



Atlanta Church of Christ in Gwinnett
www.acocg.org | info@acocg.org

*The birds of the air come and perch in its branches.
- Matthew 13:32*

Issue 28
October 16, 2018

In this issue: Important lessons, gifted speakers – p. 1-2
Catching up with the Bunemas – p. 3-6
Serving the community with the Latino Ministry – p. 7
Wishing the Desirs and Galbreaths all the best – p. 8
Bible talk in the park – p. 8

Guest speakers encourage and inspire us!

In the month of September, the AcoCG was privileged to learn from some wonderful guest speakers.

On Sunday, September 9th, Dr. Mark Ottenweller caught us up on the progress HOPE *worldwide* is making with their Early Childhood Development training program for caregivers and their households, changing the future for thousands of children across Africa. You can help by direct donations, and by walking in and raising funds through the Superheroes4Orphans walkathon on November 3rd. (Please go to <https://www.hopewwafrica.org/> for more information!)



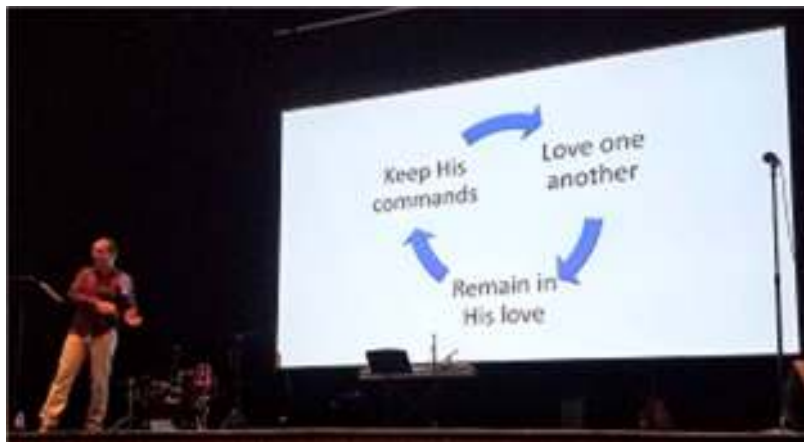
Then on the following Sunday, Twaambo Chikoye, the evangelist from our sister congregation in Lusaka, Zambia, brought us news from that congregation and a sermon on "Finding Contentment."



On the weekend of September 29th-30th, Duncan and Lisa Combrie from the church in Durban, South Africa, came to share some vital lessons from the Word with us. On Saturday morning, Lisa met with a small group of the women for a workshop on facing our fears—



—and the next morning, Duncan taught us about “The Fruit of Incredible Love.” While they were here, they were delighted to find the Vermaaks (in the center of the photo; long-time friends of the Combries as well as of our own Mukenyas) were in town at the same time, so they were encouraged as well as encouraging us.



Our thanks to each of these gifted, inspirational teachers!

Catching up with...



Alex & Teenella, Misenga
and Kamuanya Bunema

Where are you from originally? What would you like people to know about where you're from?

Alex: Actually, Alex is my middle name—my first name is Kalonji, and I'm from Congo, in central Africa. I grew up in Kinshasa, the capital city. I travel internationally most of the time now, but don't get to Kinshasa often—in fact, I haven't been back there in over 25 years. A lot has changed – I still have family there, who say I wouldn't recognize it. Congo is a very developed country; the only thing holding Africa back is politicians putting money in their own pockets – it's the people and families that suffer. We have Pizza Huts, McDonald's, etc. It's where the Rumble in the Jungle was fought—the famous George Foreman-Muhammad Ali fight in 1974.

Teenella: I was born in Newark, New Jersey; I have two older sisters and a younger brother. My mother is from South Carolina and my father was raised in Newark, N.J. where they met; my grandparents on my father side moved from Charleston, S.C., and married and had eleven kids. My father was raised in the Islam religion which they were called Moorish American. My mother was the sixth child out of ten kids; she lost her mother at age four due to birth complications. When I think of Newark I think of my mom who is deceased, family, friends, holidays, going to my grandmother's and grandfather's houses, Thanksgivings and Christmas gatherings. My mom was a Christian who loved the Lord. She always prayed for her family and friends—one of her favorite scriptures was Psalm 23. My mom took us to church, and we had family dinners every Sunday.

How did you come to live in the Atlanta area?

Teenella: We moved here because Alex was a professional boxer and changed management.

Alex: We moved here originally in 2002, but in '05 we moved to Memphis.

Teenella: Then we moved back here in 2017 so our daughters could have more opportunities for college.

What do you do for a living? How did you choose/come to be in that field?

Alex: I was a professional boxer for over 20 years. I chose boxing because my dad actually challenged me – I would fight on the street a lot, so my dad challenged me to do it as a sport with discipline. I fell in love with it and stuck with it. I spent most of my amateur career in Africa – I was a five-time national champion, two-time African champion. After winning three title belts—junior, middleweight, and welterweight divisions—I retired from boxing. There's too much politics in the sport now, it's killed the joy of boxing. It was hard on me and my family. Now I inspect oil refineries and nuclear plants all over the world; I've been doing that for over 10 years now. My trainer was a nuclear analyst for nuclear plants, and he encouraged me to go into inspecting as a backup career.

Teenella: It's a good thing he came out of boxing without serious injury – he has to test things all the time for OSHA and it takes a sharp mind!

Alex: I've been an inspector since 2003, and I actually love it! The only bad thing is being away from my family so much – I travel 6 to 7 months of the year. I'm excited to go to work – it's the easiest job, no stress. It's demanding but I love to be challenged!

Teenella: We are artsy people – can't do a 9-to-5 job.

Alex: Everything I've done, I've loved. Besides boxing, I've modeled and acted, and it was a lot of fun doing that. But I've been persecuted for my race, and the way I talk, my demeanor and character.

Teenella: Alex can make friends anywhere, and he has a great work ethic; everything he's asked to do, he does it. He'll work and not complain, which can make others look bad.

Alex would love to open a boxing gym in the future, and he's training people on the side even now. Most people think he drives a truck or is in the military because he's gone so much. He recently went to Chile doing inspections. He speaks French – the Congo was a Belgian colony and his father was a teacher who made sure his kids got the best education possible. He skipped 11th grade, so though he graduated the same year as I did, he's a year younger than me. He has a great memory! He has a lab tech degree so he can draw blood, etc.

Alex: I was trained as a young kid with memorizing, and spent my summers reading three hours a day. That kept us ahead of many of the other kids at school. We tell our girls that they have to use their brains – they read an hour a day or more in the summer. We have two daughters. Kamuanya is the oldest, a senior at Brookwood, getting ready to go to college. She runs track, the 100- and 200-meter dash and the 4 by 100 relay. Kamuanya loves kids and wants to be a pediatrician. Misenga is a sophomore at Brookwood; she also runs track: the 200m, 400m, and 4 by 4 relay. Misenga loves animals and wants to be a vet.

Teenella: I got my cosmetology license at the time we got married in 2000. I couldn't work in my field while Alex was traveling; I was a homemaker. I went to work at the top Memphis salon, because the hours conflicted with the kids' schedules, so Alex encouraged me to start my own. I opened a salon at home, got my business license and did that for four years in Memphis, then moved here. With a home salon you can set your own schedule, and there's more privacy for your clients. It's more intimate and more flexible, and I enjoyed it more than working in a salon, having to pay booth rent, etc. I enjoy working for myself.

I also had a small business I started in 2009 when Alex was laid off. I didn't know I had a talent for creating hair accessories for girls—ponytail holders and headbands, which I got patent. I created one piece, which became a hundred different pieces, and we started selling them at different festivals and things. I still have a lot of pieces, and they *sell*! It's called K & M hair accessories, named for our daughters Kamuanya & Misenga—they're named after Alex's mom and grandmother respectively. They helped sell the accessories, modeled them, and worked in the booth at the flea market. It was fun and taught them the process of creating and selling, the business and marketing side. The pieces are made from beads, so we can make them in any of the school colors or holiday colors, for all occasions – some of the beads change colors!

Now I'm starting my next journey, going back in school at the University of Phoenix for business management. I got my associate degree in February this year, then I kept going. I'm in my third year now, on track to graduate in January 2020 if I don't take any breaks – and I haven't taken any yet. I'm not working right now, but school keeps me really busy; it goes fast! Also, in the future when I've finished my degree, I want to have my own hair salon and a food truck business making American and African food. I love to cook! After the girls graduate, I can take it on the road and travel with Alex and do business everywhere.

Tell us how you first got involved with disciples – what was your first impression of them?

Teenella: My two older sisters and younger brother became disciples, and I'd been coming to a discipling church since I was 15, so I knew all the church songs and the people, and I really liked it. I grew up Pentecostal, and saw a big difference in this church – it was interracial, and the teaching was really different. But I had a boyfriend, so I was distracted. You don't see your need for God when you're young. I thought I had all the time in the world to become a disciple.

But then my boyfriend was murdered, which forced me to leave New Jersey for a different environment. My sister who first became a disciple invited me to Atlanta to live with her here when I was 19, so I came. It was a wake-up call. I kept putting God off—"I know, I know"—"it'll happen in my timing"—but you can be here one minute and gone the next, and I realized I had no relationship with God. The disciples loved up on me, and I had fun with them, then I started again to study, and was baptized when I was 20 here in the Atlanta Arts and Entertainment Ministry.

Alex: I moved to New York, then to Seattle—I've lived all over! My childhood friend from Congo was my roommate in Seattle, and then we moved to Dallas together, where my roommate met disciples and became a disciple. I wasn't happy about it! I persecuted the disciples who came over—I was angry and felt abandoned. God stripped away everything I had worked for. I lost all my boxing earnings; everything was gone, and I was empty. God humbled me! I thought I had it all by my own efforts, and didn't need God – He took it all away, and I couldn't get it back. I went to a convention of the church in Dallas, and the message was about the Titanic. They thought this ship wouldn't sink, so they were not prepared, didn't have enough lifeboats. I thought I was unsinkable, but God showed me He was stronger. After losing it all, I was so humbled it was ridiculous! I struggled for a minute—it was a battle, but God found me another way around it with the help brothers.

Teenella: I had left Atlanta; my older sister got married, and I decided to move in with my older sister in Dallas to get my life together. My sister and her husband were in the ministry then, and I lived with them for three years and was their live-in babysitter while I went to college and later cosmetology school. When I met Alex, I was dating and leading a small Bible talk for Richland College. But God had a different plan; after breaking up with the other brother, I met Alex and we started dating – that was a good move! I thought my husband was in Atlanta, but he was in Dallas.

Alex: Yeah, being humbled by God.

Teenella: He was setting us up!

Alex: God has mysterious ways.

Teenella: February 5 of next year, we will be married for 19 years!

What has surprised you most about life as a disciple?

Alex: How God transformed me – from where I came from, from non-disciple to disciple, it's like two totally different people! My siblings and parents are all still amazed—"How could this guy change 180 degrees from who he was?"

Teenella: The fact that I'm still here! My siblings are not in the ICOC anymore. Some of them decided to be apart of other churches. We're a close family so we really influence one another – so I'm learning to trust and rely God.

What lesson have you learned as a disciple that continues to help you every day?

Alex: I became a Christian because of God; I live trying to please Him and no one else. I travel so much, with no disciples around, so I could treat it like there's no accountability and I'm free to do as I want, but I know I have to answer to God.

Teenella: I have to not rely on myself; I would love to become like my mother—she was a praying woman, and would take an hour to just pray. It's not enough to just read and meditate on the Word – I have to pray and believe God can do anything in my life.

What do you wish other people outside the church knew about following Jesus?

Teenella: Jesus was someone who could relate to people – not on a high pedestal, but He could talk to prostitutes, tax collectors, or anybody; He didn't isolate himself. People think they can't touch him.

Alex: It really inspires me that the Son of God made himself nothing. He could have done so many things, but went through all that He went through so we could have a relationship with God. People used to idolize me as a boxer and as a person. I grew up Catholic, an altar boy, but my heart wasn't in it; I did it for the image, the prestige. I met so many celebrities; I was on the same podium with Pope John Paul II on his African visit, and met Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela, even Michael Jackson. I traveled to almost every continent; there's almost nothing I didn't do. God gave me so much grace – I didn't deserve it!

When I met Teenella, my own family told me not to marry her – I never been in a committed relationship, – until I met Teenella. I'm the third oldest of 9, I've been married the longest and have the oldest kids – no one expected that!

What has your biggest challenge been in following Jesus, and how do you deal with it?

Alex: Being known to a lot of people, with the lifestyle I used to have, and it's a daily battle not to fall back into it. Some are still in it; what they're missing about the victory is God always has something better than what I see with my eyes. He promised, and He's never failed me yet. I've got hope!

Teenella: Trusting people. I've seen a lot as a disciple – I grew up sheltered, and was converted young, and after seeing people mess up and hurt other people, I fall back into not trusting. Satan hurts people, then not-trusting seeps in and I put my guards up. My ultimate goal is trusting God, and not letting people dictate whether I serve or give. I fight through to serve, give, and love no matter what, since no one is perfect. The **Safe People** book has helped!

I was bullied as a kid, so I had to learn to protect myself – things can start out friendly, but girls can get catty. Other girls didn't have dads at home; my dad lived in the house, and my mom was a homemaker. Being bullied made me tough, so I can go into defense mode when I'm pushed. But your kids can feed off that, and I don't want that to happen! They watch, and they can tell you your weaknesses. It's good to be strong, but you can't get help if you're not open. Moving back here, I've had to fight through those battles again, but it's been good, talking with the people in our family group.

What is your favorite scripture?

Teenella: Jeremiah 29:11, my baptism scripture, and Psalm 23 is a childhood favorite I memorized, and Psalm 139. And Roman 8 – we are more than conquerors!

Alex: 1 Corinthians 13! As a young disciple I struggled the most with love, because as a non-Christian I received love but never gave it. Love was my biggest struggle, but as a disciple it's the main thing, so I've made it my goal.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time—interests, hobbies, etc.?

Teenella: Doing hair, working out, listening to music, time with family and friends, movies, vacations, going out as a family.

Alex: Listening to music, especially cultural and international music; working out; time with family and traveling. You can't make a fist with a missing finger, so we do everything as a family.

Teenella: We pray with the girls every night.

Alex: When I'm out of town we use apps like Netflix and Skype, so we watch movies on the computer together whenever we can, and pray together as a family.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Teenella: Most people don't know I'm a professional hair stylist.

Alex: Most people don't know that I was a boxer. Or that I'm fun to be around; my demeanor can look unapproachable.

Teenella: Me too. And we love to entertain, cook out.

If you could speak to yourself as you were ten years ago, what advice would you give yourself?

Teenella: "It's going to be ok; God's still got you!"

Alex: "Everything will be fine – stay strong and faithful!"

Our women's theater event this past Saturday, "The Last Nights of the King," was a moving, memorable spiritual experience! Keep an eye out for next month's newsletter for more of the story. If you have pictures to share, please send them to me at nberry2@gmail.com!

Hands and hearts to serve!

The Latino Ministry has taken up our charge to serve the community by helping one Saturday every month at the Cross Pointe Church program in Duluth that serves those in need. Millie Morales, who has worked with this outreach for several years, connected us with this great way of serving in our community. On Saturday, September 15th, we helped sort clothing of all sizes and descriptions, and helped fill shopping carts with food from their pantry for those who came for help. Everyone who participated had a good time serving together and enjoyed making a difference in Gwinnett County! Here's a look at that day's activities—



The brothers (and middle schoolers and teens) helped in the grocery area..



...while a Cross Pointe staff member directed the sisters (and Carmen's dad) in sorting clothing.



Disciples on the Move!

Sunday, September 23rd, was the Desir family's last worship service with the AcoCG. Kinson delivered an encouraging lesson on "Victory through Adversity." He and Sheyla are now leading the Youth and Family Ministry of the Cornerstone congregation. We will certainly miss the whole family—Kinson and Sheyla, Kayla and Joshua—but wish them all the best and look forward to seeing them as often as possible!

And a message from the Galbreath family:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We just wanted to let everyone know that we will be moving out of state at the end of October to support our family and the brothers and sisters of the Clemson-Foothills church. We love you dearly and can't put into words what the last 36 years have meant to us! We hope to spend as much time with as many of you as possible before we leave, but hope we can also visit each other from time to time! You will always be in our hearts and prayers!

Steve and Roxanne Galbreath

Preaching the Word in the park!

Enjoying the good weather as summer gave way to fall, the Latino Ministry held Bible talk in Collins Hill Park. As the kids played on the beach volleyball court nearby, we shared picnic lunches as well as the Word of God! We were happy the Rouses sat in with us as well. Take a look—



We welcome news and pictures on interesting personal stories, family group activities, and more. Please send them to Nancy Berry, nberry2@gmail.com. Thank you!

*Copyright © 2018 the Atlanta church of Christ in Gwinnett, All rights reserved.
To subscribe or unsubscribe, please contact us at info@acocg.org*