

ARIZONA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE // FALL 2023

ABLAZE



**CLAIRE
BUCKLEY**

FROM SUCCESS TO SIGNIFICANCE

**DR. GEORGE
BARNA**

RAISING SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS

**MICHAEL
WERNER**

IN HIS OWN WORDS

the PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FALL 2023



As I travel the country and meet with Christian leaders, many are discouraged by world and national events. For followers of Jesus, the news reminds us daily of two things: 1) this world is not our home, and 2) without the strong influence of biblical Christianity, we devolve quickly into oppressive, violent, immoral and unjust communities.

Sadly, some are discouraged enough to consider retreating from ministry and biblical engagement with the culture.

To be sure, there is much to be discouraged by today.

George Barna, who joined Arizona Christian University in 2019 as co-founder of our Cultural Research Center, has been chronicling the decline of Christianity in America for four decades now.

The precipitous decline of Americans with a biblical worldview -- from 12 percent to 4 percent -- is staggering. Nearly half of Millennials today are what Barna refers to as "Don'ts" -- they either don't believe, don't know or don't care if there is a God.

And now we are seeing manifestations of this retreat from God all around us -- the rise of mental health issues, the incivility, volatility and conflict in our public discourse, the violence and addiction on our streets, and in America, a newly aggressive antagonism against historic Christianity and biblical convictions.

For sure, all of the cultural bad news is hard to absorb. I understand why some Christians want to pull back from engaging with the world.

But while discouragement, fearfulness and despair may become temporary waystations on our life journey, they are not destinations for followers of Jesus.

Our calling to be salt and light doesn't change, no matter the outcome of our efforts.

President Ronald Reagan famously said that "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." And that is true.

But I believe the converse is also true -- we are also only one generation away from reclaiming our biblical foundations and living in a completely different culture -- one characterized by virtue, liberty, peace and justice.

It's really up to us -- the body of Christ -- and how we respond to this moment.

We first have to shake off the mindset that decline is inevitable and recognize that history and Scripture include countless examples of communities and nations repenting and turning back to God. In some cases, their circumstances were much more dire than ours today.

To build a different future, we have to think beyond today's headlines and plan longer term than the next election cycle. We need to focus on building institutions -- families, churches, Christian schools and universities -- that will prepare young people to bring a biblical worldview into the future.

At Arizona Christian University we are teaching biblical truth to young men and women from all over America and the world -- from 40 states and nearly 30 countries. Our enrollment has tripled since 2010, and we are now America's 9th-fastest growing college. We are equipping and educating Christian leaders to bring biblical wisdom to all areas of cultural influence.

We are also encouraging young people to marry and build families -- a Scriptural command often ignored today. Through ACU Press and the Cultural Research Center, we are providing resources like George Barna's best-selling book "Raising Spiritual Champions" -- equipping parents, churches and Christian school leaders with data-driven wisdom to help children grow up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord."

We are literally only one generation away from a complete spiritual turnaround -- from living in a world where the Gospel is freely proclaimed and all people have the opportunity to flourish. Where families and churches thrive and communities are characterized by hope, opportunity and love. Be encouraged and don't give up!

Yours for equipping Christian leaders,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Len Munsil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "M".

Len Munsil, B.S., J.D.

*President
Arizona Christian University*

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ABLAZE

An Arizona Christian University publication

OUR MAGAZINE

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MISSION

Arizona Christian University provides a biblically integrated, liberal arts education equipping graduates to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in all aspects of life, as leaders of influence and excellence.

ON THE COVER

Claire Buckley ('24), an M.Ed. graduate student leads on the field and in the classroom.

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A portrait of Claire Buckley, a woman with long blonde hair, smiling. She is wearing a light grey sweater. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

CLAIRE BUCKLEY

Passion to Impact Others

From SUCCESS TO SIGNIFICANCE



California native Claire Buckley's story offers a unique picture of motivation and leadership.

Arizona Christian University alumna Claire Buckley played several sports growing up, but in middle school she decided to dedicate herself to softball. It was her love for the sport, along with the hope of furthering her education as a collegiate athlete, that drove her to focus on softball. Those early years of playing, from age six through today, brought Claire to ACU in the Fall of 2020.

In high school, Claire dreamed of playing for a Division I college, so when her mom showed her a promotional video from a small university in Arizona, Claire wasn't interested. But when her recruitment to a large state university abruptly fell

through, she was willing to consider other options.

Two weeks later, former ACU softball coach Anna Welsh reached out to ask Claire to visit for a recruitment weekend. Still disappointed, she reluctantly agreed to tour ACU's former campus in North Phoenix and practice with the team. To her surprise, Claire fell in love with the school, and now laughs that it was the same school her mom had suggested years earlier.

Though she didn't realize the significance at the time, it was during this campus visit that Claire would meet her current best friend, Taylor Schleisman, as well as interact with Professor Susan Johnson for the first time, who would go on to become an impactful mentor. Claire had always

expected that she would attend a large university, but realized she loved connecting with people in the intimate, Christian environment at ACU. "Professor Johnson spoke to us at the recruit weekend, and you could just tell that [the faculty] were going to invest in you more than for just 16 weeks," said Claire.

With an entirely new outlook, Claire accepted ACU's offer to play softball. Her family questioned the sudden change of heart, but she was confident and excited about what God had in store for her. Shortly after committing to the University, Claire heard the exciting news that ACU was moving to a larger, better equipped campus. This quieted any remaining uncertainty she had about attending a small school.

As a student-athlete, Claire faced the inevitable challenge of time-management as she learned to navigate college. The life of a collegiate athlete can be strenuous, with practice, training and travel on top of academic pursuits. This is particularly true for those who, like Claire, are committed to excellence in each of these areas. She stayed the course, motivated by a desire to do more than just “scrape by.” She held herself to a high standard, setting an example for her peers through her consistent diligence in the classroom and on the field.

Claire also had to wrestle with the spiritual challenges of leaving a Christian home for the first time. Being away from a family life that facilitated her Christian walk made it imperative that she take responsibility for her own walk with God. “I had to be disciplined enough to go to church on Sundays and to read my Bible every day, because I wanted to, not because I was forced to,” Claire said. She noted that, as an ACU student, she was always exposed to Scripture and Christian teaching. However, when she invested in those activities for herself, they were no longer a chore, but became an exciting part of growing her faith.

Claire’s determination and athletic talent were recognized in her senior year when she was named a College Sports Communicators Academic All-American. The award recognizes students who achieve high academic standards and play a prominent role on their athletic team. Claire noted that, while always striving for excellence in her craft, the All-American title had not been her particular goal. Instead, her focus was on the integrity of her pursuit.

“I’M GOING TO PUSH MYSELF AS HARD AS I CAN, BECAUSE I WANT TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE,”

Nonetheless, the award was an apt acknowledgement of her character and her contributions to ACU.

With the excitement of receiving the All-American title, Claire stated she felt increased pressure to be “perfect.” Over time, she learned that she could not be perfect, and was responsible only for excellence in the aspects of her life that were in her control.

As graduation approached last May, Claire took the opportunity to seek the counsel of ACU professors as she considered her plans for the future. History professor Susan Johnson was particularly influential. Reflecting on her time at ACU, Claire could see the evolution of her plans and calling over her four-year career. As a freshman, she had wrestled with her desire to coach high school or college softball, but questioned whether it was prudent for a Christian to enter the world of secular education.

She came to recognize, however, that her gifts and passions were God-given. She acknowledged that God could help her be effective, even in an environment that can sometimes be hostile to Christ and His followers. And although she does not yet know where she’ll end up working or coaching, she is “trusting that it will be the platform that God has given [her] to reach people.”

Claire’s desire to impact others through coaching has grown in conjunction with a deep passion and aptitude for leadership. In addition to coaching softball, she

hopes to eventually be a professor in leadership classes, sharing her passion for the topic with young adults. “I know how many people have impacted me here at ACU, and how I’ve grown throughout the years,” Claire noted. “So I want to have that same impact on young adults in the future.”

These goals make Claire the perfect fit as she joins the first cohort in ACU’s new Master of Arts in Education program. Her specialization is in Instructional Leadership and Instructional Coaching, a program that is sure to develop her talents and prepare her for a meaningful career. She hopes to pour into other young adults, just as her ACU professors have developed and mentored her.

Claire’s desire to love others and see them grow is evident. “I love studying [leadership] because you’re never good enough, you can always get better,” she says.

“JESUS WAS THE PERFECT LEADER, AND WE CAN NEVER BE PERFECT BUT WE’RE GOING TO KEEP STRIVING.”

“When Claire was an undergrad student in my classroom, I was struck by the depth of her desire to completely understand the unique gifts and challenges students may have,” shared Dr. Linnea Lyding, Dean of the Shelly Roden School of Education and Professional Studies. “Our Master of Arts in Education program will enable her to take that knowledge one step further by honing her teaching and leadership skills, so that she can truly transform culture with truth in the classroom, on the field, and in life.”

Claire Buckley—Career Highlights:

- A.O. Duer Scholarship Award (National award given to one female student athlete in the United States) (2022)
- CoSIDA/CSC Academic All-American (2022, 2023)
- NAIA All-American - Second Team (2022)
- NAIA All American - Honorable Mention (2023)
- GSAC Player of the Year (2022)
- GSAC Gold Glove Shortstop (2021, 2022, 2023)
- NAIA Scholar-Athlete (2022, 2023)
- GSAC Scholar-Athlete (2021, 2022, 2023)
- GSAC All Conference Team (2021, 2022, 2023)

RAISING SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS



It's been twenty years since Dr. George Barna released one of his bestselling books, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*.

Since then, a lot has changed.

Studies conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University have revealed dramatically altered attitudes about Christianity and the Bible over the last two decades. The ways that Americans minister to and disciple children, and the context in which such ministry occurs, is worlds away from where it was in 2003.

Dr. Barna felt a particular sense of urgency in the midst of these changes. "I want to wake people up—especially the parents of young children as well as individuals who have significant cultural influence—to understand that time is of the essence in transforming how we raise our children."

*His newest book, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*, is the successor to his 2003 book, and is the handbook for raising the next generation with a biblical worldview. Published by Arizona Christian University Press, Dr.*

*Barna's insight into the current spiritual landscape provides that wake-up call—not only for parents, but for anyone concerned about raising the next generation of children to love and serve God. Here's an exclusive excerpt from *Raising Spiritual Champions*:*

To succeed at disciple-making requires a thoughtful and diligent commitment to the process. Turning again to the research, what have we learned in recent years about effective disciple-making?

First, nobody can be forced into being a disciple. It is an act of will by each individual. As a disciple-maker, then, you must realize that "making disciples" is beyond your capacity. The best you can hope to do is become a disciple and then appropriate the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to encourage others to choose to become disciples. With that choice in place, you may then follow the pathway that is most likely to lead them to genuine discipleship.

Second, making adults into disciples is extraordinarily difficult. The primary reason is that their worldview has already been established and,

according to the research, changes very little, if at all, after the age of thirteen. That's right, by the age of thirteen, most people's worldview is so deeply formed that it rarely endures significant change.

This leads to one of the most important facts for you to absorb: A person's worldview starts developing in the fifteen-month to eighteen-month age range and is largely in place by the age of thirteen. That's the prime window of opportunity for discipleship. If a person is not inclined to buy into the claims of Christ and the practices He preached by the time they reach high school, the chances of them ever doing so are slim, and the probability gets slimmer with each passing year they are alive. The Holy Spirit can change any person, at any time, in the blink of an eye—but, on average, such bold change does not happen among teens and adults. If a biblical worldview foundation is not in place by a person's thirteenth birthday, they are highly unlikely to become a devoted and passionate follower of Jesus Christ before they die.



Dr. Barna and President Munsil at the *Raising Spiritual Champions* Release

This is underscored by the fact that about two-thirds of all Americans who ever accept Jesus Christ as their Savior do so before the age of thirteen. But why, you might ask, is having a biblical worldview such a big deal? Can't you become a committed disciple of the Lord by regularly attending church services and reading the Bible, by donating money to a church or other ministries, and being part of a small group? In fact, isn't that the practical, functional definition of a disciple? That's certainly what most churches believe, teach, and model. Is it wrong? Sadly, that is an erroneous conception of discipleship. Settling for immersion in the religious game is one of the very things that Jesus died to eliminate, as evidenced by His rocky relationship with the religious leaders of His day, especially the Pharisees.

Remember the behaviors He enumerated as the marks of a disciple? Love God more than anyone else. Abandon anything that hinders your love of God or ability

to follow Him. Accept His authority over all aspects of your life. Obey His teaching. Love other people. Produce spiritual fruit. Envision the lifestyle that such a commitment produces. When consistently and joyfully practiced, that lifestyle motivates other people to become enthusiastic, fully engaged disciples.

Spend some time reflecting on what He said—and did not say. For instance:

- Jesus did not command people to attend church services regularly. He did call for His followers to meet together and to worship God in the company of other believers. But the way He modeled that with His disciples was typically through shared meals and experiences, by intensely discussing the meaning and application of the Scriptures, and by serving other people. He seemed greatly unimpressed by religiosity—that is, routinely attending religious events and

deploying rote religious practices.

- Jesus did not say that your spiritual development is the responsibility of, nor is it determined by, religious leaders or organizations (such as pastors or local churches). He pushed His disciples to take responsibility for their own righteousness and lifestyle choices. He taught them to lean on the power and guidance of God rather than the input and regulations championed by religious officials and organizations.
- Jesus did not teach that discipleship is about emotional connection to an ideology, movement, or persona. His conception of Christianity was deeply rooted in understanding God—His nature, purposes, truth principles, standards, and promises— and applying that understanding to produce a biblically consistent lifestyle that revolves around God rather than

self. The Bible's concept of love is not about generating warm, fuzzy feelings regarding other people; it is about grace-based acceptance of others, just as Christ sacrificed Himself for all creation.

Why does that matter? Because these kinds of insights shape an understanding of life—a worldview—that should influence every decision we make. That is what a biblical worldview does: It judges every option you face in light of scriptural truths and commands. If a disciple is a person transformed by the love of Christ to become like Christ, the means to that end is through their worldview—the intellectual,

emotional, and spiritual filter you apply to every situation so that your choices and decisions reflect the ways of the Lord. (We will dig more deeply into worldview development and application in chapters 5 and 6.)

The bottom line, then, is that if you want your life to make an impact, you must be committed to being a disciple who makes disciples. And the research clearly indicates that the most effective approach to disciple-making is to focus on discipling children. To effectively disciple a child entails developing their worldview to be consistent with the Lord's teachings. Raising children to be spiritual champions—that is,

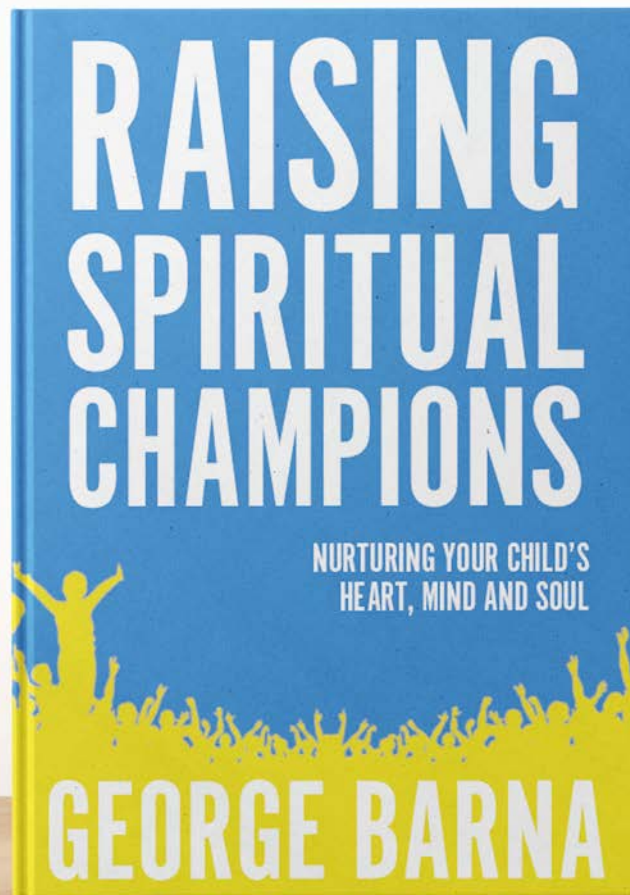
followers of Jesus Christ—is the only real hope for any nation, family, or individual. It is during a person's first dozen years on Earth that they amass the knowledge, relationships, experiences, and wisdom that shape their lifelong perspectives on how the world works, their place in that world, and how they will carry out their vision of self and life for the duration of their stay on the planet.

The above excerpt is taken from *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*, by Dr. George Barna (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023).

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THE MIHAILOV FAMILY

Leaders of influence and excellence

Going ALL-IN

It is difficult to imagine a family more sold-out for Arizona Christian University than the Mihailovs. Their commitment to Jesus Christ and advancing His kingdom has led them to go “all-in” with ACU—and their influence transcends the institution.

Wayne Mihailov is a native Arizonan and graduate of the United States Naval Academy, where he earned a degree in Aerospace Engineering, followed by a master’s in the same discipline from the University of Maryland and an M.B.A. from the University of San Diego.

He met his wife, Tanya (Worthy) Mihailov, while serving as a Civil Engineer Corps officer at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay. Tanya is also a Naval Academy graduate, and the Mihailovs served together at multiple duty stations prior to feeling called to the business world. Tanya subsequently continued her career in supply chain management, while Wayne served in various roles with GE Capital and eventually went on to start the business that he continues to lead today, Airline MRO Parts (AMP).

In 2018, Wayne joined the Arizona Christian University Board of Trustees. He hit the ground running, and early in his tenure played an instrumental role in helping ACU successfully complete the historic land swap with ASU, leading to the procurement of ACU’s “miracle campus” in Glendale.

“It has been a blessing to serve the university, its students, faculty and staff, through the transition of campuses and into an era of financial sustainability,” Wayne remarked. “We are excited by what God has done at ACU and what He continues to do.”

He continued, “Tanya and my perspective as academy graduates causes us to see a special purpose for ACU as a place that trains spiritual leaders... Kingdom leaders. Just as the service academies prepare cadets for military conflict, ACU prepares Christian leaders for spiritual battle, with the charge of transforming the culture with truth. And there is no greater calling than serving Jesus as Savior, Lord, and King.”

As a trustee, Wayne is known and respected for his philanthropy and commitment to stewardship. He frequently exhorts his fellow trustees and ACU leadership to be mindful and grateful for the faithful partners who sacrificially give to advance the mission of the university—and to steward their gifts with care.

The Mihailovs were recently able to make a significant financial contribution of their own to Arizona Christian University, including participating in two naming opportunities on campus. In February, ACU celebrated the dedication of the Bill & Amy Mihailov Conference Room, named in honor of Wayne’s parents. Then in April, the University was delighted to recognize Tanya’s mother, Helen, by dedicating the Helen Worthy Music Suite in the Music Building in her honor.

For the Mihailovs, the dedications were about more than merely expressing gratitude and honor to their parents. “It is a blessing to us that so many growing Kingdom leaders at ACU will be able to see the names of those who have set the stage before them and provided such amazing examples of Lordship and service,” Wayne noted.

The Mihailov’s contributions to ACU are not limited to Wayne’s service as a trustee and the couple’s noteworthy philanthropic endeavors. In fact, one

MIHAILOV FAMILY | SPOTLIGHT

could say that their most significant “investment” in ACU is derived from the contributions being made by their two children, Aleksa (Class of ‘24) and Stefán (Class of ‘26), both of whom attend the university and are leaders on campus.

“With the growing level of insanity in our culture, there weren’t many places where Tanya would have felt comfortable supporting our adult children’s college choices,” said Wayne. “As adults, the responsibility of providing for a university education was their responsibility and their choice. So, we were thrilled when first Aleksa and then Stefán fell in love with ACU, its mission, its faculty and staff, and the students they met during campus visits. They continue to rave about their ACU experience, especially the many amazing classmates who have become true brothers and sisters in their mutual walks with the Lord.”

Aleksa is in her senior year, majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis in biology and business. During her time at ACU she has had a tremendous influence on the student body as a student-athlete, cheering for the Firestorm and leading in the Ring of Fire student section. She also serves as a small group Bible study leader and has been an integral part of the expansion of the spiritual life team.

Stefán is a sophomore music major and is easy to spot on campus sporting his signature aviator sunglasses and carrying his electric guitar. He is on the welcome team for chapel, and he has a God-given gift for creating a sense of Spirit-led community around him wherever he goes.

All four members of the Mihailov family exemplify the biblical principle of service. Service to their country, to their family, to their employees, and to ACU. Given their considerable talents, experience, and expertise, Wayne and Tanya have had countless opportunities to invest their time and resources in important Kingdom-building endeavors. But they saw something special in what God is doing at Arizona Christian University. And they went all-in.



The MEASURE OF A MAN

To the layperson, his list of academic accomplishments may be intimidating – (see editor’s note below). But that’s not what matters to Dr. Kyle DiRoberts.

Culture’s definition of success does not define him.

“Meaning in life is not driven by what I do . . . but rather, who I am,” he reflects. “Whether I succeed or fail, my identity is in Christ. My advice to students is to rest in who you are in the Lord. Know who you are in Him, let that be your anchor and explore what God can do through you.”

Where did Dr. DiRoberts get this counter-cultural idea of success? It started with his mother.

“She sent me to summer camp when I was 11 years old. I thought it was a sports camp, but when I arrived, I realized it was church camp,” Kyle explained. “During that week, I gave my life to Jesus. It completely changed my life. I arrived at camp a

lost sinner, and came down from the mountain and told my mother, I’m going into ministry.”

He jumped into the youth programs at Scottsdale Bible Church, a faith community in which he now serves as Director of the Minister in Residence and Internship programs.

After high school, Kyle sought out Southwestern College (now ACU) to learn more about the Bible. During his senior year, working as an intern at Scottsdale Bible Church, he and a friend asked the question, “What if we planted a church?”

And they did.

They planted a church in Old Town Scottsdale. It was viewed as a wild success—but Kyle soon realized his actual calling was not as a church planter. “That’s when I learned that I LOVE to teach,” he recalls. “I pivoted from church planting to finding a way to teach every single day of my life. My mindset and goals changed

and I chose to focus my efforts on academics.”

Then came the degrees. First a Master of Divinity from Phoenix Seminary, then a Master of Theology from Talbot Seminary in California, and finally Kyle and his wife, Lolly, moved to Texas where he earned his PhD in Theological Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary.

For the past five years, Kyle has used his theological training and followed his call to teach by equipping young men and women for ministry as a professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at ACU.

As he worked with college students, Kyle developed another passion—writing. Not necessarily academic writing (which all professors do), but books that would help the average believer in their faith journey. He asked himself, “What do I want my three kids to know about God, even if I am not here one day?”

He answered his own question with, "I want them to know about prayer." So, he wrote his book, *The Secret to Prayer*, in which he suggests that God is more concerned about the condition of our hearts than the words we use when we talk to Him. According to Kyle, God cares more about the posture of our hearts than the posture of our bodies. And the right heart posture is humility.

On the heels of the success of *The Secret to Prayer*, Kyle's next book will be released soon. It's about the grace of God, another topic he wants his children to know and understand deeply.

Kyle's life journey so far has been marked by several disparate chapters, and begs the question, "What is the measure of a man?"

Some would use descriptors like church planter, theologian, professor, mentor, author. But Kyle defines himself differently. He describes himself simply as a follower of Jesus, whose identity is defined not by what he does, but rather who he is—in Christ.

Editors Note:

Dr. Kyle DiRoberts is Department Chair and Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Arizona Christian University (ACU) in Glendale, Arizona. Kyle holds a PhD from Dallas Theological Seminary in Theological Studies, a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) in Biblical Communications from Phoenix Seminary and a Master of Theology (Th.M.) in Systematic Theology from TALBOT School of Theology.

His first book, *Prayer, Middle Knowledge, and Divine-Human Interaction*, is used as a resource in seminaries and universities. In addition, he has published over 20 articles and book reviews in scholarly journals.

Kyle is most excited about his recent book, *The Secret to Prayer: 31 Days to a More Intimate Relationship With God*. It was inspired by Andrew Murray's words, "The secret of secrets: humility is the soul of true prayer."





MICHAEL WERNER

ACU Alumnus and Vice President of Finance

In HIS OWN WORDS

During my first visit to the Southwestern College campus, I joked with my tour guide about the University needing a hockey team. (For the record, hockey is my sport...don't tell the football team). It's been over 15 years since that conversation, and there's still no hockey team—but oh how this place has grown.

When I started at SWC/ACU, there were no sports fields, the soccer team was just beginning its inaugural season, half of the new dorm building was still under construction and there was almost no parking (fellow SWC alumni, you know). We wore blue instead of red and shouted, "Go Eagles!" instead of throwing up the talons, but the mission was the same.

CHANGE THE WORLD. MAKE DISCIPLES IN THE NAME OF JESUS. TRANSFORM CULTURE WITH TRUTH.

After I graduated, I went to seminary because my plan was to eventually pastor a church. I had been a volunteer leader in church since my days at SWC/ACU, but I had higher aspirations. Being a full-time vocational pastor was what I thought God called me to, so that was the plan. Until He reminded me that it wasn't.

I had been a candidate for my first vocational pastor gig on countless occasions, getting closer each time. Top ten, then top eight, then five, and finally top two. Then the other applicant dropped out. This was it! I was the last man standing. Any minute now they would call with the offer. Nope. There had to be at least one other person for a pastoral vote. And wouldn't you know, once that second person was found,

he ultimately felt God's call was for him to help lead the church. I was devastated. Devastated. I still harbor some wounds. However, that experience freed me.

While I was preparing for pastoral ministry, I had been working as an accountant—growing, progressing, leading, and ultimately becoming what many would consider successful in the business world. My drive to be excellent for Jesus was never set aside or kept strictly for the church. I had learned during my time at SWC/ACU that no matter what the situation, Jesus is calling us to minister to those around us. To bring Him into our sphere, every part of it, not just the Sunday part.

All along it seemed that God had been telling me that the ministry He had prepared me for was actually not within the four walls of the church. But I didn't want to hear that. So, I frustrated myself, and probably Jesus, by trying to tell Him what He meant. (By the way, don't do this, it never works out, trust me).

When I was denied that last pastoral position, and after many shouting matches with Jesus, (David yelled at God, so it's okay, right?), I finally realized the impact He was having through me at my work in the business world. We often miss the amazing things God is doing in our lives because they are not the things we want to see Him do. God was changing lives at my office and using me as a small part of it. He was reminding me that work by itself is not our purpose, but using our work to impact others is.

I want to change the world. This principle has been instilled in me since my first semester at SWC/ACU. (Shoutout to Professor Tim Reed). Changing the world is a great future

goal, but we often become paralyzed by not knowing what to do in the present to help us move closer to that end goal. I had to reevaluate my life's purpose early on because of this paralysis.

IN ORDER TO CHANGE THE WORLD, I NEED TO USE EVERY DAY AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT JESUS.

To be an ambassador for Christ, to use my energy for impactful conversations, and to be a willing vessel for the hard moments and interactions that bring Him glory. Wherever he has me.

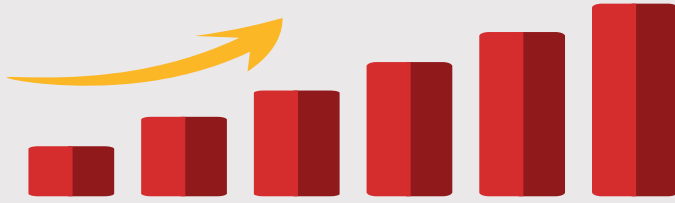
In January, I started my new role as Vice President of Finance at ACU. I've been overwhelmed, I've been exhausted, I've been challenged, but ultimately, I've been renewed. As a student, SWC/ACU changed my life. It taught me discipleship, it taught me true love, it taught me service. It also played a direct role in building my family (my wife, Jenn, is also an alumna). I got her to say "yes" before she really knew what she was getting into. Sorry, not sorry. She is the most amazing graduate this school has ever produced (completely unbiased opinion). We have two girls who are no longer little but are the most awe-inspiring human beings. I get to model for them the things this institution taught me, and, in a few years, they will get to experience it themselves. They will learn what it means to change the world.

Today, on the campus of ACU, I sit at a different desk than I did in my first semester as a student at Southwestern College. But the mission is still the same. Transform culture with truth. Change the world.

Acu

BY THE NUMBERS

76% GROWTH
IN 10 YEARS



ACU is the 9th Fastest Growing University
in the Nation



NAIA SCHOLAR TEAMS



94

Number of
Scholar Athletes
Awarded for
Academic
Accomplishment



YEARS IN A ROW
by U.S. News & World Report
BEST VALUE

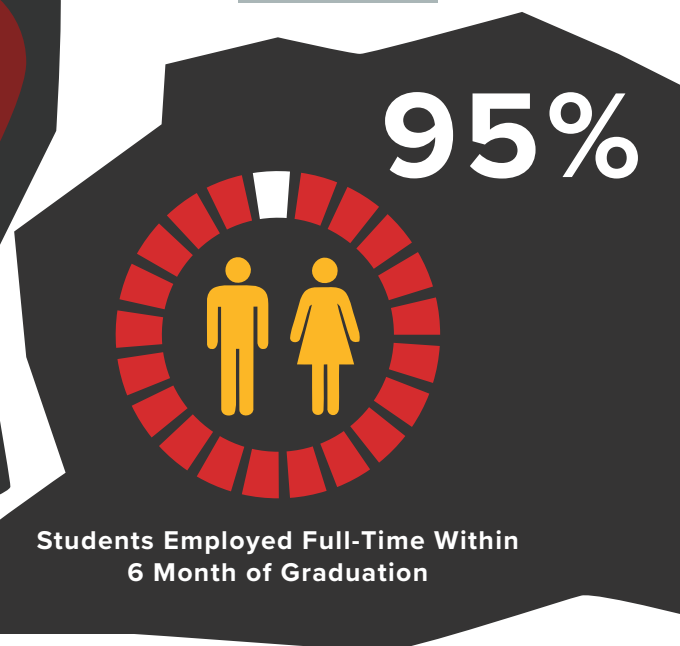
YEARS IN A ROW
by U.S. News & World Report
BEST COLLEGE



MORE THAN **100**
AREAS OF STUDY



40 States &
30 Countries
Represented



Students Employed Full-Time Within
6 Month of Graduation

FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Quinta Thomas (2017)

hasn't always chosen the expected path. He had an opportunity to play football at an NCAA Division I university. Instead, he followed God's call to play football at ACU. When he arrived at Sky Harbor Airport during the summer of his first year, he remembers thinking, "It's too hot! What did I do?"

His relationship with Transformational Coach Randy Chambers taught him life was bigger than football, and that God uses the discipline and training of athletics to ready us for service in God's Kingdom.

For Quinta, that service is ensuring educational opportunities for inner-city children.

At a young age for the profession, Quinta serves as the Principal of John Muir Elementary School, a Title 1 inner-city public school in Seattle, WA.

When asked what it takes to serve an inner-city community, Quinta replied without hesitation, "A deep prayer life, being humble, and daily recognition of God's grace and mercy." He credits his rise to the role of Principal to the equipping he received from Dr. Linnea Lyding and other faculty at ACU. When asked about his heart for children and passion for the underserved, he stated, "God equips those who serve for His name's sake and His glory, not our own glory."

Quinta has also recently embarked on a new journey of service—as a husband! He married his sweetheart, Ariel, in July.



Parker Brubaker (2020)

runs a successful commercial laundry business and towel and linen rental business. He started the company during his senior year at ACU as a Capstone project, where the assignment was to develop a business idea and create a business plan to fund and market it.

Parker gives credit for the idea to his wife, Breanne, who suggested he start a business to provide clean laundry service for hair salons in the area. Parker also expresses gratitude to his grandfather, who supported the start-up by providing a bedroom in his home where Parker stored newly cleaned towels and linens.

What started as a one-person operation has exploded in its third year to 10 employees in two locations, with several trucks delivering towels and linens all over the Valley.

Parker's business vision differs from the competition, "Our business is not laundry," he stated. "As followers of Christ, we're called to be of service to people, providing solutions to their needs. We are a service business. Without clean laundry, our clients can't operate. We're called to serve."

Parker is married to Breanne and they have two beautiful daughters, Lenora (4) and Kyah (2).



FIRESTORMFAMILY



1. **MANDY SCHELLER ('12)** started a business teaching others how to start a work-from-home bookkeeping business. She is homeschooling her kids, and having a business and accounting background helped her build a career around her life. Her husband, Rick, is an airline pilot and they reside in Colorado.
2. **CRAIG AND BRITTANY (DISCHINGER, 2011) KLAUKA ('10)** met while attending SWC and have been married almost 14 years. They have four children. For 15 years they served in youth ministry and are currently planting Grafted Church at Sandra Day O'Connor High School.
3. **TEVIN AND LEXI (CLARK, 2016) EDDY ('15)** have been married for eight years and have three beautiful girls, Aurora, Violet, and Rose. They have also been foster parents for two years and have fostered nine children. They are about to adopt a sweet baby boy they have named Quinton. They will soon be moving to Nebraska so that Tevin can serve as Senior Pastor at Hasting Berean Bible Church. They are planning to continue fostering children and are excited to see how full their 12 passenger van will get!
4. **RIKKI NEWLAND ('19)** welcomed her first child, son, Karter Kneale Barnes, in October 2021, and is currently working as a special education Pre-K teacher for Bloomfield Schools in New Mexico.

5



7



6



8



5. DERIC AND JESSICA (KENNEDY, 2005) MILLER ('06) have been married for 17 years and are busy raising their three children, Sophi, Dawson and Jake. Deric is a stockbroker for Charles Schwab and Jessica is a second grade teacher at Benchmark Elementary in Phoenix. They are very involved in their church, Desert City and report that life is full and God is good.

6. ALEX (DUGAN) THOMPSON ('15) and her husband, Michael, have been married for nine years and have four children. Years ago, the Thompsons felt the Lord calling Alex to take a step away from teaching, but were shocked this year to feel Him guiding her back into the classroom. Alex says her heart is full, having the ability to minister to her 5th and 6th graders at Arcadia Christian Academy (Phoenix). It has been the biggest blessing!

7. MATHEW POPE ('15) served in full-time pastoral ministry from 2016 to 2021 until transferring to the US Navy Chaplain Corps in 2021, where he is currently a chaplain. He and his family recently arrived at their new duty station, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, CA, after moving from Mayport, Florida, where Mathew served aboard the USS WINSTON S. CHURCHILL. Mathew and his wife, Victoria, have twin one-year-old girls, Aurora Grace and Ellie Ann.

8. COURTNEY ROSE ('11) married Colton Harris in March 2023 and celebrated the one year anniversary of their adoption of their daughter, Georgia. Courtney serves with Food For The Hungry as the Manager of Organizational Performance Planning.

CLASSNOTES

'20s

DEREK ANDERSON ('23) is a history teacher and football coach at Highland Prep Academy in Surprise, Arizona.

ELLIOTT ALEXANDER ('22) is a bid-estimator for Ford Audio-Video Systems. His wife, Sarah (Burns, 2020), is pursuing her Masters of Theology in Biblical Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. Elliot and Sarah are active volunteers at Irving Bible Church in Texas.

MELISSA GONZALEZ ('22) graduated with her Masters in English from Grand Canyon University with an emphasis in Education in August 2023. She is a K-12 teacher with ESL.

▼ **DAWSON LANDERS ('22)** graduated from the Phoenix Police Academy in April 2023. His wife Sarah (Cooper) Landers graduated from ACU in 2022.



J.D. HAMBY ('21) is a Marketing Specialist for "Today in the Word," a daily devotional Bible study from Moody Bible Institute.

MERCY JUNKERMANN ('21) was commissioned as a long-term missionary with Unto, a Cru ministry. As an Agriculture Specialist, she travels around the world to lead workshops for people who face extreme food scarcity. These workshops train communities in sustainable farming practices, such as composting, raised garden beds, and irrigation. More importantly, people hear about the God who sees them, loves them, and holds them close amidst their pain.



▲ **ELIJAH AND GABRIELA (GUTIERREZ, 2020) OLANDER ('21)** were married in May of 2021, two weeks after Elijah graduated from ACU. Elijah subsequently graduated from Phoenix Seminary in August 2023 with a Master's in Ministry and was hired as a pastoral assistant to the lead pastor of Canyon Bible Church in Prescott. His ultimate goal is to be trained and sent to a local church for full time pastoral ministry. Gabriela is an Enrollment Counselor for Colorado Christian University.

MICHAEL AND EMILY (HOBROCK) ROGERS ('21) welcomed their first child, Luke Allen, in 2023.



▲ **RACHEL (ANKLAM) VAN DEN BERG ('21)** married her boyfriend of eight years, Joshua, in April 2023. Pastor Tim Reed officiated the marriage. After working as a Legal Analyst for the Brnovich Administration at the Arizona Attorney General's Office, Rachel now works as a Legal Assistant at a private firm. She plans to attend law school. Joshua and Rachel rescued an adorable Chihuahua mix named Teddy Bear who brings so much joy to their lives.

TRAVIS WALKER ('21) and his wife Lena welcomed their first child, son Jesse King, on March 24, 2023. Jesse weighed in at seven pounds, three ounces.

DAMIAN SANCHEZ ('20) is a Solutions Specialist for Merrill Lynch in Phoenix, Arizona.

BRIAN SEWELL ('20) is the head of football operations at ACU and was also recently hired by Sodexo as a lead irrigation and technician on ACU's campus. He is engaged to 2020 ACU graduate, Jordan Sawyer, and they plan to wed in December 2023.

ISAAC FUDGE ('20) is a teacher at George Ranch High School in Richmond, Texas, where he also serves as Recruiting Coordinator and Offensive Line Coach for the football team. Isaac was named 2023 Teacher of the Year for the State of Texas by Teachers of Tomorrow and is in the running for National Teacher of the Year as well.

'10s

▼ **BAHIJ AJLUNI ('18)** and his wife, Emily (Sorum), have two children, Eva-Rose and Bahij, and are expecting their third! Bahij has been employed at Northwest Community Church for two years and serves as the Facilities Director. He and Emily also help coordinate the elementary children's ministry. Bahij is also a full-time student at The Expositors Seminary. Emily has the joy of being able to stay home with the kids and serve their family.



DILLON AND SARAH (MOSSMAN, 2020) EAVES ('18) are both working at Scottsdale Christian Academy. Dillon is the Dean of Discipline and high school and middle school baseball coach and Sarah is a 6th grade science and Bible teacher. The Eaves love ministering to kids in both of their roles.

GABO GALEFFI ('18) and his fiancé, Ashley, married on September 22, 2023. Pastor Tim Reed officiated.

ANTHONY MARTIN ('18) is in his third year teaching 6th grade math at Copperwood Elementary School, coaching Junior High flag football and basketball and holding a key role in athletic directing. He has seen God move in so many ways in his life. He volunteers in youth ministry at CityView Church. Anthony recently had the privilege to go on his first mission trip to the Dominican Republic, where the team served a school by painting, roofing, and participating in their annual sports

camp. He said, "It is an amazing experience to see God's people in a different area of the world. I am humbled to have experienced such a journey."

NIKI (FOSTER) MAYNARD ('18) completed her third summer at Forest Home Christian Camp and Conference Center in Forest Falls, California. She serves as the Family Camp Director, overseeing the family ministries as well as the girls' discipleship program. This summer, the camp served over 800 families and 500 teenage girls! Niki said it has been a blessing to work in this role, especially as it gives her the opportunity to develop young leaders on staff.

GREER FORSETH ('17) is a substitute teacher for Teachers On Call in Minnesota.

AARON AND MALEAH KING ('17) welcomed their second child, son Theo Ray in June 2023.

EMILY (POULOS) FELTON ('17) teaches 8-12 grade English in a rural community in Idaho. She has also taught in Arizona and Texas. She and her husband, Justyn, met four years ago and married last year. Emily loves their home on their 20,000 acre ranch where she helps Justyn in all aspects of ranching, including taking care of cows, dogs, horses, and sharing the same passions as her husband. Emily is also the Assistant Water Master for the ranches and farms in their Idaho valley. She said it is amazing how God provides a way to pursue what you love when you follow His calling.

▼ **LAUREN JOHNSON ('17)** is an attorney and associate for Wiley Rein LLP in Washington, D.C. Lauren advises telecommunications, media, technology, and fintech clients on a variety of regulatory and compliance matters.



DESIREE MONTEIRO JACKSON ('17) is completing her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision at Grand Canyon University. She also teaches college-level courses around the Valley and engages in counseling and mentoring with local youth.

TYLER AND SARAH (VANDERZEE) CAWTHORNE ('16) welcomed their first child, daughter Holland Kate, this year.

▼ **DJ AND AMANDA (GARCIA) HOSKINSON ('16)** welcomed their first child, son Theodore, in August 2023.



HALEY (WORDEN) SHERMAN AND MACKENZIE (WORDEN) VAN DER WERF ('16) Sisters and fellow alums, recently competed in ACU's alumni volleyball game!

JEFFREY PALEN ('15) is a Technical Project Manager for Verizon Communications in Phoenix, Arizona.

LINDSAY STEWART ('15) is the owner and a therapist at Haven Holistics in Phoenix. She has her Masters degree in Professional Counseling with Christian integration and is licensed by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners as an Associate Counselor. She is also trained in both

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing and Internal Family Systems. Lindsay specializes in trauma, PTSD, anxiety and spirituality therapy.

MACKENZIE (WORDEN) VAN DER WERF ('15) and her husband, Alex, moved back to Arizona after four years of living in North Carolina. They welcomed their first son, Locklan, in March 2023. Mackenzie also obtained her real estate license and stays home with baby Lock.

MONTFORT BIZIMANA ('14) came to the United States from Africa in 2009 to attend ACU. He subsequently became a U.S. Citizen, married, and served in the United States Army for nine years after graduation. Today he works as a human resource professional, involved in real estate, and is the owner of Bizi Properties, LLC.

▼ **DR. BENJAMIN JOHNSON ('13)** is an internal medicine physician at John C. Lincoln Medical Center, where he began in 2022. His wife, Breana (Franks, Dec 2014), homeschools their son Benaiah, who is in kindergarten. She recently signed with a literary agent and is pursuing publication for her Christian suspense novel. The Johnsons welcomed their second child, daughter Brielle, in May 2023.



▲ **ADAM AND CAITLIN (ALLGOOD, 2015) STEARNS ('13)** had a big year. In February 2023, Caitlin was diagnosed with Metastatic Papillary Thyroid Carcinoma. After surgery and a radioactive iodine treatment, her last scans showed no evidence of disease! Praise the Lord for His healing hand. Please join with the Stearns in praying that clear scans continue. She is currently a stay-at-home mom with their two boys and they are starting their homeschool adventure. Adam is the Director of Purchasing for a nearby school district and involved with the Texas Association of School Business Officials as the Vice Chair of the Purchasing Committee. They are very involved in their church, serving in MOPS, women's ministry, leading worship and pouring into the pastoral staff that are often overlooked. Although they love life in Texas, they still dream of escaping the heat and moving to Ireland!

GRACE LUGINBUHL ('12) is the Children's Ministry Director at Desert View Bible Church. Grace has always loved working with kids and being involved in the church. She never knew God would bring her to where she is now, but she is continually learning that His ways are higher and His plan is better!

DANA (PARSONS) NARVAEZ ('11) is a teacher and freelancer here in Arizona.

ZACH SWEAT ('11) successfully defended his dissertation in December 2022 and was commissioned as an Active Duty Lieutenant in the Navy Medical Service Corps the following June. Zach is completing his doctoral internship as a Clinical Psychology Resident at Walter Reed National Military Medical

Center. His wife, Magen, completed 15 years with the United States Attorneys Office providing victim witness advocacy. Currently, she is providing care and support to their sons, Brice and Jameson, who are Zach and Magen's greatest blessings in life.

▼ **ANDREW LINDERER ('10)** married Ansley in June 2023. Pastor Tim Reed officiated.



AMANDA (CARBONE) PEREZ ('10) is married to her husband, Daniel, and is a Behavioral Quality Analyst. She is a licensed associate counselor, and performs behavioral health related quality of care reviews for United Healthcare.

CALEB VANSTEENWYK AND JULIA (BRENNER) ('10) have a two year old daughter, Cara, and another daughter due in December 2023. Caleb is the Director of Operations, Employee Benefits for Experian, and Julia is a Senior Manager, Underwriter Associate for Hanover Insurance Group. Their time at ACU provided a foundation of biblical truth to equip them for God-honoring success in both the corporate world and also in their local church, Happy Valley Baptist Church, where they serve in many capacities. They are passionate about making disciples and investing in the church for the advancement of the Gospel.

'00s

- ▼ **KRISTIN (CHAPPEL) PEPITON ('09)** is a Kindergarten Teacher at Phoenix Christian Elementary. She and her husband, David, have been married for twelve years and have two beautiful daughters who are nine and six years old. Kristin recently began her 13th year of teaching, her first year at Phoenix Christian. She loves having the opportunity to pray with her students and coworkers. The Pepitons are very involved in their church, Phoenix Bible Church, which just unified with Bethany Bible Church. God has been in every step of their story!



SHEENA ABRAMS ('08) holds a Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy from Fuller Theological Seminary and is an intern at Dawn Institute, which provides mental health and trauma counseling and treatment for all ages.

STEFANI (SIMPSON) OLIVERIO ('06) is the Online Facilitator for grades 3-5 and middle school Bible at Northwest Christian School. She and her husband, Rob, who is the head librarian at ACU, keep busy raising their three children and serving at Northwest Community Church.

NATHAN DARUS ('04) is the Bisbee Community Choir Director and the new music teacher on the Army base at Fort Huachuca, teaching grades 5-8.

SARA DELGADO ('01) is a high school special education teacher at Gilbert High School. She started her 23rd year of teaching this fall and is representing ACU with a pennant in her classroom!

- ▼ **BRAD AND SARAH (DALTON, 1998) SPANGLER ('00)** lead a multi generational ACU family! They are proud to have two kids currently attending ACU. They have both flourished at ACU, found their community, and discovered ways to glorify the Lord in their journey. Sarah has continued to work in higher education so she can combine her passions for education, leadership, and collaborative design. Brad devoted his early years after graduation to youth ministry. Once their kids joined the youth group, he moved on to healthcare technology and is leading the industry in designing solutions for video connections between provider and patient. The Spanglers are huge ACU fans and are grateful for the impact that it has had on their family for the past 30 years!

**'90s**

TRAVIS DALE ('97) has ventured into running his counseling practice full time after serving 20+ years in full-time church ministry as a Pastor of Counseling and Students. He provides faith-based counseling for individuals, couples, and families. His wife Amy (Stuber, 2022) is a life coach

and works with teen girls and women. The Dales have three boys, Brennan, Aiden, and Truitt. They have also launched a non-profit ministry, Avenue, which provides counseling and coaching to people with financial needs and a network for other counselors, therapists, coaches, and churches.

AMY (PETERSON) SUN ('95) recently published her first book, *Heart of the Kingdom*. It is an allegory about a princess who has everything but is still seeking what will satisfy her soul. It can be read in a public school setting or used as a tool for parents to lead their children to the Lord as they discuss finding Jesus to satisfy their soul's desire. Additional resources, such as coloring pages or prayers for children, can be found at www.amysunauthor.com. The book is available on Amazon. In addition, Amy is the Director of Women's Mentorship at Legacy Family Ministries.

DANIEL MORRISSETTE ('94) continued to grow in his faith and technical knowledge after his time at SWC. He has worked in the semiconductor, ocean science and electric vehicle industries. He has continued to build on his degree and will soon be graduating with his Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science with a minor in Oceanography. Daniel is a Navy Submarine Veteran and is currently a Staff EHS Training Specialist for Tesla. He and his wife, Christine, have two children and one grandchild.

'80s

DAN HERRIAGE ('86) retired in 2021 after teaching and being a school administrator for 45 years. He and his wife, Louise (Mungle, 1986), taught in Arizona, Guam, Kansas, and North Carolina, where they currently live.

'70s

STEPHEN AND LEORA (HENKELMAN) OKKEN ('77) adopted five children, and after 22 years they finally have no more teenagers in the house!



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