

ARIZONA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE // SPRING 2024

ABLAZE



**KATERYNA
KASHYRINA**

MIRACLES AMIDST MISSILES

**DR. GEORGE
BARNA**

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

**CHARLIE
MURPHY**

THIS IS IT

the PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SPRING 2024



When I left the political world for academia in 2010, I remember thinking I was going from the front lines of sharing Christ and promoting Christian principles in the public square, to the supply lines.

It has become increasingly clear to me that the realm of education in many ways has become the front lines.

ACU – with its clear biblical, conservative mission – will likely experience more opportunities to stand for biblical truth on the front lines of our culture similar to our recent battle against religious discrimination by a local school district. By God's grace, we prevailed. More recently, as a member of the Council of Presidents of the NAIA, I joined a unanimous vote that received national media attention for simply upholding fairness and safety through Title IX protections for women in athletic competition.

When we look at our educational system nationally, I think many high school and elementary school parents were shocked during COVID lockdowns to discover what their children were actually learning, and how often indoctrination against biblical and traditional American values replaced lessons on reading, writing, history, science and math.

Over the past year, a similar awareness is growing about the anti-American, anti-biblical indoctrination happening in higher education. It started with the moral confusion exhibited by several elite college presidents testifying before Congress; Harvard's president lost her job after she was unable to conclude that calling for genocide against Jews was a violation of Harvard's code of student conduct.

After Israel was brutally attacked by Hamas terrorists, who butchered more than 1,200 civilians including children and babies, many American college students decided they needed to protest ... against Israel! Some of these protests included students chanting "Death to Israel, death to America." If these students are ever in charge of things, they may get their way.

I believe the growing awareness of the indoctrination occurring on other college campuses will continue to fuel ACU's growth – now the 9th-fastest growing university in America.

I am so encouraged by what I see happening at Arizona Christian University! Our students are developing a mature faith, a strong biblical foundation, and a passion to

engage the world with the hope of Christ and the truths of Scripture.

The last massive awakening in the 18th century happened at a time of deep spiritual emptiness in Great Britain. Slavery, sexual immorality, abuse of children, addictions to alcohol, drugs and gambling permeated a society with empty churches and full jails.

The turnaround began with just a few students at a small Christian college who began to pray!

The awakening that followed led to so many conversions to Christ that it influenced all of society – churches were filled and jails were emptied, people were set free from addictions and immorality, and government reforms led to the abolition of slavery and the protection of children from abuse. Over the course of a few short decades, everything looked different.

As you read stories in this issue about what is happening with student-led chapels at ACU, and the life transformation happening on our campus, I hope you will be excited for the future. I hope you will see that this is just the beginning of what God is doing at our University. And I hope you will choose to pray into and seed the next awakening that is coming!

Yours for equipping Christian leaders,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Len Munsil".

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

An ACU student attending Chapel.

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Miracles AMIDST MISSILES

Just two years ago, Kateryna Kashyrina was a 15-year-old studying pre-law at the National University Odesa Academy of Law in Odesa, Ukraine. She was also training with the hope of making the Women's National Swimming team and competing for her country in the 2024 Olympics.

When war broke out in February 2022, Kateryna's entire world changed. Her family was faced with an unthinkable decision: leave their homeland or stay and risk being victims of the conflict. "We hid in our basement for seven days, not

knowing whether we would be able to flee or forced to stay," Kateryna recalled. "It was so dangerous." As Russian missiles rained down among the homes in her community, Kateryna and her family decided to leave the country they loved.

Kateryna and her family fled to Greece, where they found safety with some friends who lived there. The rapid turn of events left Kateryna in a daze, and her world was turned upside down. She no longer felt any desire to swim competitively, and her dreams of becoming an attorney now seemed impossible.

Her older sister lived in the United States at the time, and as the trauma of her flight from her homeland began to subside, Kateryna began wondering if there might a possibility to continue her studies at a university in America.

While searching online, she stumbled upon ACU's website, learning about the university for the first time. She was attracted to the unique Christian mission of the school, as well as the fact that it had a swim team. So, she emailed the head swimming coach, Brad Hering. Unbeknownst to Kateryna, Coach Hering had been





praying for a practical way to help victims of the war in Ukraine. After receiving her email, he was filled with compassion and a sense that the Lord was answering his prayer.

Coach Hering got right to work helping Kateryna navigate the admissions and financial aid process. However, even though Kateryna qualified for one of ACU's highest academic scholarships, there was still a financial gap that her refugee family could not afford to bridge. Miraculously, just two days prior to the deadline for her to enroll in the fall semester, Kateryna received an unexpected grant from a friend and supporter of the ACU swim program. She and her family were overjoyed upon hearing the news of God's provision, and were overcome with gratitude and hope.

Upon arriving at ACU from Greece, Kateryna experienced an outpouring of love and friendliness from her new classmates.

“IT WAS SO DIFFERENT BECAUSE PEOPLE, THEY’RE LIKE, ‘HI, HOW ARE YOU?’ THEY CARED ABOUT ME.”

Members of the swim team and other ACU students rallied around Kateryna, welcoming her to the United States and offering to help her with whatever she needed.

Now a sophomore at ACU, Kateryna is humbled and delighted by the miracles God has provided. Her passion for swimming has been reignited, and she is achieving success in the pool and the classroom.

Her trials and hardships have molded her into a dedicated and tough young woman with a deep faith in God. Coach Hering noted, “When I give (the swimmers) killer sets, Kateryna always says, ‘Thank you so much, Coach,’ while everyone [else] goes, ‘That was the hardest workout of my life!’” Kateryna’s drive for excellence extends into everything she does, whether studying at school, training in the water, or serving the Lord.

Back in Ukraine, Kateryna sees God’s faithfulness amid the chaos. While missiles have reduced her former Olympic training pool to rubble (above), her grandma, who still lives in Ukraine, remains safe and healthy. However, the toll the war has taken on her community has been significant. Soon after her family fled, Kateryna’s home was hit by a

Russian rocket. The only remnants were two framed items - “a picture of God and a photo of my family,” noted Kateryna.

Today, Kateryna is studying political science and plans to attend law school and become an attorney. She feels called to fight for justice for Ukraine and its citizens. “I know that the war will not stop... tomorrow,” she acknowledges. “I feel like it [won’t] stop even... in one year. It looks like it could be for such a long time.” But Kateryna is taking the long view, taking advantage of the opportunity God gave her to come to the United States and study at ACU to equip her to make a difference in her home country in the future.

Kateryna has been inspired by Jeremiah 29:11-13, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.’”

Since fleeing Ukraine two years ago, her life’s direction has been in God’s hands. And she is resting in His promises to her, her family, and her country.



This IS IT

Charlie Murphy had been out of jail only two days when the call came. The call that was an answer to a desperate prayer he had prayed to a God he barely knew. The call that would change his life.

Today, more than 10 years later, Charlie is a police officer himself, serving in some of the toughest areas of his community. But before arriving at Arizona Christian University, Charlie saw himself as a broken man.

"My dad had anger issues. He and my mom fought a lot," he recalled. "I told myself, I don't want to have the issues my dad has." But as a teen, he remembers being intimidated by other people. "I was down about myself," he said. "I would find ways to hurt others, just to feel good about

myself."

"One day my buddy and I had a fight outside my house, and 10 minutes later the cops arrived." With tears in his eyes he continued, "just seeing the look on my mom's face, I knew something had to change. I felt broken. I wanted to be the kind of person who helped others, but instead, I let everybody down."

At his lowest point, Charlie knew that he needed help. "I had never really prayed before," he remembers. "But I looked up and said, 'I don't know you God, but please help me.'"

Just two days later, after Charlie had been released from jail, a football coach from ACU reached out to him. Charlie had been attending a local junior college and planning to play for that school, but the ACU coach was asking if he might consider joining the Firestorm. "The minute I heard the words Arizona **Christian** University, I knew this was God's answer to my prayer," he stated. Charlie knew he needed God. He remembers saying to himself, "***This is it.***"

After arriving at ACU the next semester, Charlie quickly realized he was there for more than football. "My coaches and professors taught me about life and showed me ways to overcome difficult times through a relationship with God," he said. "I felt this huge transformation."

"Coach Bowen became a father figure . . . to help me be the person God wanted me to be," Charlie continued. "He saw potential in me and invited me to attend a leadership retreat. During the retreat a pastor invited me to be baptized. My life started over again."

At his baptism, Charlie gained a new perspective on how to deal with his anger. He made a promise that whenever he got mad at someone, he would remember what Jesus did for him. "Jesus died for my sins to forgive me," he reflected. "So, through him, I can forgive others as well."

While at ACU, Charlie majored in political science in order to pursue his childhood dream of becoming

a police officer. He took courses in law enforcement with Dr. Travis Meadows, an active member of the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) who opened the door for Charlie to have an internship with the department. Since then, Dr. Meadows has remained a role model and mentor.

Today, Charlie's childhood dream of making a difference for others has been fulfilled. In his role as a patrol officer for the Gila River Police Department he is living out the mission of ACU, transforming a broken culture with truth, one child at a time.

"My supervisor knows I have a soft spot for kids, so he sends me to

neighborhoods with troubled youth," Charlie recounts. "I tell them I struggled as a kid . . . that they matter, and they can do great things in their life."

ACU left a lasting impression on Charlie's life in another way as well—he met his wife Amanda during his sophomore year at the university. "I invited her to go to church with me as a date, and from there things just kicked off," he laughed. "We're both all into Jesus . . . she got baptized at our church and we've given our lives to God."

As he has walked in obedience to Christ, Charlie's relationship with his father has begun to change as well. After not seeing his father for almost

10 years, Charlie and his dad recently reestablished contact. "I want to honor my father, and I call him at least once per week," states Charlie. Their renewed relationship is playing a restorative role in both their lives.

Charlie's journey is a testimony to the transformational work of Jesus Christ in his life. "I didn't have purpose in life growing up," he said. "I struggled in school, and I felt I wouldn't do well in life. That all has changed. It starts with Jesus who died for us to forgive our sins. God has put me here for a reason.

**"I KNOW MY PURPOSE . . .
I AM HERE TO SERVE GOD
AND TO SERVE OTHERS."**



Fan THE FLAMES



Many alumni of Christian colleges remember chapel services as an obligation, a required function to check off their weekly list. That may even be true of some ACU alumni.

When ACU alumnus Grant Botma (class of 2005) was recently asked to speak at ACU's chapel, he recalled, "To be honest, I wasn't overly excited about it. I remembered my days as a student. There were times when I stayed up too late the night before and I'd be quite tired. During many chapel sessions, I struggled to stay awake and often wished I could go back to my dorm to take a nap."

Grant is not the only college student who has struggled with chapel engagement. These days, at chapel services across the country, many college students are more likely to be on their smart phones than in their Bibles.

But not at ACU.

Starting in the Fall of 2022, ACU Campus Pastor Travis Turner tried an experiment. He called it "Testimony Tuesdays," and carved out five minutes from each Tuesday chapel to allow a student to share how God had transformed their lives.

"As students shared their stories, I watched people put their phones down and saw their heads turn up," he said. "Our students want to hear from each other."

That experience inspired Pastor Travis to invite students to take on an even larger role in planning and implementing ACU chapel services.

"Students were leading worship already . . . why not invite them to speak from the platform as well," Turner states. "I sensed God leading me to get out of the way and let them lead. My vision became *'fan the flames - don't pull the reigns.'*"

So, he looked for a student who had

the character and ability to lead the process.

"I found a young man named Reggie Robinson who loves the Lord and has a sweet humility about him," he recalls. "I chose him as our first student chapel coordinator. Within weeks, he had put a committee together and they selected the book of Matthew as the focus for the upcoming semester. From the platform, over the course of the semester, students led the student body (line-by-line) through the Sermon on the Mount. It was extraordinary."

Then, the following semester, Reggie and other student leaders taught each Tuesday through all the parables in Matthew.

To prepare their chapel messages, students meet with ACU's Bible professors to discuss the scripture from which they are teaching and then they rehearse their

presentations with each other.

This year, Reggie and the chapel committee continued to fine tune and improve the chapel experience. Starting in the fall, they decided that services on Tuesdays would continue to feature a student speaker, while chapel services on Thursdays would feature an ACU alumnus.

One of those alums was Grant Botma. And although Grant confessed that he wasn't initially enthusiastic about speaking at chapel, his experience surprised him. "Throughout my sermon, I saw engaged faces and focused eyes," he recalled. "The students audibly responded to my questions, laughed at my bad jokes, and took notes. They were genuinely interested in God's word and eager to be there."

He continued, "I initially accepted the request (to speak), thinking I was doing my college a favor. But the truth is, *they did me a favor*. It was an absolute blessing to be on

campus and worship the Lord with enthusiastic and energetic students."

Reggie Robinson and his team have also initiated a few more chapel traditions that have resonated with the student body. One of them is to close each chapel with the singing of the Doxology.

It was clear this new tradition had taken hold when, during a recent chapel service, a visiting worship band who was unaware of the custom did not close the service with the Doxology.

The worship music stopped, but nobody moved. You could hear a pin-drop. Unscripted, a lone student in the crowd began to sing,

"PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW"

... and the entire congregation of students, staff, and professors joined in singing the Doxology acapella. "It gave me goosebumps," Pastor Travis

recalled.

Reggie explained, "we do these things out of reverence for God and His Word. We sing the Doxology after worship . . . and we all stand for the reading of the Bible. It's the very least we can do."

Movements of the Holy Spirit can't be planned. They are often expressed through young people, sometimes on college campuses.

Something is happening at Arizona Christian University. "They (students) have done something exceedingly wonderful and more than I expected," stated Pastor Travis.

Editor's note: Alumni, parents, and friends of ACU are encouraged to attend chapel services on campus. Please join us on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 10 a.m. (during the school year).



THE SUTPHINS

Advancing Education Through Generosity



Following GOD'S LEAD

Daniel and Rebecca Sutphin were an unexpected source of one of the most notable philanthropic gifts in Arizona Christian University's history. They are not alumni of the school or parents of an ACU student. In fact, until three years ago, they had never even heard of the university.

But the Sutphins, in an act that they describe as "answering the call" that the Lord gave them, recently helped establish the first-ever endowed scholarship in Arizona Christian University's 64-year history. They join a growing contingent of financial supporters from across the country with no previous ties to the school who are drawn to the University's steadfast commitment to the truth of scripture and standing firm in the face of cultural opposition.

Daniel and Rebecca are a young couple, still in the midst of raising and home-educating their 8 children who range from teenager to toddler. They first met in the dining hall of the small Christian college they both attended in Tennessee.

The Sutphins' relationship took a winding path as they navigated their college years and Daniel's first year of medical school after graduation. But their shared reliance on Jesus Christ and a sense of His plan for their lives continued to draw them together, and they ultimately wed early in Daniel's surgical training while Rebecca was working as a public school elementary teacher.

Their lives have been marked by acts of faithfulness—times when they prayerfully sought the Lord's leading and walked in obedience—even when they did not fully understand His plan for them at the time.

In fact, without one such instance of

Spirit-led obedience, the Sutphins might not have ever met in the first place. "I had my heart set on singing in the choir at the University of Tennessee," remembers Rebecca. She had no interest in the school where she and Daniel ultimately met, and only went to visit the campus to please her mother and "check the box."

"BUT I CAN TELL YOU WHERE I WAS STANDING WHEN I FELT CALLED TO GO TO THAT COLLEGE,"

Rebecca says. "It was a very clear, heart throbbing moment when I heard God really speaking to me and moving me to go there." And while it was not part of her plan, Rebecca recognized the Lord's voice and obeyed, charting the course for the rest of her life.

Their time in college gave the Sutphins an understanding of the powerful influence Christian higher education can have on young men and women. And as time passed, they also began to develop a clear understanding of the role teachers play in shaping the next generation.

Rebecca's time teaching in the public school was eye-opening. She had a God-given aptitude for developing curriculum and investing in her students, but also experienced frustration with the public school's secular worldview and its requirement that she tailor her instruction to standardized testing requirements rather than the children's particular needs.

So, she and Daniel prayed about it and felt led to have Rebecca leave the public school system and stay home with their newborn son. As their family grew and their oldest reached

kindergarten age, the Sutphins ultimately decided to have Rebecca home-educate their children. "The ability to calibrate the curriculum in a manner that reflected each child's strengths and weaknesses, and the ability to focus on what objectively matters, was very appealing to us," noted Daniel.

Over the last 17 years Rebecca has faithfully and sacrificially used the gift of teaching that the Lord has given her to invest profoundly in the lives of the Sutphins' eight children.

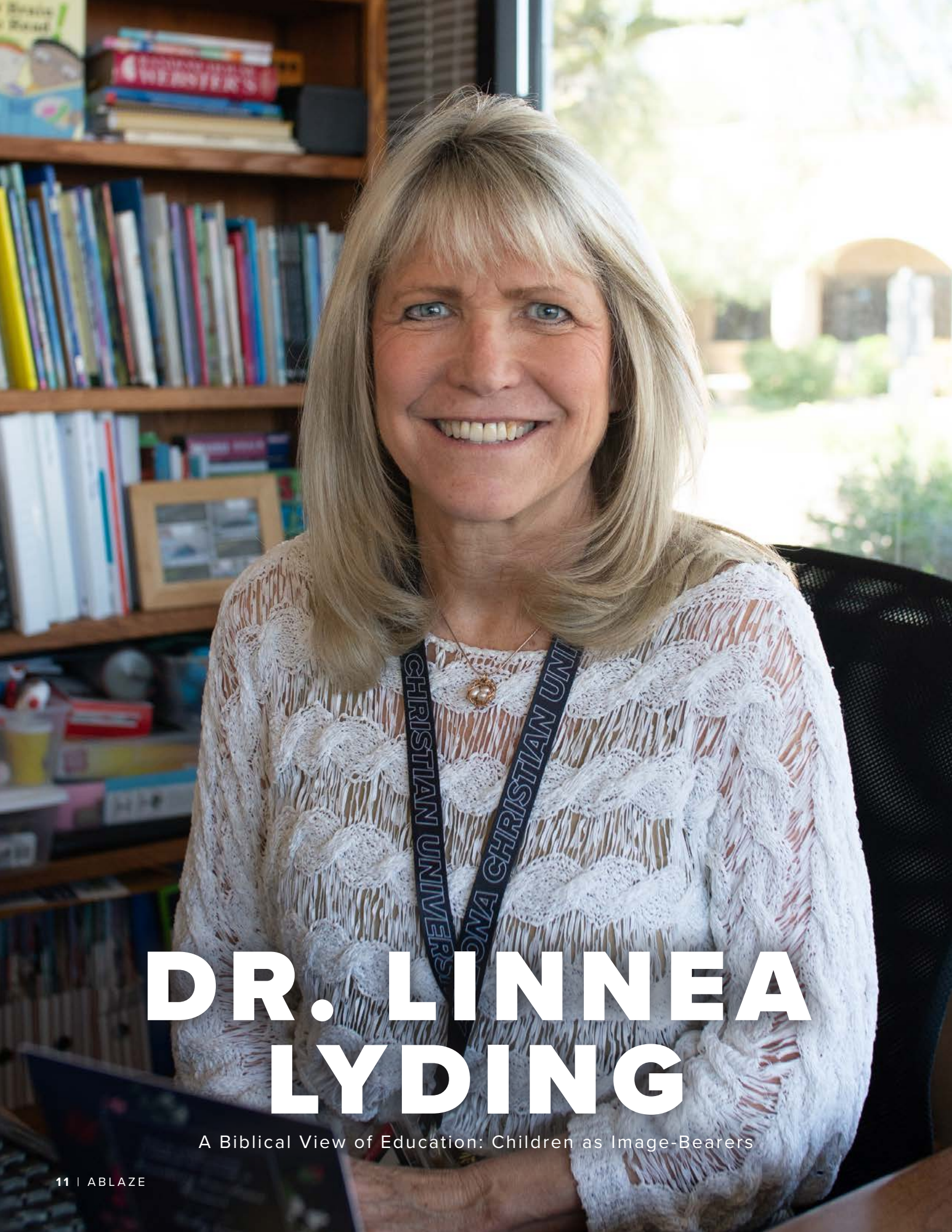
"Rebecca's testament has in many ways been lived quietly before the Lord," reflects Daniel. His desire to honor his wife's enduring faithfulness and gift for teaching led him to ACU, where he worked with the university to establish the Rebecca Sutphin Excellence in Teaching Endowed Scholarship at Arizona Christian University.

"We prayed for years to find a place where God was at work so we could join Him there," Daniel stated. "As we came to learn more about the core values and leadership of ACU, we felt called to invest our resources there to help them train up the next generation of faithful Christian educators."

As a result of the Sutphins' generous endowment gift, ACU will be able to award a scholarship each year to a female ACU student who, like Rebecca, "demonstrates sincerity of her love for the Lord and a desire to serve Him with gladness in the field of elementary education."

"Influencing the life of a child, their heart, their mind, encouraging their understanding of the world—whether in the home or outside the home—what else could be more important?" Daniel asks.

"We want other young women who face some of the challenges that Rebecca did, particularly with respect to having the resources to go to college, to find value in their calling to become teachers, and to help those who feel God's call to the ministry of teaching."

A portrait of Dr. Linnea Lyding, a woman with blonde hair and bangs, smiling. She is wearing a white lace top and a black lanyard with 'CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY' printed on it. The background shows a bookshelf filled with books and a window looking out onto a building and greenery.

DR. LINNEA LYDING

A Biblical View of Education: Children as Image-Bearers

Parents SHAPEACALLING

DR. LINNEA LYDING | FACULTY

Dr. Linnea Lyding is Dean of ACU's Shelly Roden School of Education and has served at ACU since 2012. Her path to being a role model in higher education started in her youth, as she grew up helping to care for a sister with a severe disability.

"Our family life was different because of Colett's needs," she recalled. "We used sign language to communicate and she made odd sounds, and when she would get angry, her signs were fast and furious. When she had seizures in public, people would just glare or move out of our way."

"That was during a time when people didn't know much about disabilities," reflected Dr. Lyding. "Most people steered clear. But my parents saw my sister's potential and wanted her to live as normal of a life as possible. I believe God placed Colett in our family because He knew what a difference my parents would make in the world for people with disabilities."

As Colett grew into adulthood, Dr. Lyding's parents researched opportunities for her to live on her own. When they could not find anything suitable, they started a nonprofit organization to help hearing-impaired and other disabled young adults build life skills which could lead to an independent lifestyle. Their new nonprofit organization purchased townhomes for Colett and many of her disabled friends.

"My sister had amazing abilities, but her limited communication made it hard for others to see them," stated Dr. Lyding. "My parents' dedication to Colett and her friends' well-being shaped my calling and purpose. Through their example, God gave me a heart for helping children build confidence in themselves to become all that He created them to be." Dr. Lyding's own career plan was to teach Early Childhood Special Education, but at least initially, it seemed that God had other ideas. When she graduated from university, teaching jobs were scarce and the

only position she could find was teaching Junior High math. While she wouldn't have chosen that role, it ended up giving her experience working with secondary education students, a skill necessary for her future.

Over time, the principal at the school where she was teaching encouraged her to present at educational conferences. "I was a bit nervous about speaking to groups, so I resisted," she remembers. But her principal convinced her that she had special knowledge about teaching children who struggled with learning disabilities and encouraged her to share it with others. "Since my passion was to help children be all that God has created them to be, I agreed," she stated.

THEN, GOD LAID IT ON LINNEA'S HEART TO PURSUE A DOCTORATE DEGREE IN EDUCATION.

"I thought it was a crazy idea . . . I did not want to go back to school. I even asked God to take the idea out of my mind if it was my own, but He didn't." Through a divinely orchestrated set of circumstances, Dr. Lyding enrolled in the Doctor of Education in Leadership and Innovation in Teaching program at ASU. "In the program, I could study what I wanted to study (with their guidance), and I was required to do my research at my place of work. This was exactly what I wanted to do," she recalled.

Dr. Lyding's faith in Christ played a formative role in shaping her call as an educator, and she joined Arizona Christian University in 2012. She was attracted to ACU because of the opportunity to serve in a place that would allow her to integrate her faith with her passion for mentoring future educators.

"Through my sister Colett, I learned that every child is a child of God. At ACU, I equip graduates who love and

care deeply for the children they teach and see those children as God sees them," she exclaimed. Dr. Lyding trains her students to transform culture with truth as they teach, fostering classrooms where every child feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential image-bearers of the God who created them.

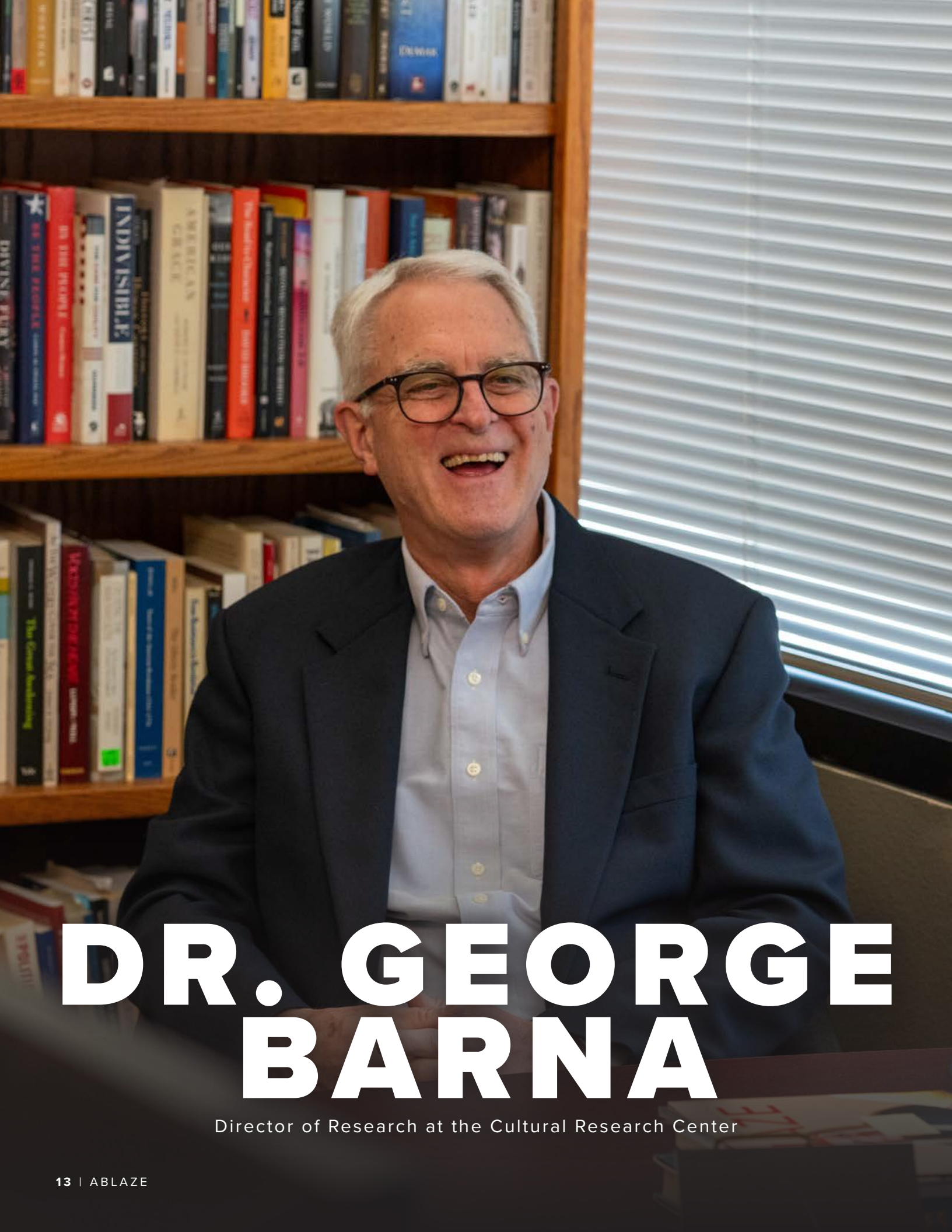
A Look Back at Arizona Christian University v. WESD

One year ago, Dr. Lyding played a critical role in ACU's victory against the Washington Elementary School District (WESD), vindicating the rights of ACU elementary education students to student-teach in the district. As she reflected on the case, Dr. Lyding can see how it helped her show students firsthand how to navigate difficult situations with grace and integrity.

"We knew it wasn't right for the district to discriminate against our students because of their religious beliefs," stated Dr. Lyding. "We asked our students to pray, and they did. They saw the importance of not retaliating, and the value of acting honorably in the face of persecution."

Ultimately, thanks to the prayers of many in the Firestorm family and expert legal representation from Alliance Defending Freedom, the WESD Board capitulated, allowing ACU students back into their classrooms. The district also extended the contract with ACU for 5 years and paid the university's legal fees.

Since then, ACU education majors have spent the last year serving the elementary students at Washington School District. "We are pleased with the outcome and continue to have a strong relationship with teachers and administrators (many are ACU alumni) within the district," Dr. Lyding noted.



DR. GEORGE BARNHA

Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center

Lights. CAMERA, ACTION

It's an early February morning in Nashville as Dr. George Barna settles in to talk about his latest research focusing on worldview in America. Across the table is Roger Marsh, longtime host of The Bottom Line, a daily national conservative Christian radio show.

This conversation focusing on the loss of biblical worldview among our nation's preteens is the first of a grueling schedule of two dozen interviews for Dr. Barna over the next few days at the annual National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) convention.

Anyone familiar with NRB knows this annual convention is the place to be for Christian communicators. And it is no surprise that Barna and his worldview research are such a big draw for the nation's most influential media members attending the NRB event.

As Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, Barna does more than 200 media interviews every year. He also participates in at least another two dozen in-person appearances, along with writing dozens of media articles and op-eds.

It's little wonder that Barna is often identified as "the most quoted person in the Christian Church today" and has been the leading authority on biblical worldview and trends in the American church for nearly four decades.

* * *

But Barna didn't set out to be a national voice in worldview research—far from it.

Instead, he claims to be an introvert, more comfortable in the company of numbers and data sets, than in front

of a camera or speaking to a sold-out audience.

His love of statistics started with his boyhood fascination with baseball cards. Not the player pictures or career narratives—but the flip side of the card, packed with nearly microscopic rows of numbers and averages.

"The numbers spoke to me," Barna recalls. "They told a story."

"Those years of digesting the numbers made me very comfortable with math and with numbers to tell a story," he explains. "Since I have always loved writing narratives as well, it seems only natural now that I combined the two skills into writing books, articles, and reports based on statistical data."

INTERESTINGLY, HIS LOVE FOR JESUS CAME LATER.

While in graduate school at Rutgers University, he and his now-wife, Nancy, were planning to get married, and the church required them to complete a premarital counseling program. When the program was done, they had a private meeting with the church's priest.

According to Barna, "During that private meeting I asked him a bunch of theological and faith-related questions. He blew up and told me I could never question the church. At that moment I knew that church was not right for us."

But Barna's intellectual curiosity was piqued, and after getting married in the church, Barna and his wife "went on a search for God."

"After a few false starts we found a fundamentalist church that was Bible-

oriented, and we accepted Christ there," says Barna. "Within just a few months, that church blew us out with their rules and unbiblical boundaries, but we found another church that was more sane, and we stuck to the faith because of our growing relationship with Jesus."

As he recalls, those early detours on their journey were foundational to their faith. "The bad church experiences we had led us to focus on Jesus rather than churches, programs, or charismatic personalities."

* * *

Like his faith journey, Barna's road to becoming the nation's leading researcher on faith and culture also took some unexpected twists.

He actually started his career after graduate school with a traditional marketing research firm—serving clients such as Chevrolet, Colgate Palmolive, Proctor & Gamble, and networks ABC and NBC.

Sprinkled into that list of secular clients were a few projects for Christian ministries. And after working on one campaign for a faith-based client, their marketing and media representative asked him to leave his big firm and become their director of marketing research and direct marketing. He accepted the offer and moved with his wife Nancy to Chicago.

That transition would ignite Barna's passion for exploring how marketing research could serve ministries and the Christian body—something that was new territory back in the early 1980s.

* * *

As Barna's time at the marketing firm in Chicago came to a close, he



and Nancy moved back to California. That's where Barna Research Group, which would eventually become the nation's leader in faith-related research, started in their garage in Hollywood in 1984.

Shortly after returning to California, Barna received an unexpected call from the Vice President of Research at Disney, who happened to be a former colleague, asking if he'd be interested in doing some research for Disney.

From that connection, Barna Research Group became the marketing research firm for the Disney Channel, giving the burgeoning research company a strong financial foundation that would enable it to spend significant time developing marketing research methods for churches and Christian ministries, which was Barna's true passion.

"It became obvious that ministries had neither the budgets nor expertise to commission marketing research," Barna recalls, "even though they desperately needed the information because they were making decisions based on anecdotes, assumptions, emotion, and tradition."

During that time period, Barna Research Group leveraged the profits from its Disney research to underwrite its cutting-edge

national studies regarding faith. As he explains, "We essentially gave the research away to churches and parachurch ministries in order to help their ministry efforts be more effective and efficient."

For the next 25 years, Barna Research Group conducted groundbreaking research and became the industry standard for research into matters of religion, faith, church, and worldview. Then, following a season where George felt led to make a change, he sold Barna Research Group in 2009.

* * *

Over the years, the veteran researcher took on a wide variety of projects—including studies for four presidential campaigns, research on possible themes and storylines for TV shows and movies, developing cultural trend-tracking processes, doing studies of leadership and behavioral change for multiple branches of the military, and many others.

Of all the projects he's done, which does Barna see as most significant?

He points to an early worldview project for Charles Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, which led to Colson's classic, *How Now Shall We Live* (1998). Barna also

noted a large, complicated study he completed, examining how God transforms lives, resulting in the book *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (2011). He also singles out his political and election research that identified a group known as SAGE-Cons, Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians, illuminating that group's emergence as a powerful force in American politics.

And Barna sees two of his recent projects as some of his most significant. One has been the Student Worldview Inventory at Arizona Christian University, a worldview measure of the University's student body; and his research into effective ministry to children, which he shares in his latest book, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul* (published by Arizona Christian University Press in 2023).

And along the way, he's written an astonishing 60 books. "I love writing more than anything else I get to do," he explained. "Research is complicated to explain and articles usually don't do justice to the breadth and depth of the findings. Books allow a contextualized presentation of facts in a narrative form and have a greater potential to take a person beyond temporary changes to transformation."

Why so many books?

"I have had the privilege of conducting unique studies of many facets of faith," he explained. "If you peruse the catalogue, you'll find it covers research on many faith-related topics, ranging from evangelism, discipleship, and leadership to stewardship, worship, faith practices, and more. My goal has been to provide a holistic perspective of biblical ministry, and it has taken years and many books to provide that outlook."

After more than 40 years doing research, Barna now is the Director of Research of the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. He is also a professor at the University.

It was during a conference at an oceanside resort in California in 2019 that the idea for the Cultural Research Center was born. The organization was ultimately co-founded about a year later by Barna and his wife, Nancy, along with ACU President Len Munsil and his wife, Tracy, who serves as CRC's Executive Director.

So why this stop along the journey?

"ACU allows me to continue to do unique research and to have a platform for disseminating the information," Barna explained.

"Our emphasis is on cultural transformation, which of course happens one life at a time. Our worldview research, through the Cultural Research Center, enables us to give people a pathway toward becoming who God made them to be, and to help facilitate the advancement of His Kingdom on Earth," he said.

Despite running the gauntlet of wall-to-wall meetings at the NRB conference, Barna is tireless in calling our nation to embrace the biblical worldview.

As he sees it—and as his research bears out—from a worldview and spiritual perspective, our nation has been going in the wrong direction for the last 25 years or so.

But he remains clear-eyed about his life's assignment to continue to alert

Christian leaders to the challenges we face.

"I'm determined to finish well," he says. "I am committed to focusing on the things that I think matter the most and make the biggest difference—biblical worldview, ministry to children, and effective discipleship."

Although he loves to spend time watching the Yankees, playing guitar, relaxing on the beach, and hanging out with his three grown daughters, their families, and three grandchildren (ages 5 to 9), he doesn't have plans to stop anytime soon.

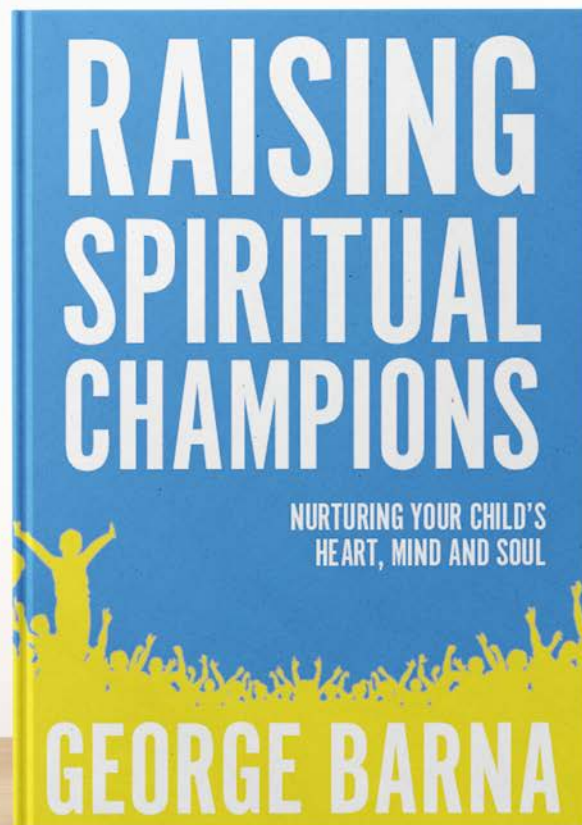
As Barna explains, "I don't believe 'retirement' is a biblical concept—in fact, there is no Hebrew word for retirement—so I expect to mentor successors for CRC, continue writing, help to disciple my grandchildren, and hopefully do a few more research projects of significance."

And he'll likely do an interview or two and write a few more books along the way.

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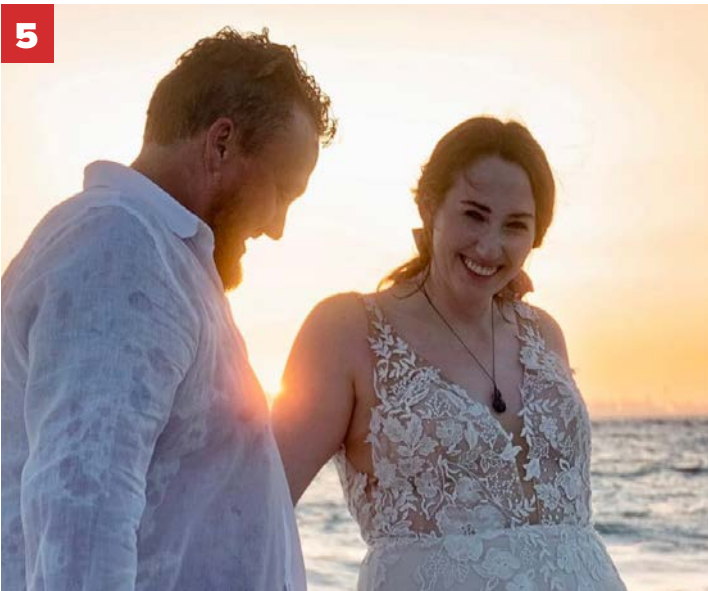
1. **KAITLYN (STRELTZOFF) MARICELLI ('19)** received her Masters in Business Leadership from GCU, became the head volleyball coach for a private Christian school in Spokane Valley, Washington, and married her husband, Spencer! Her two closest friends to this day are the ones she met at ACU. Life has been full of fun surprises and she has learned to trust God fully with His plan.

2. **AUTUMN (WELLS) DEFFNER ('15)** serves with her husband, Griffin, as the worship pastor for River Church in Phoenix. She is also the owner of Autumn Ashley Photography.

3. **NICK AND TESIA (SWAYDAN, 2015) NORTON ('18)** met at ACU, where they were both on the golf team. They married in 2018, and after remaining in Arizona for a few years, decided to move to Utah in 2021 to be closer to their families. They have since bought a house and adopted a cat, Gracie. The Nortons enjoy playing pickleball together and are expecting their first child in June 2024!

4. **CHELSEA (FREWIN) DUBOVOY ('17)** and her husband, Jonathan, moved to North Dakota in January 2024, with their son Ezekiel. The day they arrived the temperature was -24 degrees, and with the windchill it was -56 degrees!

5



7



6



8



5. **JAMIE (HEATH) LOVE ('15)** married Ryan Love in May 2023. She is the assistant varsity boys basketball coach at Thunderbird High School (Phoenix), which was recently the region champs.

6. **HEATHER (LOGAN) MONAHAN ('99)** lives in Prescott with her husband, Matt, and their seven children. Heather continues her life-work as a busy homeschooling mom to her youngest four children, Elise (16), Asher (15), Evelyn (10), and Alistair (9). Matt stays busy at the helm of their growing business. The family is engaged in many activities in their community, church, and youth group, and is grateful to have grandparents living nearby. Their oldest three children graduated in 2020, 2022, and 2023. Their oldest, Anna, married in 2021 and works part time and teaches high school math and chemistry for a homeschool co-op. Elena is currently obtaining her private pilot license, and Abi is a freshman at ACU studying Secondary Education and Political Science.

7. **DR. LINNEA LYDING** Professor and Dean, Shelly Roden School of Education and Professional Studies at ACU, and her husband, Chris, welcomed their first grandchild in the fall. Liliana May Fandialan made her way into the world on September 25, 2023 and is already sporting her Firestorm gear!

8. **CARRIE (DOWDLE) LYNN ('03)** ministered among refugees in Northern Iraq and then worked at a missions agency for several years. She and her husband, Ryan, have been married for fifteen years and are thankful for their two children, Micah (11) and Moriah (6) who God brought to their family through adoption. The Lynns live in Phoenix, where Carrie home-educates their children and volunteers with refugees.

CLASSNOTES

'20s

JOSEPH REICHENBERGER ('23)

currently holds a position within the recruitment department at Arizona Christian University. As he works full time at ACU, he is also pursuing his Master of Divinity from Phoenix Seminary.

GRIFFIN SWAN ('23)

enrolled at Arizona Christian University in the Fall of 2019, making him a member of the first freshman class to attend at the new campus in Glendale. During his time at ACU, Griffin was able to not only play college baseball, but completely transform his understanding of life and priorities. He found himself entranced by the life-changing friendships, conversations, and experiences that this University provided him. Now, after graduating, he has been given the opportunity to stay at the University as a Student Recruitment Specialist, where he can give students the opportunity to have the same experience he did. The most fascinating thing is that he still finds himself on this campus growing in his faith in ways he never thought possible.

ISAAC SOUZA ('22) is a Student Recruitment and Training Specialist for ACU. Since enrolling at Arizona Christian University, Isaac has been radically transformed by Christ. He lost 150 pounds, became a leader on the football team, and received a full-time job leading Academic Recruitment for the school. He is married to his wife, Katelyn Souza, and they are expecting their first child this August. ACU is the place Jesus chose to change his life and he is forever grateful to the mission and vision of the school.

▶ **AMBER STECHMAN ('22)** graduated with a Behavioral Health degree and currently serves as the Campus Photographer & Social Media Coordinator at Arizona Christian University. She is also a member of the very first cohort in ACU's Master's

of Marriage and Family Therapy graduate program. She was a Life Group Leader on campus as an undergrad, and made some of her most cherished, lifelong friendships at ACU.



BILLY CARTER ('21) and soon to be 2024 spring graduate, Kourtney Bruner, are engaged and plan to marry in May.

MICHAEL ROGERS ('21) received his Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies from Phoenix Seminary.

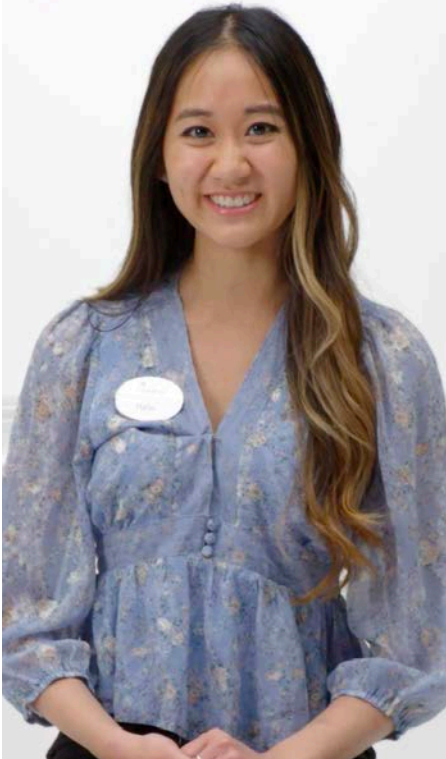
PAIGE CHURCH ('20) is a nurse at Chandler Regional Medical Center and is engaged to be married.

▶ **MADELINE (GREEN) MOYLE ('20)** married Samuel Moyle on August 25, 2023. Madeline moved to Orange County, California, in 2022 and the Moyles moved to Los Angeles upon getting married. Madeline is self-employed as a content creator and freelance choir vocalist, and Samuel works for NBC Universal as a VFX coordinator.



▶ **BRIAN AND JORDAN (SAWYER) SEWELL ('20)** married in December 2023.





▲ **HALLE SWITZER ('20)** has been able to buy a home, launch a freelance modeling business, earn two promotions at her job, and join a K-Pop performance group. After being a part of the ACU dance team in college, she has continued her love for dance by joining a K-Pop performance group that performs at events in Arizona and California. In the spring of 2020 she made contact with her birth family in Vietnam, which set off a journey to become more in touch with her culture. Halle has worked at Chick-fil-A for seven years, and after graduation she was promoted to the Director of Operations at the 89th and Shea location, where she oversees all areas of the business and manages 140 employees. She is now preparing to interview for a prestigious corporate Chick-fil-A program that may ultimately result in operator selection. She happily resides in Tempe in her new home with her one-eyed cat, and can't wait to see where her path takes her next!

'10s

ANDRES "ANDY" MARRUFO ('19) is the worship and creative arts director at Crossroads Nazarene Church in Chandler. He and his wife, Stephanie, have three children. Stephanie is an adjunct professor at ACU.

MARCO CASTILLA ('19) is a real estate agent for RE/MAX in the Denver area and recently obtained his real estate license in Arizona.

▼ **JONATHAN NUNNALLY ('18)** is the executive director of Legacy Church in Thornton, Colorado where his wife, Taylor, serves as the executive assistant. The Nunnallys are expecting their first child in July 2024.



MONICA LIEVSAY ('17) is the youth pastor at First Baptist Church Scottsdale and has worked with children, youth and missions for over a decade. She recently graduated from Trinity University with a master's in Sociology.

▼ **GREER (FORSETH) SAHA ('17)** married the love of her life, Daniel Saha, on October 7, 2023. Greer and Daniel have moved to Manhattan, Kansas, to start their new life together!



ZACH AND MICHELLE (FRIGAARD, 2019) VOGEL ('17) have been married almost four years. They have a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter and have stepped into a full-time ministry they run called Identity Sports. They host live events with professional athletes where they discuss how their faith impacts their lives. The Vogels are also launching a podcast as they build a digital platform to help amplify the voices of athletes to share what God is doing in and through their lives to encourage those around them.

TAMARA (WILLIAMS) YANKE ('16) is the Administrative Assistant for Crosswinds Presbyterian Church in Phoenix.

JESSICA (TRINK) LINDBERG ('15) is a math teacher at Paradise Valley High School and administrative assistant/director of their gifted education program.

▼ **ALEX (DUGAN) THOMPSON AND MANUEL "MANNY" HIGUERA (2022) ('15)** who both serve as teachers at the new Arcadia Christian Academy, caught up with Pastor Tim Reed. Manny is currently working toward his Master of Arts in Education.



RYAN (ATTD) AND SAMANTHA (MCCANTS, 2017) JONES ('14) are expecting their first child, a girl, this spring. Ryan is a firefighter and Sam is a territory sales executive at Fidelity National Title Agency in Phoenix.

TYLER AND ALEXANDRA (TUTEN, 2015) KARL ('14) recently moved their family of four to Lancaster, Ohio, in pursuit of a change of scenery. Tyler's company, Juncture Wealth Strategies, has an office there, so the move was an easy one for the Karls. Tyler serves as a portfolio-manager and Alexandra is a stay-at-home mom to their children. The Karls loved the fall colors and greenery everywhere in late 2023 and are searching for a church community to plug into.

MELISSA GAINEY ('14) is a Life and Living Benefits Advisor at Symmetry Financial Group.

JORDAN AUGUSTINE ('13) is the head varsity boys basketball coach at Ironwood High School, where his team won the 2023-24 5A State Championship.

SAMUEL LINCOLN ('13) graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor's in Biblical Study. He is married to Katherine and they have two beautiful children and remain in the Valley. Sam pursued a Masters in Executive Leadership, and after many years with Scottsdale Bible Church, recently took a role as Audio/ Visual Director at Arizona Christian University. Sam still finds time to fill in at Scottsdale Bible Church, supporting his former teammates here and there.

JOHN KORTMAN ('13) is the high school girls soccer head coach at Northwest Christian School in Phoenix.

▼ **THOMAS SLAGER ('12) AND KEVIN YULE ('01)** who are both serving at Highland Church in Scottsdale, caught up with Pastor Tim Reed. Thomas is the lead pastor and Kevin is the executive pastor.



LARRY CARMICHAEL ('12) is a clergy member for The Salvation Army.

MATT DENNIS ('12) is the College and Family Pastor at Turning Leaf Church of the Nazarene in Litchfield Park. He has been serving that community since 2011 and is also working with the home office of the Nazarene church to help with 60 other churches.

CASEY MORRELL (ATTD) ('11) is the owner of 4 Him Printing and Athletics, a full-service print shop offering screen printing, embroidery, jerseys, team stores, and more (4himco.com). His wife, Kailin (Anderson, 2017), is a teacher for Deer Valley Unified School District.

BRADEN TROOST ('11) is a coach at Northwest Christian School for the high school girls soccer team.

CRYSTAL KRUEGER ('10) is a licensed marriage and family therapist at the Dawn Institute, which she founded in 2018. She received her Doctorate in Behavioral Health from ASU in 2021, which followed her Master's degree in 2013. She is also a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional.

MIKE BHATTI ('10) is the Director of Connection at Arcadia Christian Academy in Phoenix.

'00s

TARA (REED) MILLER ('09) works for Manna Global Missions and with Filter of Hope, a nonprofit with a mission to provide safe clean drinking water to families in need worldwide. Recently, Tara and her husband have been training college students from all over the United States who are working with Filter of Hope and taking them to local villages in the Dominican Republic.

ROBBY LASHUA ('06) is the pastor of Apologetics at Desert Springs Community Church in Goodyear. He also serves as an Associate Professor at Mission Bible Institute, and as host of Christ, Culture & Coffee, a weekly apologetics podcast. He recently spoke to students at one of the weekly chapel services at ACU. He and his wife, **Kelly (Ballmer, 2008)**, have four children.

MIKE BRANTON (ATTD) ('04) is the student ministries pastor at Sun Valley Community Church in Gilbert and recently spoke to students in chapel at ACU.

'90s

ROB MULARI ('99) is the Connections Pastor at Saguaro Canyon Church in Tucson and recently spoke to students in chapel at ACU.

PHIL KOOISTRA ('98) received his Doctor of Ministry from Western Seminary. He is the lead pastor and primary teaching elder of Grace Bible Church in Bend, Oregon. His wife, **Heidi (1998)** is the women's ministry director at the church.

DONALD COLANN ('97) is a teacher and lives in Glendale.

SAM SERVINS (ATTD) ('96) book *Girls Are Dumb & Guys Are Jerks: A Guide to Navigating Dating and Other Life Choices* was published in December 2023.

KEVIN REDDING ('94) has been on staff at Shiloh Community Church in Phoenix since 2001 in various ministry roles and currently serves as the high school and young adult pastor. ACU is a family tradition for the Reddings, as his daughter **Rachel (Redding) Dean** graduated in 2016.

'80s

ALLAN HARRIS ('84) a 6th grade math teacher at Campo Bello Elementary School in Phoenix, was among the Arizona teachers who received \$2,500 grants through Palo Verde Fiesta Bowl Charities Wishes for Teacher Draft Day presented by SRP in Fall 2023. Allan purchased headphones, a whiteboard and math manipulatives for his class.

FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Featuring ACU Veterans

More than 80 years ago, Arizona Christian University's campus was the former Thunderbird Field, an aviation training facility for military pilots during World War II. Today, the property continues to embrace the airfield's mission as ACU honors and equips those who serve in the United States Military. ACU offers services to assist veterans in a variety of ways as well as academic programs that prepare future military members to serve our country.

Anne Courchaine (2012)

Lieutenant Commander Anne (Munsil) Courchaine attended Arizona Christian University, was named Outstanding Graduate in Biblical Studies, and went on to law school at Arizona State. After law school she was selected for the Navy J.A.G. corps. She was stationed in San Diego from 2016-2020, providing legal advice to the commanding officer of her naval base. Since 2020, she has been serving in the reserves.

After practicing civilian law following 4 years of active service in the Navy, Anne recently left the workplace so she can spend this season of life in her growing family. Anne and her husband, Tim, who works in the U.S. Attorney's Office and also served as a Judge advocate general (JAG) in the Marines, live in the Phoenix area and have three children.

Monfort Bizimana (2020)

Staff Sergeant Monfort Bizimana was born in Burundi, a small country in East Africa. As a child, Monfort survived Burundi's civil war and arrived in the United States as a refugee, later receiving U.S. citizenship. At ACU, Monfort studied behavioral health with an emphasis in counseling and competed on the Cross Country team. He graduated in 2013 and joined the Army soon after.

Monfort has served in multiple capacities, including cavalry scout, counterintelligence, special agent, and logistics. During his eight years of service, Monfort was stationed in Georgia, Kansas, South Korea, Poland, and Italy. His wife, who is still on active duty, is currently stationed in Europe. Monfort retired from the Army in 2022 and splits his time between Italy and Texas, where he invests in property, runs an online business, and studies for his MBA through the University of Maryland.





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