. My daddy had

a large metal syringe that had a cup-like attachment on the business end that held medicinal pills about half the size of a Ballpark Frank. This syringe filled with one of the pills was inserted deep in the throat of a sick cow, and the pill, by the use of the plunger, was forced down the animal's throat. That is the difficulty any faithful Christian would have in swallowing this latest rubbish that Barry Grider is all too willing to print in FH's church bulletin.

Over and over many of us ask ourselves, when such

drivel emanates from FH with the apparent approval of the elders, how long will it be before more people wake up to the changes that are taking place at this once bulwark of the faith congregation and join those of us who pray that they will make an about-face and return to the close walk in the old paths they once were so careful to follow.

—P.O. Box 592  
Granby MO 64844



*The following letter was first written privately to brother Elkins. After it became clear that Elkins was not going to answer it, brother Pogue decided to submit it for publication in CFTF as an open letter. We thought it would fit well following Pogue's excellent article dealing with the same subject.*

*The brother Elkins we knew thirty years ago would have had no problem answering it, but at some point between then and now the man we once knew ceased to be. Whatever afflicted brother Elkins seems to have infected a number of brethren. In some ways some brethren remind us of King Saul, starting out so well, but coming to a sad end—all of it accomplished by their own hand. —Editor*

## OPEN LETTER TO GARLAND ELKINS FROM CHARLES POGUE

Dear brother Garland:

When I was a young man I heard many good things said about a brother in Christ by the name of Garland Elkins. He was, I was assured, a Gospel preacher who loved the truth, preached the truth, defended the truth, and had a vast amount of the scripture committed to his memory. This man, Garland Elkins, I was told, was one who hated error in any form and would never fellowship it in anyway, either directly or indirectly.

It was finally my privilege to study under this man at the Memphis School of Preaching for two years. It was my impression that all I had heard about this Christian gentleman and preacher was entirely true. I appreciated studying under you, brother Elkins.

During the week of July 17-23, 2011, I went to the website of the Forest Hill Church of Christ, as I occasionally do, and opened the link to the July 12 bulletin. I found it consisting mostly of an article by one Rob Hatchett. The article was entitled, "Where Are the Future Leaders?" I strongly recommend you read it if you have not done so. I read the article, and when I finished, I sat in sadness and dismay that such an article would be printed with obvious endorsement in the Forest Hill News. I immediately wrote an article in response to its attack upon the church. If/where followed, such an approach will change the New Testament church into little more than a religious country club practicing a neo-form of

the social gospel. My article is scheduled for publication in the August Issue of Contending For The Faith. Other information concerning the Forest Hill News article by Hatchett will also appear in the same edition.

This past Saturday, along with some other deeply concerned brethren, we traced down the identity of Rob Hatchett. We discovered that the congregation of which he is a member is the Clear Creek Church of Christ in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He has confirmed to us that he is the author of the article. Garland, having visited the website of that congregation, I hesitate even to call it a congregation of the Lord's blood-bought body. I have no hesitation in saying it is more like a denomination than a congregation of the church of Christ.

Brother Garland, I would like to ask you to do one thing as a favor to me. Please visit the website of that congregation, and navigate to the sermon page on the site (the link is: <http://www.clearcreekcoc.org/sermons>). You need watch no more than ten or fifteen minutes of the "sermon" for 12/19/2010, "Silent Night." If, brother Elkins, you can observe the rubbish that is there, keeping in mind that Rob Hatchett's hatchet-job on the truth was printed, with approval, in the Forest Hill Bulletin, and not be willing to admit that grave and seriously damaging changes are occurring in the matter of fellowship at Forest Hill, my heart will be broken. It is not the heinousness of the condition of the Clear Creek church that provokes my concern over the article. Rather, I found the

writing to be offensive, a derogatory attack upon the church, and an attempt to compromise unwavering preaching of the truth by utilizing a pragmatic approach to achieve what the author assumes to be a desirable and utilitarian goal. Indeed, if we retain our young people through the tactics he endorses and advances, they will not be qualified to lead their own souls in the direction of heaven, much less the souls of others! Most of all, I was deeply grieved and alarmed that this erroneous material was fed to all who receive the Forest Hill News.

When the Forest Hill Bulletin of February 10, 2009, appeared, containing (1) the “I Drew My Circle Again” (really, I grew my circle again) article, (2) the excerpted material from Tyler Young’s 2008 Lubbock lecture (that was so bad Tommy Hicks refused to print in the lectureship book and the Lubbock elders excised from the CDs before circulation), and (3) Barry Grider’s article, “I Got Used to It,” endorsing both of the above, I was sickened. But the illness I felt from that issue of the bulletin in no way compares with my shock and dismay over the July 12, 2011, issue.

I would be interested in knowing if you or any of your fellow instructors endorse the material in the Hatchett article, and if you do not, will any of you be willing to speak respectfully to the Forest Hill elders over any concerns you might—and should—have concerning brother Grider’s repeated publication and endorsement of unsound material in the Forest Hill News? Additionally, will anyone associated with Forest Hill or MSOP contact Rob Hatchett and point out to him the numerous errors in what he has written? (Of course, if you did so, his embarrassing question would doubtless be, “Why did Barry Grider publish it with approbation in the Forest Hill News if it was so filled with error?”)

It may be that only a handful of alumni are very concerned with the direction that both Forest Hill and MSOP have taken in recent years. Nevertheless, I am thoroughly convinced our concerns are well founded. I greatly fear that unless someone puts a stop to this unseemly tendency soon, the congregation and the school will eventually move so far to the left they cannot be salvaged. Moreover, their consider-

able influence will doubtless drag hundreds of congregations along with them, jeopardizing not only their own souls, but also the souls of many once faithful brethren.

I pray that at least one individual directly associated with MSOP, preferably from the faculty, will find the courage to distance himself from his devotion to the school and the congregation long enough to take a close and objective look at the path which both began travelling a few years ago. Brother Garland, will you be the one to take this stand for the truth, perhaps admittedly at great cost? If such material as mentioned above in the Forest Hill News is any indication, movement down this path of fellowship compromise is accelerating. And if the Forest Hill elders see nothing wrong with such material as the Hatchett article, one wonders what programs and/or compromises may be in the planning stages behind closed doors.

These conspicuous changes in direction and emphasis began surfacing in earnest with the Dave Miller/Apologetics Press/Gospel Journal/GBN situations (the recent announcement of the MSOP-GBN alliance also being troublesome). However, they have since spread like cancer to involve, explicitly or implicitly, fellowship with Mac Deaver, Sunset, Lake Tahoe encampment, Bear Valley, and other questionable works and brethren. Since I, through distance and circumstances, never had a real opportunity to maintain a close connection with MSOP, I believe I have been able to make an unbiased assessment of the situation that exists with the Forest Hill church and the school. The assessment I am forced to make weighs heavy upon my heart, and I will continue to pray about and do whatever else I can do to encourage others to look at the situation through unprejudiced eyes. If they do, I am convinced they will share my concerns.

I write this note with respect, considering myself lest I also be tempted or fail to grasp my own weaknesses and shortcomings.

Your brother,  
Charles Pogue  
Class of 1995

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**[EDITORIAL STATEMENT—**The quoted comments from brother Barry Grider immediately following these remarks prefaced his Sunday evening sermon on “Motivation” delivered at the Forest Hill Church of Christ (FH) on July 17, 2011. As may be seen in his quoted preface, Grider refers to “so-called conservative churches of Christ” and to “every congregation, conservative in nature”. Although not the only term whereby the Holy Spirit in the New Testament references the church of our Lord, in Rm. 16:16 the Spirit clearly referred to the largest and smallest organized entity of those saved from their sins when He employs the term churches of Christ. I do not fully know what Grider means by “so-called conservative churches of Christ” and “every congregation, conservative in nature” because he did not explicitly (in so many words) define his terms. I know that to use the terms “conservative” and “conservative in nature” when referencing a church of Christ is one way of describing a faithful congregation. Furthermore, when defined in the light of the totality of the Bible’s teaching bearing on the subject (in this case the Lord’s church), the term conservative is in harmony with the apostle Peter’s directive of, **“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”** (1 Peter 4:11). **I also know that “every church, conservative in nature”, beginning with her elders, is a church that conserves New Testament authority by believing and practicing only what is authorized by the New Testament, leaving undone that for which there is no New Testament authority, and that which is expressly forbidden** (Col. 3:17). Moreover, I know that no congregation of the Lord’s people is conservative (faithful to the Lord in word and deed in conserving the authority of the Lord as revealed in the words of the New Testament) if it does not conduct its affairs according to Paul’s apostolic directive found in Col. 3:17. And, when such is the case with a church or a church member, I also know that said church or member is not walking by faith, but by their own human council (2 Cor. 5:7). Further, I know that a church of Christ is not in submission to the precept set out by the apostle Paul in Col. 3:17 when her elders lead the church, and the church follows them, in extending fellowship to one or more unrepentant false teachers and those who fellowship brethren who extend their fellowship to false teachers. I also know that a church of Christ is not conservative when her elders lead the church they oversee in withdrawing fellowship from brethren who in doctrine and practice abide by Rm. 16:17, 18; Col. 3:17; 2 John 8-11; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Jude 3, et al.

In using Rob Hachett’s article, included in its entirety following Grider’s quoted remarks about it, Grider has to a certain extent by implication defined for us his understanding of what a “conservative” congregation is. That is the case with Grider unless he wants to confess that he used a liberal brother’s article to teach FH, a church Grider thinks is “conservative in nature”, how to better serve God. Hachett is an active member of the liberal Clear Creek Church of Christ, Chattanooga, TN. The proof that the Clear Creek Church of Christ is liberal is found in the articles in this issue of CTF. **(By liberal I mean those who in word and deed practice and teach that which looses men from what God has bound on them in His authoritative New Testament.)**

1. Does Barry Grider, consider the Clear Creek Church of Christ, Chattanooga, TN a church that is “conservative in nature”?
2. Do the FH elders consider the Clear Creek Church of Christ, Chattanooga, TN a church that is “conservative in nature”?
3. Does the MSOP faculty consider the Clear Creek Church of Christ, Chattanooga, TN a church that is “conservative in nature”?

The FH elders would do well to understand that doing only what is authorized by the New Testament of Jesus Christ is that with which they ought to be concerned than anything else before it’s too late.—DPB]

## JULY 17, 2011 GRIDER STATEMENT ABOUT ROB HATCHETT’S ARTICLE

*Each week the congregation produces a bulletin and sister Sanders and I do our best to get that bulletin out on time and others come in and help us with that and I know you appreciate your bulletin and I know that you enjoy getting that and from time to time many of you tell me so. And I just want you to know I really appreciate all of the positive feedback that I’ve received concerning the article this past week, not one that I wrote, it was a guest article. It presents a very, very serious problem for so-called conservative churches of Christ and I would urge all of you, if you have not already read the article, to do so. It’s something that every congregation, conservative in nature, needs to consider before it’s too late, but I appreciate those of you who commented.”*



# Where Are the Future Leaders?

**Rob Hatchet (sic)**

It’s never easy to do a self-evaluation when you know there’s an area that needs improvement. It’s like going to the dentist when you know you have a cavity. Sometimes, though, we need to ask and answer some tough questions in order to begin making positive changes.

Here’s the main question as we start this self-evaluation: Why have so many young people been in our church

youth groups but not remained faithful to the New Testament church? We take pride in huge youth groups and record enrollments at Christian universities, but there’s a clear drop off in commitment to the church family when the young adult years roll around.

Unfortunately, I’ve realized that many churches are reluctant to ask the question “Why?” A few years back, the

church I was attending held a congregational meeting after a number of young families with children had left. I spoke up at this meeting and asked, “Are we even going to evaluate why these people left and see if there are any changes/improvements we need to make?” That question was quickly met with the response, “Worship is not entertainment, and we don’t come here to be entertained.” If I’ve heard this response once, I’ve heard it a thousand times. This has become a generic response to try to doctrinally avoid any discussion of improvements we can make in various aspects of our congregations.

So, the point of this article is to force us to ask and answer the questions: Why are we losing so many young Christians? How can we stop losing them?

The self-evaluation starts now...

Question #1: Does your church have a system to track the kids that have graduated from your youth group over the past 10 years?

Most college kids never “place membership” at a church during college so they don’t have an eldership looking out (sic) for their spiritual lives during the years they need shepherding the most! Unfortunately, I have found that most elderships don’t have a plan in place to track their kids after high school. A continued support system from their childhood church family will help many young people as they face the temptations of becoming adults.

If I could give each congregation one homework assignment, it would be to create a list of every youth group member over the past 10 years. Start searching for each one’s current address, email, and phone number. From there, begin staying in touch with them on a regular basis, even if they may not live in your immediate area.

While we’re on youth groups, what type of spiritual interaction does your church youth have with other generations in your church? We have segregated youth groups so much from the rest of the congregation with their own devotionals, service projects, classes, and mission trips that many teens never get a real picture of what it’s like to be a Christian adult. Often youth only see adults engaged in spiritual activities within the regularly scheduled worship services. And even at these services, watch a family arrive at church...they disperse to separate parts of the building, sometimes never to reunite due to the age-segregated worship and classes.

We must make sure we paint a better picture of what it’s like to be a Christian adult. This is done through cross-generational activities. Young men need to see older men praying together, serving together, and discussing life as Christians in activities outside the regularly scheduled meeting times. They need to see Christianity play out in real life. As you begin to invite your former youth group members back to church, make sure you have spiritual activities in which they can participate with other adults outside of worship services

and regular classes.

Question #2: Is your congregation “relevant” to Christians in their 20s?

Put yourself in the shoes of a 20-year old who visits your congregation. How would you feel after visiting your church? Did you sing newer songs? Did you use technology in the service? Was there a class for your age? Did you feel welcomed?

While I realize these type questions have caused division among congregations, we have to face the fact that our youth are being drawn especially to community/non-denominational (sic) churches that are focused on being “relevant” to today’s world.

I’ve heard all my life that we aren’t “consumers” in church that have to be entertained. Unfortunately, I think we’ve said that so many times that it’s become an excuse for not attempting to be attractive to the younger generations. In doing so, congregations have often lost a sense of relevance to today’s society.

Have you seen one of the new buildings that McDonalds is building for their restaurants? It is much more trendy/modern/relevant than its older buildings. They have two-way fireplaces, stone exteriors, and granite countertops throughout. However, it’s still serving the same burgers, fries, and McNuggets that McDonalds has always served. The product is the same—the look and feel of the restaurant is just more relevant to today’s society.

Just like McDonalds hasn’t changed what it serves, we don’t have to change the Gospel that we are serving. We cannot change! However, we have to realize that those leaving the church in their 20s are consistently saying it’s because the congregation where they worship, though doctrinally sound, is out of touch with what they face and their needs in their Christian walk of life. Jesus’ ministry consisted of meeting people’s needs and then sharing the Gospel with them. The greatest need for people today in their 20s is the need for social interaction and social connection. This is essentially true for those that are not married.

Here’s the thing we know: The world (through Satan) is very good at meeting social needs. Very good! The church needs to be very good as well. The men’s ministry in our congregation always has scheduled events we can invite any male visitor or person in the community in their 20s. When we meet someone, our next statement is usually:

“Would you like to play basketball with us Tuesday night?”

“The 20s will take a short term mission trip to West Virginia, will you help?”

“Do you play softball? We’ve got 3 teams at the church”

“Our Young Professionals meet every Thursday night for dinner. Would love to have you join us.”

“Saturday the 20s are going to clean gutters and windows for the widows. Can you help?”

By fulfilling the relevant social needs, it will give more opportunities to develop relationships and share the Gospel through Bible study and service projects.

Question #3: Does your congregation put more focus on simply filling a pew on Sunday or on being a Christian?

Something I hear over and over from people in their 20s who formerly attended the Church is that the congregation they attended was more concerned about it being “the most doctrinally correct church” than they were about helping members truly develop a relationship with God. While that may come across as judgmental, this is a very real perception, and it is something that each congregation should evaluate.

When discussing with one elder the topic of losing our youth, he told me the reason we have lost so many is because they didn’t hear enough sermons about things like “Women’s Role in the Church.” I told him that he just proved he was completely out of touch. Those leaving the church are saying that women’s role, musical instruments, denominations, baptism, etc. were forced on them so much that they never learned how to truly develop a relationship with God through worship, prayer, service, and meditation because every class or lesson always turned to doctrine.

I taught a 2-week series in a Wednesday night adult class. The first week I asked typical doctrinal questions and asked for all responses to be Scripture. Questions were asked like “Why don’t we use instruments?”, “Why do we take the Lord’s Supper each Sunday?”, and “Why aren’t women in leadership roles?” People were very enthusiastically answering every question and had every verse memorized.

The next week I started by quoting 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” I then asked everyone to share with us their “reason” for the hope they have.

Silence.

More Silence.

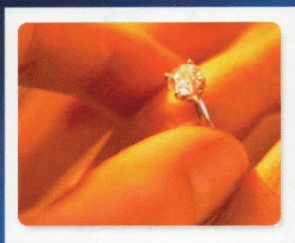
These same participants were answering enthusiastically the week before when it came to the doctrinal questions. But when it came to a basic question regarding their hope in Christ, it was as if they had never thought about that question and for sure had never shared with others. Hence, the need for congregations to ask Question #3.

Satan is very good at making the world’s desires attractive, and he is going to give it his all to win our youth and young adults. For the future of our congregations, we have to make sure we are Striving to teach the Truth to all ages.

(*Forest Hills News*, July 12, 2011 via *Think*, June, 2011)

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## Directory of Churches...

### **-Alabama-**

**Holly Pond**—Church of Christ, 10221 Hwy 278, Holly Pond, AL 35083, Sun. 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 6:30 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., (256) 507-1776, (256) 507-1778.

### **-Colorado-**

**Denver**—Piedmont Church of Christ, 1602 S. Parker Rd. Ste. 109, Denver, CO 80231, Sunday: 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. www.piedmontcoc.net, Lester Kamp, evangelist. (720) 535-5807.

### **-England-**

**Cambridgeshire**—Cambridge City Church of Christ, meeting at The Manor Community College, Arbury Rd., Cambridge, CB4 2JF. Sun., Bible Study--10:30 a.m., Worship-- 11:30 a.m.; Tue. Bible Study--7:30 p.m. www.CambridgeCityCoC.org.uk. Keith Sisman, Gospel Preacher. Contacts: Keith Sisman [By phone inside USA (281) 475-8247]; Inside the U.K.: Cambridge (England): 01223-911243]; Alternative Cambridge contacts: Joan Moulton - 01223-210101; Postal/ mailing Address - PO BOX 1, Ramsey Huntingdon, PE26 2YZ United Kingdom

### **-Florida-**

**Ocoee**—Ocoee Church of Christ, 2 East Magnolia Street, Ocoee, FL 34761. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m. Wed. 7:00 p.m. David Hartbarger, Evangelist, (407) 656-2516,

**Pensacola**—Bellview Church of Christ, 4850 Saufley Field Road, Pensacola, FL 32526, Sun. 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m. Michael Hatcher, evangelist, (850) 455-7595.

### **-North Carolina-**

**Rocky Mount**—Scheffield Drive Church of Christ, 3309 Scheffield Dr., Rocky Mount, NC 27802 (252) 937-7997.

### **-South Carolina-**

**Belvedere (Greater Augusta, Georgia Area)**—Church of Christ, 535 Clearwater Road, Belvedere, SC 29841, www.belvederechurchofchrist.org; e-mail belvecoc@gmail.com, (803) 442-6388, Sun.: 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., Evangelist: Ken Chumbley (803) 279-8663.

### **-Oklahoma-**

**Porum**— Church of Christ, 8 miles South of I-40 at Hwy 2, Warner exit. Sun. 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. Allen Lawson, evangelist, email: lawson@starnetok.net.

### **-Texas-**

**Denton area**—Northpoint Church of Christ, 5101 E. University Dr. (Greenbelt Business Park). Mailing address: Northpoint Church of Christ, Greenbelt Business Park, 5101 E. University Dr., Box 6, Denton, TX 76208. E-mail: northpointcoc@hotmail.com. Sunday: 9:30, 10:30, 1:00; Wednesday 7:00. Contact: Dub McClish: 940.387.1429; tgjoriginal@verizon.net.

**Evant**—Evant Church of Christ, 310 West Brooks Drive, Evant, TX 76525. Office: (254) 471-5705; Jess Whitlock, evangelist (254) 471-5717.

**Houston area**—Spring Church of Christ, 1327 Spring Cypress, P.O. Box 39, Spring, TX 77383, (281) 353-2707. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m., David P. Brown, evangelist. Home of the Spring *Contending for the Faith* Lectures beginning the last Sunday in February and the internet school, Truth Bible Institute. www.churchesofchrist.com.

**Huntsville**—1380 Fish Hatchery Rd. Huntsville, TX 77320. Sun. 9 a. m., 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (936) 438-8202.

**New Braunfels**—225 Saenger Halle Rd. Sun: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. Wed. 7:30 p.m. Lynn Parker, evangelist. (830) 625-9367. www.nbchurchofchrist.com.

**Richwood**—1600 Brazosport, Richwood, TX. Sun. 9:30; 10:30 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (979) 265-4256.