



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

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Celebrating Jesus' Resurrection!



On Easter Sunday, April 21st, our congregation hosted disciples and visitors from all over the world for "Easter for All Nations"! Guest speaker Rayola Osanya from the New York City church of Christ challenged us to a new vision of being "Cross Cultural Christians," and we and our guests enjoyed a bountiful international feast of food and fellowship. Here are a few pictures of the work in progress—once everyone started coming in to eat, we didn't have time to take more photos. Many thanks to all who organized, set up, served, cooked, baked, roasted, carried, and cleaned up!



With thanks to Zack Matovu for these pictures!



On top of all this, we took up our special mission contribution; our goal was \$100,000, but to date we've given over \$110,000, with more coming in day by day! Amen!

A deeper understanding of the Spirit

This past Sunday, May 5th, Kindred Howard, evangelist/teacher from the Athens church of Christ, helped us learn about and appreciate God's gift of His Holy Spirit – if you missed his lesson (or any Sunday or midweek sermon), you can catch up at [www.acocg.org/mediacast/!](http://www.acocg.org/mediacast/)



Catching up with...



Stephen and Heather
Roca

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

Heather: I was raised all over Kentucky, and also in Ohio. If you go to the Cincinnati area, go to Skyline, not to Gold Star, for coney dogs! The Newport Aquarium is one of my favorite places to visit there also. And there's a meat called goetta, which is kinda like sausage, that's only known in the Cincinnati area—it's absolutely delicious!

Stephen: I was actually born at Eastside Medical, and grew up in Lilburn till I was 23. It's really grown over the years; I lived on a street at the edge of the business district, and where there used to be trees, now there's a Kroger. Next door to us there was an open field, and our neighbors bought it and built their own house.

How did you come to live in the Atlanta area?

Heather: My family moved to LaGrange, Georgia, from Ohio when I was 16; my dad was promoted to general manager of Cracker Barrel. I met Stephen in college, and a year and a half into our relationship we got married and moved to Lilburn.

Stephen: I stayed in the area because of Georgia Tech—I went there to get a computer science degree. I had a couple of other options, but Tech has probably the highest-rated software engineering school. During college, I worked as a co-op with Manhattan Associates, which is headquartered in Cobb County; that was my first job, and it kept me here. I did give leaving the state one chance—I wanted to leave Manhattan Associates to work for Google, so I did an on-site interview with them two years ago in Irvine, California—but I'm really a homebody, like to stay in one place.

Heather: Neither of us wanted to move to California; I had just learned I was pregnant with Joshua, and it was terrifying to think about moving to California without having any friends or family there. Google was seeking him out, and were emailing him a lot – we thought, "Let's see if this is what God wants," so we prayed specifically about it, and God answered every request with a "No" – we stepped out on faith and took the risk, but we're still here. Thank goodness!

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

Heather: I'm a stay-at-home mom, and I want to be a wedding planner. I bounced around about what I wanted to do with my life – first I wanted to be an obstetrician; then at Berry College, I studied to be a journalist – I was very good at it, but hated everything about it! Then I went to Georgia State and majored in social work, but my heart would break with every case, so I just couldn't do that for a living. I was in limbo until one day I realized, "I think I'd be good at planning events!" So I got started, and now I've done weddings, parties, showers, and more. I love it! I've helped with planning lots of parties, weddings, and showers at church; I planned Glenn's surprise 60th birthday party along with Julia Anglin.

With Dena and Malachi's wedding I kind of hit my stride, and the more weddings I've done, the more I'm in love with doing them! I'm working on becoming a certified wedding specialist, because that's where I want to specialize when the kids are older. I really enjoy it!

Stephen: I'm a software engineer. Back in kindergarten I wanted to be a race car driver, then I was into video games. I wanted to program them but didn't know how to get into it. I morphed from video games into a different kind of programming; now I'm working more with Enterprise Java software. When I went to college, I started in computer science because I like the problem-solving aspect, so I chose that over creating video games. In college, I was doing much lower level programming, and I realized it was not for me, so I got out and went more into web architecture. I decided I wanted to write software that will be useful and can be used by a lot of people. Now I'm working with privacy software, helping other companies comply with larger privacy laws, helping people keep track of where their personal information is in their systems.

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

Heather: There's a funny story behind that! I was first invited because I'd transferred to Georgia State, where I met North River students. I was trying to find a Christian friend group when David Collier and Jonathan Massey reached out to me. I was wearing a Christian Harley Davidson t-shirt, and Jonathan leaped over a railing and invited me to Bible talk – I said yes! They actually both got the place wrong – I was terrified because the directions took me to a secluded place and I had been invited there by a man, but they came and apologized, and took me to the right place. Earlier that day I had seen everyone in that Bible talk in the Commons area – I didn't know that at the time, but I'd gotten really annoyed because they were so loud! Looking around at the Bible talk, I saw the people who had annoyed me— then they asked me, "As an outsider, what do you think of us?" I told them, "We've got to be more mindful!"

I did one study with one campus sister, but none of them was married, so they tried to figure out how to connect me with married disciples. Dave Collier asked if I wanted to come to church; I said, "I'm Pentecostal, he's Baptist, and we don't know what to do." David said, "My parents are elders; do you want to visit the church they go to?" I told Stephen that Marietta was a long way to go for church, but I wanted him to meet my new friends at North River, and then go to David's parents church. On our first visit, we went with my Pa and my mom; it was interesting, very different, but I loved it. Then we came to AcoCG, fell in love with it, and studied with Stephen and Roxanne Little, among others.

Stephen: Between our two schools, getting married, living with my grandmother, we had so much going on! We knew we had to find a new church because Heather's was two hours away, and we were looking for something challenging. We knew after our first North River service that this family of churches was where we needed to be.

Heather: We'd tried a couple of different churches; one that we visited in Lilburn was mostly older people who were excited to see a young couple. A sweet lady introduced us around; she tried to introduce us to the minister, who dismissed us, and that didn't sit well with me. When we came to AcoCG the first time, it was midweek, and we saw Richard Alawaye, but so many people were talking to us we didn't get to meet him. The next Sunday, after the prayer at the end Richard make sure we were the first people he talked to—we thought, "This is our church – he cares!"

Stephen: My first impression with the campus students I met, I was meeting so many, I kept my opinions open – it can be bad to make quick judgments, because you might have to change them later. The first time we came to AcoCG I thought it was impressive, convicting; everyone was sharing, and you could tell people were serious about what they were talking about.

What has surprised you most about life as a disciple?

Heather: The doctrine is different—I've learned baptism not just something you *do*, but it serves a purpose—but the lifestyle is pretty much what I grew up with; I feel like I'm living what I *tried* to live before.

Stephen: No surprises; I hated the idea of denominations anyhow. I like ICOC *family* of churches – coming from an Independent Baptist background, it didn't make much sense to stand alone. Different churches in a family should stand together, Christians should work together, but that wasn't happening. You can only do so much in work or in church without other people.

What lesson have you learned as a disciple that still helps you today?

Heather: I had to do a lot of study about anger; I've had issues with it my whole life. I remember doing a study" early in my life as a disciple, reading, "Man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires—I stared at the Bible and thought, "WHAT??" I talked with Stephen Little about the meaning, and that helped. I think of that and "In your anger do not sin." Jesus did it the right way—His was *righteous* indignation. Staying home with the kids, life is crazy; I long to live as a *righteous* mom. Learning to do this is a continuing lifelong lesson.

Stephen: Mine is the same thing Steve Mukenya has been trying to teach the church: the importance of relationships. Most of what I do is Heather, the kids, work, home, and there's not time for much additional. I used to work near and get with Steve Collier, and now with Ron Frazier – earlier, when the Construction Crew, the married mens' Bible talk, used to meet at Panera, we would go to that, and I used to get together with Stephen Little and with Richard Alawaye. People don't realize how much better you do with extra relationships. It's hard to feel I have time for them, but they're *important!*

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

Heather: That it's not just a bunch of rules! I hear all the time, "Your God is only about rules." It's sad that so many churches don't love with the love of Jesus. He's forgiving, gracious, gives mercy –the world doesn't see enough of that. Bible-bashing Christians tell people all they *can't* do. When I came to this church, I spoke in tongues, and probably did other inappropriate things, but they loved me till I saw this was not the way it was supposed to be. They were honest with me, and came and talked to me about it, but in love – I don't think the world sees enough of that.

Stephen: That following Jesus doesn't stop you from being a *person*. There's no magical transformation when you start coming to church; there's always going to be potential for mistakes. People becoming disciples expect it to be an immediate switch, immediate change, but it doesn't take you out of the world. There will be fights, embarrassing moments, times when you show the same worldly qualities as others do.

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

Heather: Anger, as I said earlier.

Stephen: Anger has become the biggest challenge for me, oddly enough. It didn't come out till we got a dog and had children. I feel it's more disappointing for me because people think I'm even-keel, not easily upset; our children have proof that that's not true! Everyone has specific pressure points. Heather went through her anger stuff first, but I didn't feel like I had a problem with it—then I went through the exact same thing. It's taught me to always be humble!

What is your favorite scripture?

Heather: **Psalm 19:14**, "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." I don't think people know this about me, but I have a big mouth :-)) and have struggled my whole life with it. I got in trouble the most for sassing my mom, talking back; I first learned this verse as a song in Bible school in the sixth grade, and it has stuck with me ever since.

Stephen: **1 Corinthians 1:25**, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." In high school, our Sunday school teacher taught us Psalms and Proverbs and wisdom scriptures, so I was very much into the wisdom of God when I was choosing what I value most. In terms of intellectual achievement, there's such a gap—the lowest for God is above what we can ever be!

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

Heather: Cooking and dancing around the kitchen at the same time. When Stephen comes home, he takes the kids, I close the kitchen doors and sing and dance. And Doctor Who, of course!

Stephen: Video games, from way back; Heather made me an "Evolution of the Video Game Controller" piece that's on the wall. I have a friend who brings Super Smash Brothers to work, and we play it at lunch. And playing board games – and soccer, but I don't have time for it.

Heather: We love trying interesting, off-the-wall board games, trying weird ones and sharing them with friends. Ron taught us Dungeons & Dragons – video games give me a headache so I can't play them with Stephen.

Heather: Also, we crochet. We have a ministry called HOOK—Helping Others, Offering Kindness—making hats, scarves, prayer shawls, different things, and selling them. After the cost of supplies, we take the "Jesus money" from this and put it toward missions and toward helping people in need to pay bills, buy food, etc. We started this five or six years ago when we were newly married, but we haven't had time to do much with it recently. We have scarves and stuff available, and we'll find time to take special orders too.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Heather: – I love motorcycles!

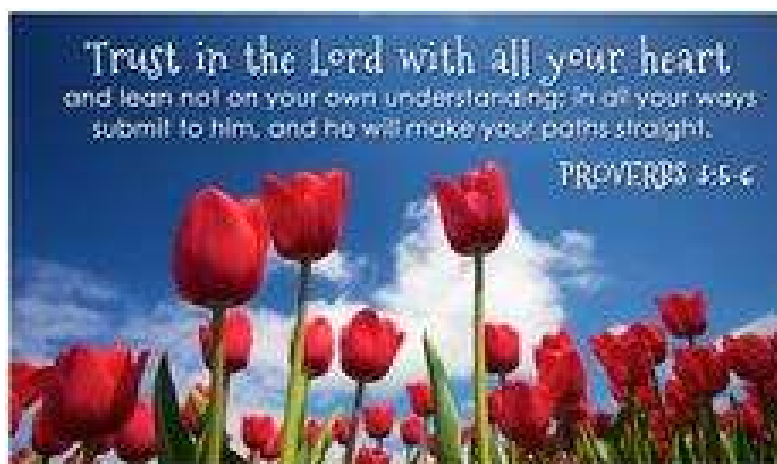
Stephen: I've dyed my hair many times – it's been everything from orange to blue, different colors at different times. The orange happened when I was trying to dye it blonde—the first batch didn't turn out right, so it was orange till I went to Walmart and got another box. Also, I once had an afro; a friend straightened it once, which was fun. I used to wear a gray jacket with big pockets—I looked like a hobo. This was all in high school and early freshman year of college, before Heather, of course.

Heather: I hated that jacket and made Stephen get rid of it!

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

Heather: I would tell 17-year-old Heather, "Stop always wanting the next thing – slow down and enjoy the moment you're in." From high school to college to boyfriend to married with two kids, it was all so fast; now the kids are teaching me to slow life down. I enjoyed every step, but wish I had taken time to enjoy it more.

Stephen: "I know you're in a hurry. Large accomplishments don't happen in a day!"



Little by little, we can make a big difference!

Bridgett Roberson says, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! We collected school supplies from February 3rd to February 24th and donated them to Norcross Elementary and Peachtree Elementary. The schools appreciated the supplies collected because many of the teachers no longer had the supplies that were donated at the beginning of the school year. I thank each of you who contributed. This community service project was very dear to my heart because I was a school teacher for many years and understand the struggle at this time of the year. Again, thank you and I hope to do this again next year."



The more, the merrier!

Family groups are sharing good times in each other's homes and in the community! The Fraziers hosted a get-together for their group and the Russells' group on Good Friday (April 19th)...



...and on the 24th, the Rouses—including their grandson who loves baseball—enjoyed a midweek Gwinnett Stripers game with the Matovus' family group.



It's great to see family groups put the meaning behind the words, and build true family relationships!

With thanks to Ron Frazier and Sherry Rouse for pictures!

New birth and new horizons!

We close this issue of the AcoCG newsletter with the spotlight on Haley Early, who had her best April ever! First, she completed her GED, as she had planned to do for some time, and celebrated with family and friends on April 27th—



—and early the next afternoon, she began her new life in Christ when she was baptized in the Rouses' backyard! Welcome to the family, Haley!



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!

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