



Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God

Volume 21 Number 3 Summer 2020

2020: A Sea of Changes

By Nic Don Stanton Roark

Since the publication of our winter issue, it feels as though the world has changed several times over. In this issue we will offer some updates about how the Historical Society and the archives have been impacted by this global pandemic and how it will affect us going forward. This issue will also highlight the role the Church of God has had in chaotic times in the history.

Annual Meeting

Due to the risk of COVID 19 transmission and the unpredictability around public health measures, the 2020 annual meeting will not be held in person. Instead, we will strive to coordinate the posting of pre recorded videos from presenters on topics that would have been covered at the in person meeting. More details about content and access will be posted on the Historical Society Facebook page, so check there for information and consider following the page for regular communications.

Anderson University

Following the early rapid spread of COVID 19 Anderson was quick to act to

suspend in-person classes and residence just after the scheduled Spring Break. The University intends to reopen to residential students in the fall with social distancing measures in place. The university will also be operating classes on a "HyFlex" model, the intent of which is to be prepared to switch seamlessly between residential and online teaching methods as individual and group needs dictate.

Archives

The archives remained closed and unstaffed following the stay-at-home order and travel restrictions. But because the safety and security of our records is of paramount importance, though the building is closed archival staff have been walking the stacks every three days to look for leaks, pest infestations, and large deviations in temperature or relative humidity. In addition to the digital collections, such as historical issues of the Gospel Trumpet, that are always available through the university library website, we have continued to fulfil record requests digitally. The broad impact of the shut-down also greatly reduced these requests, so during this time I have been able to work from home through the university's VPN (Virtual Private Network) and do some major data cleanup on our records. For example, we maintain a database of name rec-

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The *Historian* is published by the Historical Society of the Church of God. Membership is open to all who are interested. Membership dues are \$20 per year (\$15 for students). Checks should be made out to *Historical Society of the Church of God* and sent to Box 702, Anderson IN 46015.

Please send your family stories and photos to the same address. We would love to print them in future issues.

Follow the Church of God Historical Society online through Facebook and Instagram for regular content.

Pres: Gary Agee | Vice Pres: Dale Stultz | Secretary Treasurer: Sadie Evans | Editor: Nic Don Stanton-Roark

ords for 8757 individuals and families associated with the university or the Church of God movement. For high profile individuals this database is cross-indexed with the name authority files maintained by the Library of Congress, so that proper name forms are maintained and used by publishers and historians going forward. This shut-down gave me the rare gift of time to attend to this rather monotonous task.

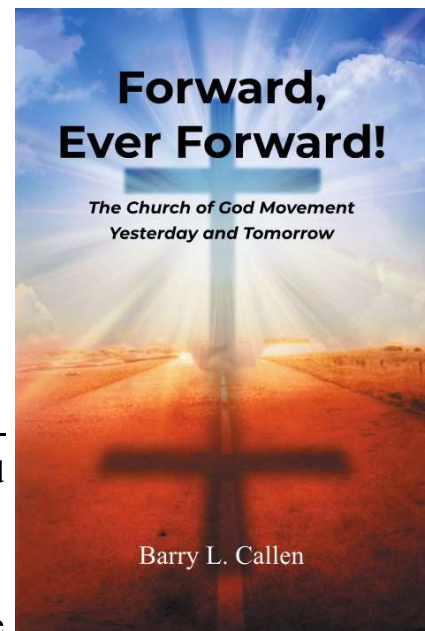
Forthcoming

A new book on the Church of God Movement has been released, as a coordinated publication of Anderson University Press, Emeth Press, and Mid-America Christian University Press. From the release statement: “It takes a serious look at our Movement, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. What got us started, with what problems have we struggled, and what must we do now if we really care about tomorrow. It’s time to rethink our Movement’s identity, central doctrines, and mission strategies in order for it to have a viable future in this fast-changing world.”

Callen seeks to analyze the life cycles of reform movements, identifying Church of God as being “beyond its middle age.” Print and ebook copies can be purchased from amazon.com.

Displaced Persons

Two pieces in this issue relate to the Church of God’s historic role in responding to crisis by rendering assistance to displaced persons. The recurring column of Robert Reardon’s recollections of “movers and shapers” in Chog history looks at Russell Olt, who is a key feature of Marisa Hulstine’s overview of the Displaced Persons Commission (p. 4). Marisa is a 2020 AU graduate who worked for two years as a public history intern in the Church of God Archives and worked with archival materials to produce this essay.

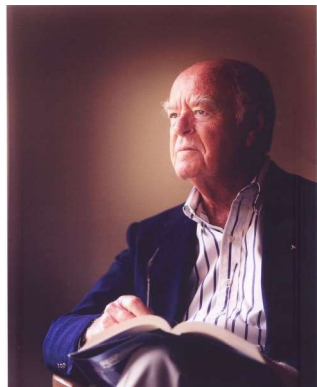


Movers and Shapers in the Church of God:

Russell Olt

By Robert Reardon

This on-going serial captures firsthand recollections from Robert Reardon regarding luminaries in the Movement. See the Winter 2019 issue for details.



He will always be known as The Dean. He was persuaded by John Morrison to leave his post at Wilmington College in Ohio and come to the Anderson Bible Training School in 1924, a phenomenal achievement for Morrison and a turning point for higher education in the Church of God. The Olts moved in across the street from our house at 914 Walnut and we saw a great deal of each other.

Olt was a visionary. It was the idealism of the Reformation Movement that led him to the Church of God and to the basic Christian commitments of his life: World Peace, social justice and equal opportunity for minorities, and a fair shake for the laboring man and woman through the labor movement.

Through his years at the College he helped organize the United Fund, the Council of Social Agencies, the Urban League, the Peace Fellowship, International Youth Convention, the first World Convention of the Church of God, and many other enterprises. He was an inveterate traveler, always keeping a second suitcase packed, ready for a trip to the Coast, a European crossing, or a trip to the far east.

It was in his travel to Germany before World War II that he became aware of what was happening to the Jews, especially physicians he had somehow come to know. He was able to move several of these doctors and their families to the United States before the Holocaust. After the War he was a primary mover in bringing hundreds of displaced persons to the U.S. from Central Europe, finding sponsors and homes for them among Church of God people.

He was a man with many facets to his personality. He was the strict academician, legalistic, personally presiding over the academic program of a thousand students, insisting that all regulations be meticulously observed, barking at the slothful and evildoers, pushing Anderson College relentlessly toward accreditation standards in the North Central Association. As a classroom teacher he gave impossible assignments,

particularly in his introductory psychology classes where he regularly gave Fs to two-thirds of the class at the 6-week grading period, scaring them out of their minds. No student will ever forget the terror of being called into his office.



But his admiration of the German Universities inspired him to believe that a serious educational program could be created at Anderson and he aimed to do it. Any student who has a degree from Anderson needs to know how much of Dean Olt's persistent insistence on academic excellence is wrapped up in their diploma. He built the College into a credible educational institution, which through the years established a whole new way of thinking about the world out there, far from the ingrown isolation that had begun to foster a cult-like spirit in the early 1920s. He, perhaps more than any other individual, opened the doors of the Church to, the poor, the homeless, the powerless, the destitute, and added the dimension of compassion to the mission of our Movement.

There was another side to this great man. He was a love of food—particularly hamburgers, which we often ate at Tom Dearing's [Eastside Drug Store] late at night. He had a wonderful sense of humor, and a yen for practical jokes that amused him greatly. But for those in trouble, persons with serious problems who came to him for help—and through the years they came in large numbers—they remember him as a friend, confessor, counsellor, whose wisdom and insight brought healing and release during their dark night of the soul.

Dean Olt was a large, large man.

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Displaced Persons: The Church of God's Response to Refugees

By Marisa Hulstine

After the events of World War II, a massive refugee crisis hit the continent of Europe. Millions were displaced, including Jews, Eastern Europeans, and ethnic Germans who had no home to go to due to destruction of homes, or from being expelled from their country of residence.



The big question many of the Allied powers were asking was, how do we respond to such a major crisis?

With the official inauguration of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 and the founding of the Christian World Service (CWS) in 1946, there seemed to be a major coalition focused on helping war-ravaged Europe. The Church of God found a special place in which they were able to work with these two important bodies. The CWS and WCC were both founded out of a desire for to establish an ecumenical movement of churches dedicated to helping the poor, widows, orphans, and refugees. They had theological differences, but also unity in their shared goal of helping those less fortunate.

Background of Displaced Persons

A displaced person is someone who has been uprooted by war, discrimination, or political pressure. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the Allies were in charge of running the displaced persons camps. Occasionally, these camps were located in former concentration camps like Buchenwald in Germany. The conditions were austere, and many families had been separated by the war. Polish citizens who had been put into concentration camps, sent to forced labor in Germany, or expelled from their homes were scattered in the DP Camps. There were Jews who had survived the concentration camps, death marches, and mass killings who were attempting to rebuild their lives. Later, ethnic Germans came into DP camps because they had been expelled from their homes due to their German heritage.

Even though conditions in the camps were bad, life went on, and people either reunited or rebuilt their families. The Central Tracing Program

which was run by the UNRRA was in charge of determining what happened to family members and under the best-case scenario, reunite families. Some who had lost their family chose to remarry and begin a new family, so the DP camps were not always a place of hopelessness, with many weddings and celebrations occurring.

The DP camps could not continue as a permanent settlement for people, and the response for the United States was the creation of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which authorized 200,000 DPs to resettle in the USA. Brazil, Argentina, and Canada, among others, also chose to act by letting immigrants in to rebuild their lives. By 1950 the DP Act allowed Jews to enter the country, and the USA accepted 80,000. The response to DPs helped the camps holding them to be primarily closed by 1952.

Why Did the Church of God Get Involved?

The head of the Displaced Person Commission of the Church of God was Dean Russell Olt of Anderson College. Charles E. Brown, former editor of the Gospel Trumpet, was one of the commission members, and his background provides some insight into why the Church of God decided to assist displaced persons. Brown had an interest in the ecumenical unity of the church, but was uncertain of how it would be achieved. The ecumenical councils that formed during his lifetime struggled due to differences in spiritual practices like communion and ecclesiastical concerns, such as the ordination of women. In Brown's opinion, church unity could not be had over practices that were not scriptural. Even though he was not sure of complete church unity he saw world church conferences as a helpful initiative. It was a natural pull of the Holy Spirit to seek unity as a church. Brown wrote, "We not only concede, but gladly assert, that these conferences and the movements which they represent are an indication of the urge of the Spirit of God working in all Christians throughout the world, leading them toward the unity for which Christ prayed" (Brown, *The Editor Speaks: Which Way Lies Unity?* CE Brown Papers, CHOG 563).

By assisting the WCC and CWS, the Church of God was uniting under a common goal of helping the widows, orphans, and the poor of the world. The Church of God was involved in taking on several projects which were created

by CWS. The work of the CWS was not limited to resettlement, but also to the relief of those who stayed in Europe. They implemented, with the help of the Lutheran World Relief and the National Catholic Welfare Program the CROP initiative (Christian Rural Overseas Program). This program allowed for the mass transportation of corn, wheat, beans, etc. to Europe. The CWS implemented the "Great Hour of Sharing" which they used to finance the relief work. The goal of CWS was "to do in partnership what none of us could hope to do as well alone," and this fits with the goal of unity Brown was after with the Church of God. Though there was no universal church formed by such an initiative there was unity among church bodies to assist in the common goal of social justice.

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At first, with the start of the Displaced Persons Commission, there was the goal of assisting those families who had ties to the Church of God in Europe. Before the start of World War II, there were 80 congregations in Poland and East Germany, but because of the Nazi party's harsh stance against churches that did not stand with them, many congregations were broken apart. Many people were sent to forced labor camps, became POWs, went missing in the east, or faced other sorts of violence. Those who survived the war lived in the camps, and there were a few Church of God pastors who interviewed possible DPs to see if they fit the quota to enter the USA. Aletta Van der Breggen was the Church of God representative for DPs in Europe, and she handled the casework and the correspondence with the commission. Eventually, the goal expanded to not just helping Church of God families, but families of different religious backgrounds. The displaced persons settled by the Church of God in this article fell under the 1948 Displaced Persons Act.

Families Assisted by the Church of God

Several families were assisted under the Church of God's Displaced Persons Commission. Some of the stories featured in this piece went through the application and sponsorship process in 1951 while the Displaced Persons

Act was still in place. Many of the citizens came from different backgrounds, some were Poles, Russians, Germans, Serbians, and other

Eastern European regions. The commission of the Church of God worked in cogency with the CWS and the WCC who handled the paperwork and helped fund travel overseas to the USA. I want to feature a few of the families helped by the Church of God to provide

insight into the Christian purpose of helping refugees.

These families were not all Church of God, some were Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran Christians. The CWS did not discriminate in who they assisted because their purpose was not to evangelize the people to a certain Christian movement or denomination but to serve them with love, with the hope that they might discover Jesus through them. This initiative was not focused completely on saving souls,



but working toward a common goal of helping people in need, people God calls humanity to assist.

Margita Alksnis, b. 1911

Many families came from Eastern European countries who had fled from the Soviet forces as they liberated formerly German territory. The USSR brought communist governments to areas as they neared Germany, with attendant violence and unrest. The conversion to communism was brutal, and any person considered an enemy to the USSR could be punished or killed for not submitting. For Margita Alksnis, an evangelical Lutheran from Latvia, this was the case. She fled to the West and lived in a camp until she was able to secure immigration to America through the Church of God.

As stated prior, POWs from Poland or other Eastern European countries found themselves



File photo of Czeslaw Bylinski, b. 1905

in DP camps. Many had been in German hands since the start of the war in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. Since many of these POWs were separated from their families they had no contact with them

back home. One of these men, Czeslaw Bylinski, an orthodox man from Poland, was an officer who spent World War II as a POW. He had been married, but by 1945 he had lost contact with his wife and child and doubted they were still alive. In response, he chose to remarry a German woman named, Lorentia Gebhardt in 1951. Bylinski, being an Eastern European man, chose to marry a German woman who had an interesting background herself.

Lorentia, an evangelical, was raised by a lawyer father who held a government job. She spent time in the BDM (League of German Girls), an equivalent to the male Hitler Youth. Youth organizations in Nazi Germany were meant to indoctrinate the ideology of Aryan supremacy. Once the war started, Lorentia had to serve in the Reich Labour Service for six months as Germany made it compulsory for single women to contribute to the war effort. After the war, she married Czeslaw, suggesting that the indoc-



Lorentia Gebhardt Bylinski, b. 1921, ca. 1946

trination she received as a youth was not effective on her. Since she was applying to emigrate, she had to provide a background of any political activities she did with the Nazi Party.

Her choices with the Nazi Party were not her own ideology. Many women were forced to participate in activities like BDM and all women had to give up time in the labor service during the war. This applied to another woman, Lisa, who married a Serbian/Yugoslavian POW in 1948, Dusan Stamenkovic. She had spent six years in BDM and close to a year in the Reich Labour Service and the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) as part of her requirement as a German single woman.

There were a few families whose lives as refugees were very complicated because their displacement occurred way before World War II. For example, Reinhard Semf, a Church of God follower originally from Russia, had to flee Siberia and the Bolsheviks with his family in 1930 where they ended up in Japan. For a while, his family farmed in Japan until he left for Germany in 1939 and he married a woman, Erika Krueger in 1941 who he met at the Church of God in Berlin. Since the war had started, he was unable to travel back to Japan and he was forced to hunker down with his wife's parents in East Prussia. Eventually, they had to flee the area once the Soviets neared to avoid any persecution and violence they could face from them.



Semf Family, ca. 1951

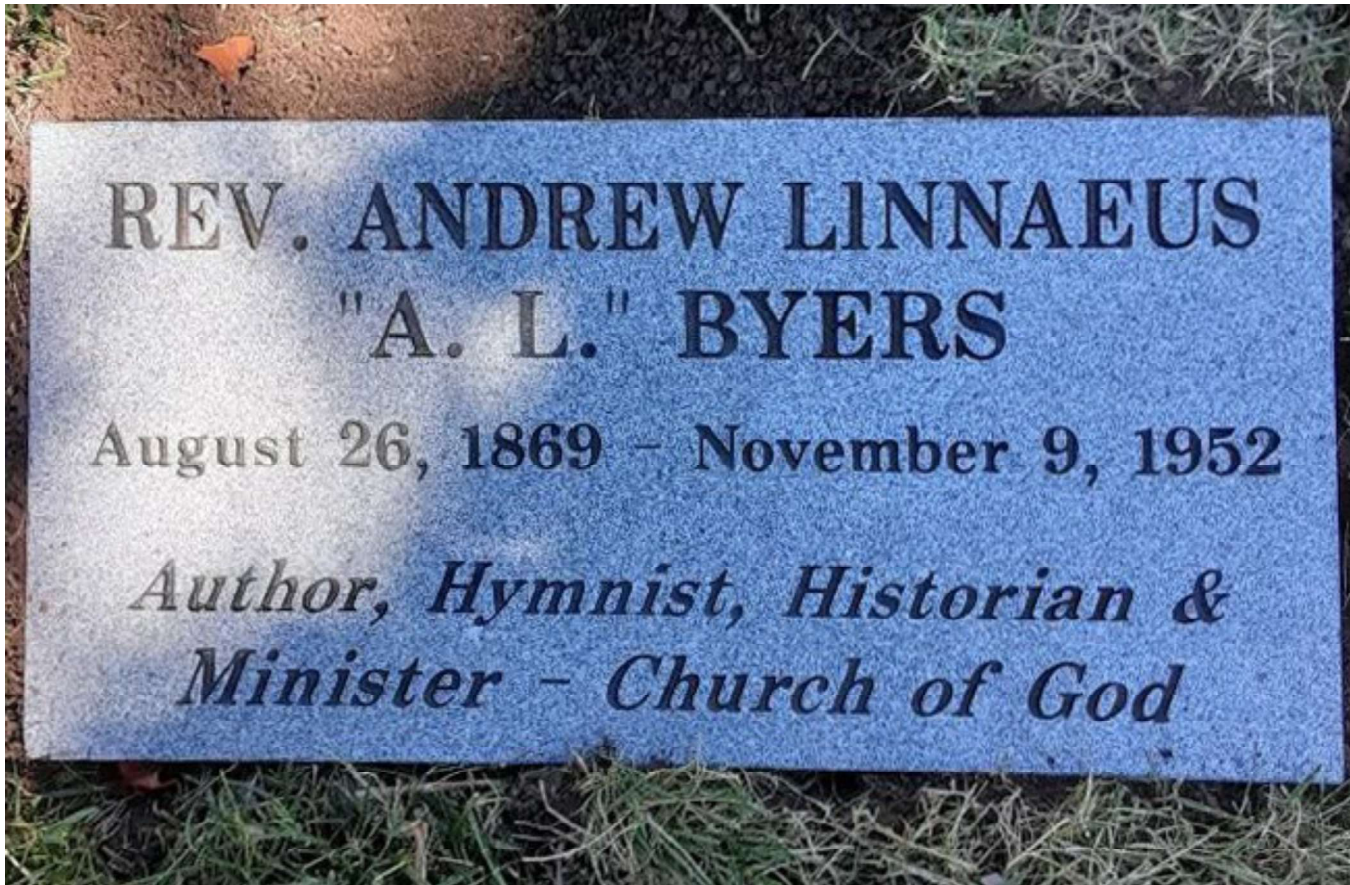
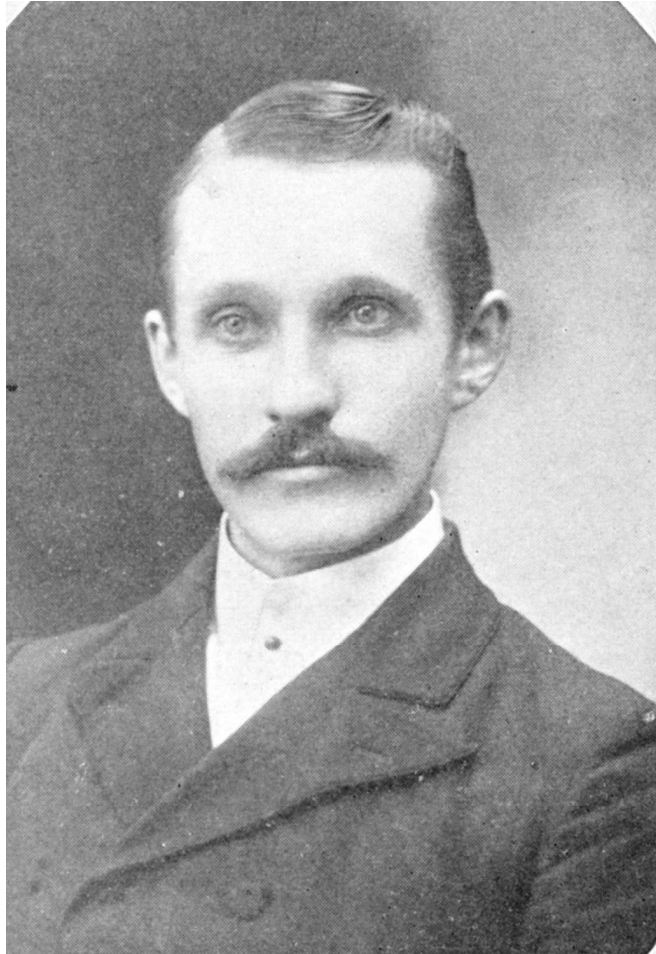
These were the situations that some of the families brought to the Church of God Displaced Persons Commission. All were displaced in some way by the war, whether they were POWs

A. L. Byers Memorial Campaign

Dale Rude offers the following statement of thanks:

I would like to thank everyone from the Historical Society of the Church of God for your donations toward the purchase and installation of a gravestone for Andrew Linnaeus "A. L." Byers. We exceeded our initial goal and were able to purchase an upgraded stone for this great man of God. The completed gravestone is shown in the picture and will be installed as soon as the cemetery is open again for business. Thanks again, and may God bless you and bless our memory of "A. L." Byers.

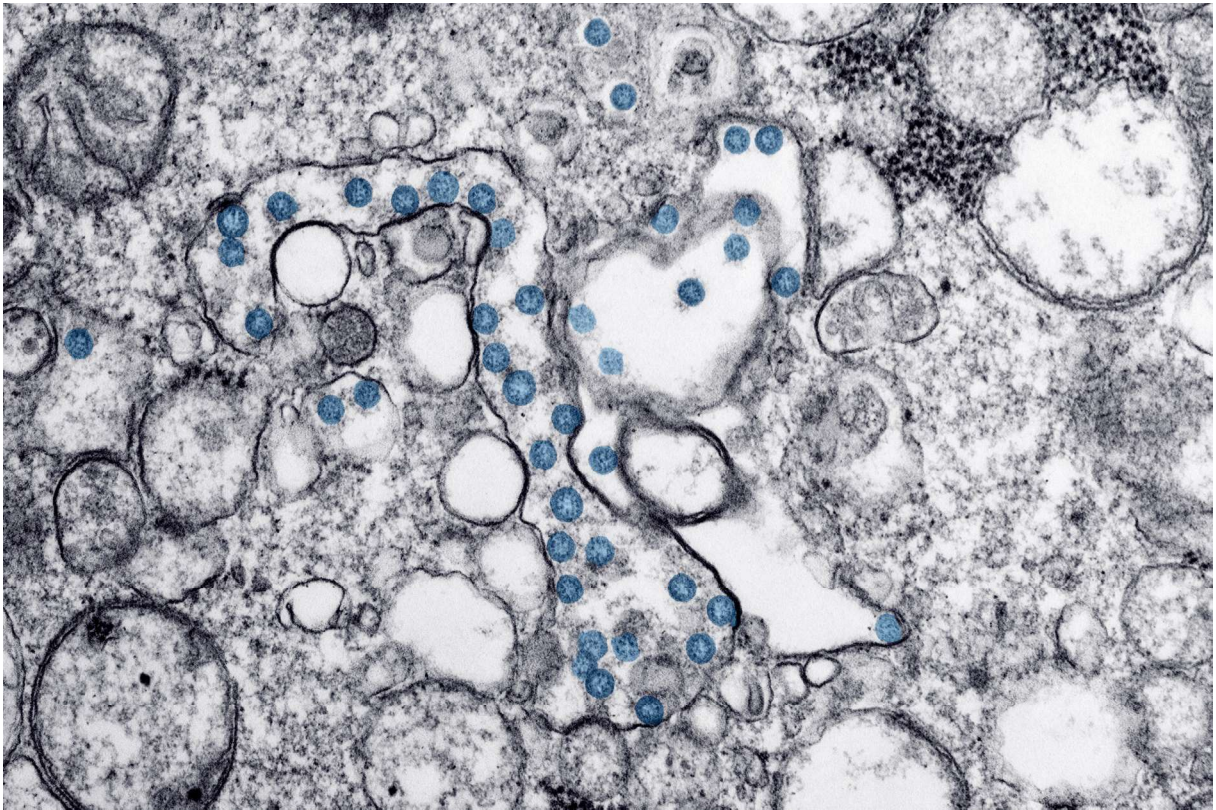
The memorial stone was installed on May 28, 2020.



Displaced Persons, cont. from p. 6

or forced from their homes, and the Church of God with the CWS and WCC were there with open arms to help them. This major event highlighted the attitude the Church of God had toward refugees, it was a shared Christian duty, even if ecumenism could not be reached, there could be consensus to assist those in trouble. By looking at an event that happened in America's past it can provide insight into how the church should respond when it comes to Syrian refugees or those seeking asylum from Latin America. The refugee crisis is still in existence today, and as Christians, as the Church of God has shown, there is an opportunity to help people.

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Transmission electron microscopical image of an isolate from the first U.S. case of COVID-19, formerly known as 2019-nCoV. The spherical viral particles, colored blue, contain cross-section through the viral genome, seen as black dots. (Image and description courtesy CDC Public Image Database.)

In this issue: Responses to COVID-19

Annual meeting update

In-depth on Displaced Persons Commission

Russell Olt remembered