

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 3490
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March 31, 2022

Dear Brethren,

This is my final member letter prior to the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Many of us from the office in McKinney will be traveling for the upcoming festivals for the first time since 2019! It is shocking to look back and see how we have “lost” approximately two years when it comes to traveling and visiting the brethren. Because of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, our ability to travel has been extremely limited since March of 2020. While I believe we all understand the reasons we stayed home, that doesn’t mean it was a good thing, at least not for the Church. Being separated for weeks at a time—with no opportunity to attend Sabbath services and with limited opportunities for fellowship—has affected all of us. There are several parts of the world where the members have not seen their pastor in more than two years. With conditions rapidly improving, we expect that travel will, once again, become a large part of our schedule for the remainder of this year.

As I write this letter, there is a very sad story unfolding that affects a member couple. I believe most of you are aware (from social media and local prayer requests) of the tragic situation that has developed in Nevada with the kidnapping of 18-year-old Naomi Irion. Her mother and father, Diana and Hervé Irion, are Church members who live and work in South Africa. I have a special connection with the Irion family, having been their pastor when young Naomi was born. I have been in contact with Naomi’s mother, Diana, to offer encouragement and help from the Church. Currently, the family members in Nevada include Hervé and Diana Irion and Diana’s daughter, Tamara Cartwright, and son, Casey Valley. They also have with them their three adopted sons from Ukraine. As you can imagine, a family of this size needs a lot of help just taking care of their daily needs. I am very pleased to report that our congregation in Reno has been actively involved in caring for the family. Members there not only found them a rental home, but fully furnished it within a matter of two or three days. It was amazing to see this unfold from a distance. I want to thank all the members in Reno for their outstanding work and example.

I mentioned a special connection with the Irion family from our days together in Houston, but I need to explain more, to let you know what happened when Naomi was born. I performed the wedding for Hervé and Diana, who brought her two children (Tammy and Casey) into their marriage. Not too long after they were married, Diana became pregnant with Naomi. Then, well into the pregnancy, they received some very bad news. The baby’s lungs and other organs were not developing as they should. Diana was told that there was a good chance the baby would be stillborn.

This remained the same diagnosis throughout the pregnancy, and as she got closer to her due date, it was more and more obvious, from the doctor’s perspective, that the baby would not be born alive. Diana and Hervé asked me to be present at the hospital at the time of Naomi’s birth, in order to anoint her right away. I agreed and was waiting outside the delivery room, not knowing what to expect. To everyone’s amazement, upon birth, Naomi let out a shrill cry! The doctor declared it a miracle since the last ultrasound had shown very little lung development. In order for her to cry, her lungs clearly must have developed, and her organs were all fine. The doctor was amazed and

came out of the delivery room to tell me I could come in and pray for the baby. His message to me was that the baby was perfectly healthy, and that a miracle had taken place. This was not the outcome that had been predicted by the doctor.

I arrived home very early the next morning, and I couldn't even explain to my wife what had happened! I was as numb as the doctor. Whenever our paths have crossed over the years, Diana has reminded me of this amazing night. Of course, we all learned a great lesson that night—never underestimate what God may choose to do in our lives.

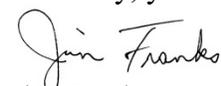
But now, I must announce the sad ending to this story. I am heartbroken to announce that Naomi's lifeless body was discovered on Wednesday, March 30. She had been murdered. The police and FBI believe they have the perpetrator in custody, but that will be determined by the judicial system. It is surreal for me to know that I prayed over Naomi when she was born and now I will be praying over her at her death. It is probably the darkest moment in this life to lose a child and especially in such a senseless manner. Please remember the Irion family in your prayers. They are struggling to understand what has just happened to their family. After more than two weeks of searching for her in hopes she was still alive, this news has been devastating.

I have received a number of requests from the brethren wanting to know what we can do as a Church and as individuals. Through a "GoFundMe" account and the generous contributions of members, their financial needs have been met to date. The Church will cover any additional cost to make sure the needs of the family are met. The family can be reached through their various social media accounts if you desire to communicate with them directly about their plans and to receive any updates they may have. Plans are being made for a funeral and/or memorial service for Naomi. I plan to be at either or both, depending on the timing.

Each day in America several thousand people, mostly children, are abducted and murdered, but when you know those involved, you feel it in a deeply emotional manner. I believe that with everything that is happening in the world and the various trials among the brethren, we have even more reason to focus on this coming Passover and what it means for all of us. Paul instructed the Corinthians to examine themselves and not take the Passover in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27). Let's focus on this as Passover approaches, and let's pray for all those who are suffering, doing good wherever we can, but "especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

We are told by James that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Even though we don't always receive the outcome that we are praying for, we do know that once we put our requests into God's hands and have done all that we can do, we must trust Him for the answer. I am heartbroken by the news of Naomi's death, but I know that the God we worship is the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). We will do our part to help mend the heartbreak being experienced by so many, and especially the Irion family, but at the end of the day, God is and always will be our source of comfort. When it seems that evil has triumphed, we are assured that God is still in charge and will care for us as a loving Father cares for His children.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,



Jim Franks