

# ABLAZE



**GOD IN  
AMERICA**

CULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER

**FAITH AND  
RESILIENCE**

ALUMNI FEATURE

**MEN'S  
LACROSSE**

CREATOR'S GAME

# the PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SPRING 2025



Colleges and universities in America in 2025 are roiled in controversy.

It's largely their own fault. For decades now the world of higher education has ignored the fundamentals of truth-based, classical education in favor of left-wing ideology that teaches college students to hate God, hate America and even hate themselves and their families. Almost uniformly most colleges – even many Christian colleges – have embraced unbiblical, damaging and false woke theories related to economics, gender, sexuality and American and world history.

As the nation now reaps what has been sown at our universities, a political and cultural backlash has formed and achieved political power, which is disrupting higher education.

Unfortunately, in reaction to decades of left-wing indoctrination, which culminated recently in pro-terrorism violence, intimidation and vandalism on many campuses, some conservative and Christian leaders have decided to throw the baby out with the bathwater and are suggesting that a college education is not necessary at all.

With respect, this is a recipe for disaster for conservative Christians.

I have never believed a college education was for everyone. Certainly, there are many who are called and created by God to vocations where a college degree is an unnecessary expense that delays the start of their career.

But good grief – not everyone!

Imagine a future where all of the plumbers and electricians are God-fearing Christians, but they live in a world where all the teachers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, engineers, lawmakers, military officers and corporate executives – the leaders of our society who are making the rules for others – are all secularists indoctrinated in left-wing ideology?

The reality is that for most people, especially those from challenging economic backgrounds, a college education is still the best pathway out of cycles of poverty and into the middle class and beyond. And it is a vital credential that provides an entry way into so many careers that lead to positions of influence.

Even from solely an economic perspective, college pays off. A college graduate, on average, will earn roughly \$1 million more than a non-college graduate over a lifetime - \$2.3 million for those with a bachelor's degree, compared to \$1.3 million for those with a high school diploma.\* Even

with increased costs, and even if you have to use student loans to earn that degree – no one is paying \$1 million for a college degree.

Fortunately, there is a much better approach than telling young Christians to just not go to college. And that approach is simple – get behind the few remaining Christian universities, like ACU, that are committed to conservative, biblical principles. New websites like [www.faithfulcolleges.org](http://www.faithfulcolleges.org) and books like, "Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide" by Glanzer, Cockle and Martin are providing objective, factual information and rankings that reveal which Christian colleges and universities are staying true to their biblical foundations. I'm happy to report that Arizona Christian University shows extremely well in these reports.

ACU specifically is designed to build disciples of Jesus who will be leaders of influence and excellence in every important area of culture. With worldview expert George Barna measuring our efforts, we know that remarkable spiritual growth and transformation happens at ACU, along with an education that prepares our graduates for successful vocations. ACU is launching amazing graduates, grounded in biblical truth, into ministry and missions, teaching careers, law school and medical school, businesses and nonprofits, counseling careers, law enforcement, and more. And these ACU graduates are pursuing and gaining positions of cultural influence that would otherwise go to college graduates who may have been indoctrinated into wokeism.

It would also help for serious Christian philanthropists who desire to see a biblical, conservative resurgence in our culture, to stop supporting their secular or "progressive Christian" alma maters – and get behind ACU and the few schools who are willing to stand for biblical truth in our culture. We are grateful for our growing army of financial supporters, and for the parents and students who have helped ACU become one of the fastest-growing universities in our country!

Yours for equipping Christian leaders,

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

President  
Arizona Christian University

*\*The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings, Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose and Ban Cheah, The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011.*

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## **ABLAZE**

An Arizona Christian University publication

### **OUR MAGAZINE**

The ABLAZE magazine is published by the Department of University Advancement, with contributions from ACU staff, faculty, and Stronghold Media, a student-led media club at the university.

### **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**

Men's Lacrosse players Gavin Waddell (Freshman Attackman) and Parker Vigue (Freshman Attackman) celebrate a goal together.

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# EMILY TILL

Athletics and Academics, Leading Others Toward Christ

# Her INNERFIRESTORM

STUDENT FEATURE | EMILY TILL

With seconds left on the clock, Emily Till posted up and sank a clutch shot, sending the Arizona Christian University women's basketball team into overtime against GSAC rival Menlo College. In her first game back from an injury sustained during her sophomore season, Till showed no signs of being rusty, contributing 10 points, nine rebounds—her specialty—and a key blocked shot. ACU went on to secure an 80-74 victory, making the moment one of Till's most memorable as a Firestorm athlete.

For Till, this game was more than just a thrilling win—it was a milestone in a lifelong dream. From her early days growing up in Colorado to her journey at ACU, she has refused to be complacent, excelling in both athletics and academics while leading others toward Christ.

For many years—from second grade through high school—athletics was a central focus in Till's life. A multi-sport athlete in high school, she competed in cross country, basketball, and track, but her heart was always set on playing collegiate basketball. After conversations with ACU Head Coach Rusty Rogers and a campus visit, she knew ACU was the right fit and committed to join the Firestorm.

Adjusting to life in Arizona was a challenge at first, but with extended family nearby and a growing community of friends and teammates, ACU quickly became home. The transition to college athletics also

required a shift in focus—no longer juggling multiple sports, Till embraced the long NAIA basketball season that runs from August through March. She welcomed the challenge and, more importantly, cherished the relationships she formed through the ups and downs of the season. "There's no other group of girls that I would want to be around every day," she said.

Balancing basketball with her studies as a behavioral health major has required discipline and intentionality. "The biggest challenge is having the willingness to show up as your best self every day," Till said. Even on difficult days, she focuses on "showing up, physically, mentally, just being there fully 100%."

Till's influence at ACU extends far beyond wins and losses on the basketball court. Alongside teammate Addison Neal, she leads a Bible study for the team, currently focusing on the Gospel of Mark. She also treasures the devotions shared before every game. "I think that's where all of us have probably grown the most...hearing and learning from each other," she said.

For Till, basketball is more than just a game—it's a daily opportunity to reflect Christ and His work in her life. "I try to show my teammates the love of God through my actions and words," she said. "I [show] my coaches that I love God because I respect them." She describes the ACU basketball team as a community

where faith is woven into every aspect of their lives. "We incorporate so much prayer into our lives and so much encouragement through Christ."

Beyond athletics, Till serves as a student staff leader with ACU Young Life, continuing the heart for ministry she developed as a youth leader in her home church. She also works alongside ACU Biblical Studies Professor Kathy Mason, planning events, coordinating service projects, and engaging with students on campus retreats.

Her dedication—both on and off the court—has earned her national recognition. In 2024, Till was honored with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Emil S. Liston Award, a prestigious recognition given to just one male and one female junior basketball student-athlete in the country for excellence in both academics and athletics.

Looking ahead, Till is pursuing a bachelor's degree in behavioral health with aspirations of becoming a speech-language pathologist. She plans to complete a master's program after graduating from ACU and hopes to coach women's college basketball while doing so. Ultimately, she envisions coaching at the high school level, using her experiences at ACU to develop future leaders of influence and excellence using the spiritual and academic lessons she has learned during her time at ACU.



Emily volunteering at Cañon Community Baptist Church VBS

# God IN AMERICA



## What Americans Really Believe About God

God is becoming an increasingly visible topic in public discourse across American culture. This shift is evident everywhere—from the sidelines of college football championships and the Super Bowl to discussions on college campuses and television ads. We're even seeing it in the political arena, as newly minted Cabinet officials openly express their faith, thanking God on national television and attributing their success to divine guidance.

These high-profile references to God in sports, entertainment, and public life are encouraging. However, even as faith-based messages gain visibility, Americans' actual beliefs about God have never been more uncertain.

The latest *American Worldview Inventory 2025*—the sixth annual nationwide study on the worldview of American adults, led by Dr. George Barna and the Cultural Research Center—reveals a growing confusion about God, even among those who identify as Christians.

How did we arrive at a point where so many Americans—even professing Christians—hold conflicting or distorted views about God?

While two-thirds of Americans still identify as Christian, only 4% hold a biblical worldview. Even more alarming, just 40% believe in the God of the Bible—down from 73% three decades ago. Instead, 92% of Americans now embrace Syncretism, a worldview that blends beliefs from multiple religions and ideologies.

In a culture where spiritual beliefs are increasingly fragmented, the biblical understanding of God faces mounting challenges from powerful cultural forces, reshaping how Americans perceive Him.

## What Americans Get Wrong About God

The research highlights a troubling reality: Americans hold increasingly diverse and often contradictory views about God. While 46% of adults believe in a singular supreme being who created and governs everything, others hold vastly different perspectives—17% believe humanity itself is divine, 8% believe in multiple gods, and 29% reject any higher power altogether.

And even within the church, confusion abounds.

Among self-identified Christians, who make up 67% of the U.S. adult population, many hold beliefs about God that contradict Scripture. The *American Worldview Inventory 2025* reveals that only 60% of Christians believe in one sovereign Creator, while the remaining 40% align with alternative views common in secular culture.

Even among theologically defined born-again Christians—those who claim salvation through faith in Jesus Christ—distorted views persist. Some deny God's sovereignty, question biblical moral absolutes, or believe salvation involves human effort rather than grace alone.

Similar confusion surrounds the nature and existence of Jesus Christ. Only 59% of U.S. adults believe Jesus exists and influences lives today, yet

their perceptions of Him vary widely. Among self-identified Christians, 78% acknowledge Jesus as an active spiritual authority—meaning nearly one in four do not. Many reduce Him to a great moral teacher rather than recognizing Him as the divine Son of God. Others blend their faith in Jesus with belief in other religious figures, further demonstrating the grip of Syncretism in modern Christianity.

### Who Do Americans Worship?

Americans' confusion about God directly impacts their worship practices. While 59% recognize Jesus as a spiritual authority, only 34% worship the God of the Bible. More than 50 million Americans worship Mary, and over 5 million openly admit to worshipping Satan.

These findings highlight the

increasing spiritual inconsistency among Americans, including those who consider themselves devoted Christians.

### A Nation Redefining God

For decades, Americans have been reshaping their understanding of God to fit personal preferences rather than biblical truth, according to Dr. Barna, CRC Director of Research.

"God is still part of the conversation in America, but we've reached a point where He means different things to different people," Barna explains. "Instead of adjusting their beliefs to align with God's Word, most people now shape their understanding of God to align with their personal desires."

One undeniable sign of Syncretism's

## BORN AGAIN CHRISTIANS' VIEW OF GOD



**25%**

do not worship Jesus, despite claiming Him as their Savior.



**11%**

worship God but not Jesus, while...

**31%**

worship Jesus but not God.



**36%**

worship both God and Jesus exclusively.



**8%**

worship God and/or Jesus alongside Mary or the prophets.



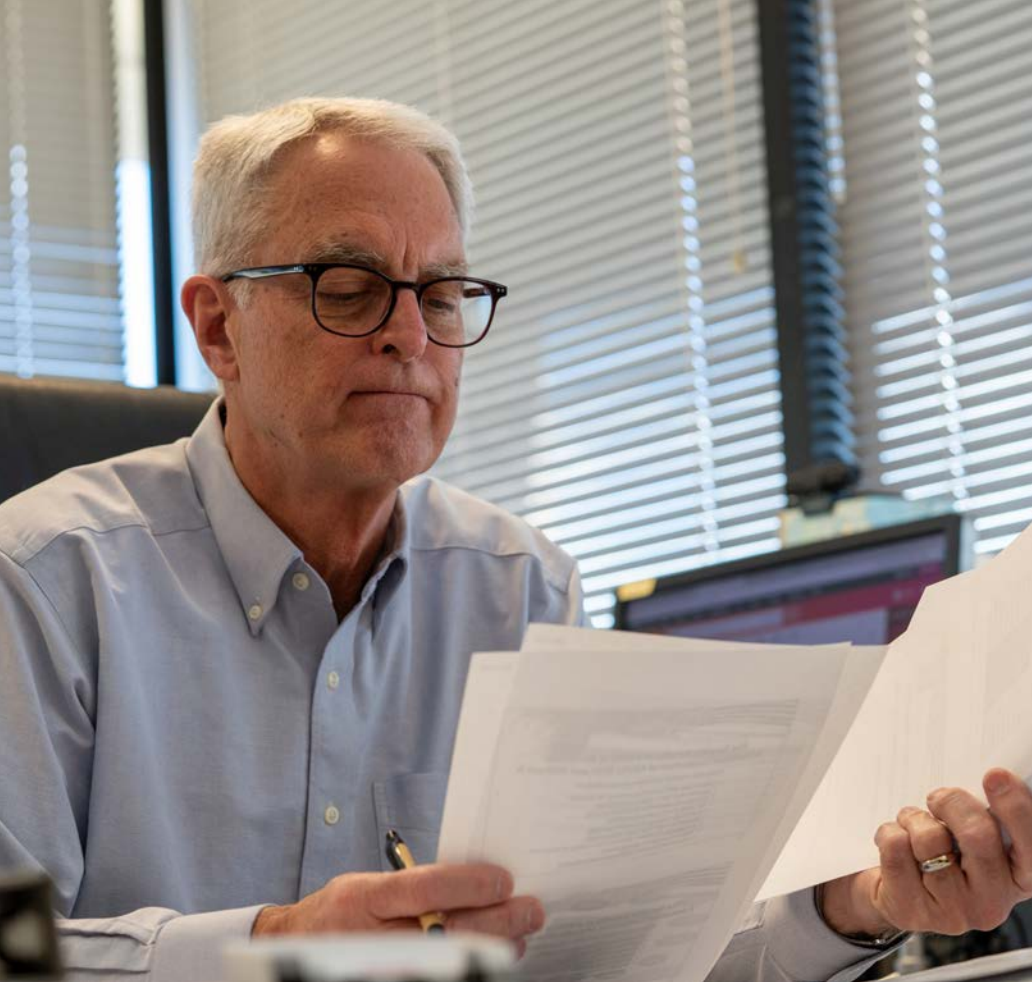
**7%**

mix Christian worship with deities from non-Christian faiths.



**21%**

worship other spiritual entities or none at all.



grip on America is the diverse mix of deities people embrace. Research shows that 40% of adults believe in spiritual beings from competing religious systems, while 17% actively worship multiple figures.

Rather than seeking to understand who God truly is, many Americans create customized belief systems, blending Christianity with New Age spirituality, self-help ideologies, or secular philosophies.

For example, some claim to follow Jesus Christ while simultaneously engaging in Wiccan or New Age practices. This reflects Syncretism's influence, where personal spirituality is based on individual preference rather than a coherent, biblical foundation.

### **What Are the Worldview Implications?**

This widespread confusion about God has profound consequences for individuals and society. Without a clear understanding of who God is, people struggle to establish a consistent moral and ethical framework.

Because beliefs about God—often called “prime reality”—serve as the foundation for worldview development, shifting perceptions of the divine lead to widespread cultural instability. As Barna notes, without a biblical view of God, it becomes nearly impossible to build a coherent biblical worldview.

The consequences of this spiritual confusion are already evident in American culture, from the declining influence of the church to rising mental health struggles linked to existential uncertainty. Without a firm grounding in biblical truth, people increasingly rely on subjective, ever-changing beliefs to navigate life.

Barna cautions that even among those who identify as born-again Christians, a troubling number hold views of God that contradict Scripture.

“This is one of the greatest challenges facing the church today,” he warns. “People may claim Christianity, but their actual beliefs about God often have little resemblance to biblical truth.” This isn't just theological drift—it

represents a fundamental shift in how people approach faith, truth, and spiritual authority. As Americans continue redefining God based on personal preferences rather than biblical teaching, the result is moral confusion, spiritual inconsistency, and a lack of true discipleship.

### **A Call to Action**

These trends are deeply concerning. That's why Dr. Barna and the Cultural Research Center designed the *American Worldview Inventory 2025* as a “National Study for Strengthening the Worldview of Americans.” This year's research focuses on four areas where Americans consistently demonstrate weak biblical understanding: beliefs about God, truth, sin, and salvation.

The goal of the research is to uncover why our nation is struggling in these areas and provide practical strategies to rebuild a biblical worldview in America.

Addressing this crisis requires a renewed commitment to biblical literacy and discipleship. Churches, families, and Christian educators must rise to the challenge of teaching a consistent, biblically grounded worldview. Without intentional discipleship, future generations will continue drifting further from biblical truth.

At Arizona Christian University, our biblical worldview training begins with teaching students that prime reality is the infinite, personal God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. They learn His attributes—He is sovereign, transcendent, triune, just, omniscient, immanent, and good. They understand that He is the source and standard of objective Truth and that we can know Him through His Creation and His Word.

That's the God we want to make sure our students—and our nation—know.

The good news is that our culture is talking about God. Now it's up to those who know and serve Him to share the truth about who He truly is.

# AND RESILIENCE



ACU alumni and Stewardship partners (left to right)  
Brandon Ream ('06), Grant Botma ('06), and Jake Norton ('08)

Born and raised in Arizona, Grant Botma grew up in the West Valley where his father owned a dairy farm. As the middle child among seven siblings, his childhood was shaped by a strong sense of community and faith. Sundays and Wednesdays were dedicated to attending church in Phoenix, and weekdays were spent at a Christian school, where he completed kindergarten through eighth grade.

Life, as it often does, brought unexpected changes. Grant's parents' divorce during junior high marked a significant turning point. His father's subsequent incarceration further compounded the upheaval. In the close-knit world of a small Christian school, such events were rare and unsettling. This led to a transition from his familiar surroundings on the family farm to the bustling environment of central Phoenix. Although it was a stark contrast, this transition allowed Grant to experience the dichotomy of country life and city life, which he reflects on with gratitude today.

Support came from his grandparents, who generously funded his education

through grade school. Their assistance enabled him to continue his Christian education through the end of eighth grade. For high school, Grant moved to a public school, first in Buckeye for his freshman and sophomore years, and then in Glendale. When his father was released from prison, Grant elected to move in with him, and attended Ironwood High School for his junior and senior years.

College was not initially part of Grant's plan. He remembered sitting for the SAT and, halfway through, feeling a sense of disillusionment. Questioning why he was there, he walked out in the middle of the test, deciding that junior college was a better fit. He attended Glendale Community College for a semester, during which time he was financially independent, holding down a good job and living in his own apartment.

Although he was not pursuing higher education with enthusiasm, Grant was deeply involved in church activities and served in various capacities, including at Christ Church of the Valley, where he was introduced to the idea of a church plant. As an

18-year-old, he eagerly volunteered to help, which led him to start reading the Bible on his own. This personal engagement with Scripture was transformative for Grant. Despite his upbringing, his faith had not been truly personal until he delved into God's Word for himself.

The pastor of the church where he was serving became a mentor, encouraging his spiritual growth and suggesting that he consider Bible college. A quick search led Grant to discover Southwestern College, conveniently located nearby. Excited by the prospect of growing in his faith while furthering his education, he visited the college, enrolled, and began classes the following week.

Throughout his journey at Southwestern, Grant was fortunate to be surrounded by amazing Christian role models. Through supportive educators like Tim Reed, his basketball coach Steve Morley, and staff members like Chuck Hunter, he was able to deepen his faith and grow in his relationship with God. Mentorship also played a crucial role, with figures like Bayard Forrest (Phoenix Suns) offering guidance.

Initially majoring in Christian Ministries, Grant volunteered at large churches but realized his true passion lay elsewhere. While studying God's Word, he recognized the significant impact financial stewardship has on relationships, and felt a calling to help others navigate their finances. This led him to double-major in business, driven by a desire to help others address financial issues that often lead to relational strife. His experiences and mentors at SWC/ACU helped shape his desire to serve others through financial services, laying the foundation for his future endeavors.

In 2007, Grant founded what has become a diverse group of companies collectively known as "Stewardship." These companies encompass a wide range of financial services including a mortgage brokerage, real estate agency, property and casualty insurance, investment advisory, and life, health, and estate planning. Stewardship's mission is to build genuine relationships with people and provide real estate, home loans, insurance, and investments with wisdom and love.

As CEO, the heart of Grant's leadership philosophy is the commitment to love and serve people through their finances, creating a trustworthy environment where clients feel confident in entrusting their financial matters to him and his team. "We love and serve people through finances. I'm also trying to love, support, and serve my employees. This allows us to better serve our clients."

As Grant has grown Stewardship over the years, he has also had the opportunity to hire several fellow SWC/ACU alumni in key roles with the company. ACU graduates that are employed by Stewardship include: Brian Ream ('10), Financial Planner; Jake Norton ('08), Investment Advisor; Michael Zins ('07), Vice President of Private Money Lending; Marshall Tague ('04), Automations; and Brandon Ream ('06), Insurance Advisor. This network of high-producing, mission-driven individuals

culture at Stewardship that nurtures both professional growth and faith in Jesus Christ. This philosophy resulted in Grant being awarded the Outstanding Young Alumnus of the Year by ACU in 2016.

Beyond his business, Grant's personal mission is to foster a strong, faith-centered relationship with his wife Jodie and 3 children—one that not only strengthens their family but also serves as an example to others. Professionally, he remains dedicated

to Stewardship's mission of helping people navigate financial decisions with integrity. His passion for service has also led him to his latest endeavor: launching a school for adults with disabilities, a reflection of his deep commitment to making a lasting impact in the community.

During his time at SWC/ACU, Grant wrestled with life's bigger questions and ultimately found clarity in the teachings of Jesus and the Great Commission. He came to understand that true fulfillment comes from serving others—an insight that now drives Stewardship's mission of loving

people through financial guidance.

Grant's journey is one of faith, resilience, and purpose. The challenges he has faced and the community that shaped him continue to fuel his passion for growth and service. With gratitude for those who have influenced his path, he remains committed to living out the values that have defined his life's work.



Celebrating Inc. 5000 Recognition

not only contributes to the success of Stewardship but also operates from the shared mission to glorify Jesus that was instilled during their time at SWC/ACU.

Grant credits much of his success to the mentorship and support he received from professors, family, and mentors who guided him through life's challenges. These influences shaped his approach to leadership, inspiring him to build a workplace

## In His Own Words – Grant Botma’s Experience Speaking at ACU chapel

*I had the pleasure of speaking at the chapel of my alma mater, Arizona Christian University. I was pleasantly surprised by my experience, and here’s why.*

*To be honest, when I was asked to speak at the chapel, I agreed, but I wasn’t overly excited about it. I remembered my days as a student there, and I recalled what it was like attending chapel. Did I enjoy chapel as a student? Well, occasionally. But chapel was mandatory, so we had to attend. There were times when I stayed up too late doing homework, playing video games, or engaging in who-knows-what kind of shenanigans, 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.*

*So, I expected the current students to be just like me, not always particularly enthusiastic about being in chapel. However, I discovered the opposite.*

*As I watched the students gather in the Event Center, I noticed a lot of smiles, high fives, and hugs. There were many lively conversations happening, and the energy in the room was contagious. When the services began, the energy level only increased. The students were actively engaged with announcements and sang their hearts out during the praise and worship session. It was a beautiful sight.*

*When I was introduced as the chapel speaker, I received a warm welcome. Throughout my sermon, I saw engaged faces and focused eyes in the crowd. They 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.*

*I initially accepted the request to speak at ACU’s chapel, thinking I was doing my old college a favor. But the truth is that they did me a favor. It was an absolute blessing to be on that campus and worship the Lord with a group of enthusiastic and energetic students.*

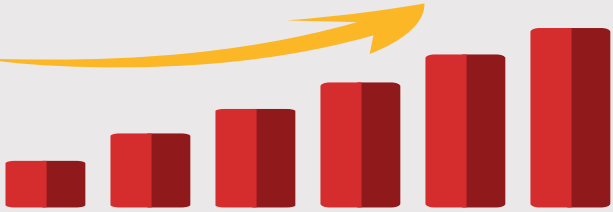
*Thank you Arizona Christian University for allowing me and my children to be a part of chapel today. I am praising God for this blessing!*



Acu

# BY THE NUMBERS

**137%** GROWTH  
IN 10 YEARS



600 total students in Fall  
2014 to 1421 in Fall 2024



**152**

Scholar-Athletes  
Awarded for  
Academic  
Achievement



**3000**

STUDENT  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE PROJECTS

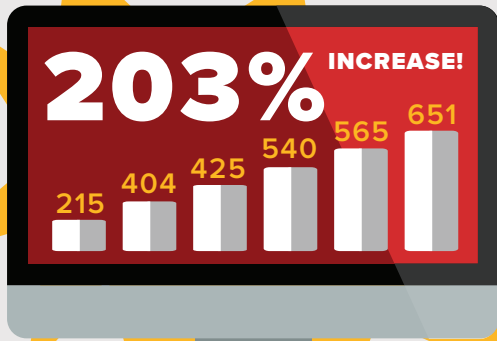
**9th**

FASTEST-GROWING  
COLLEGE IN AMERICA



38 States &  
29 Countries  
Represented





STUDENTS LIVING  
ON CAMPUS



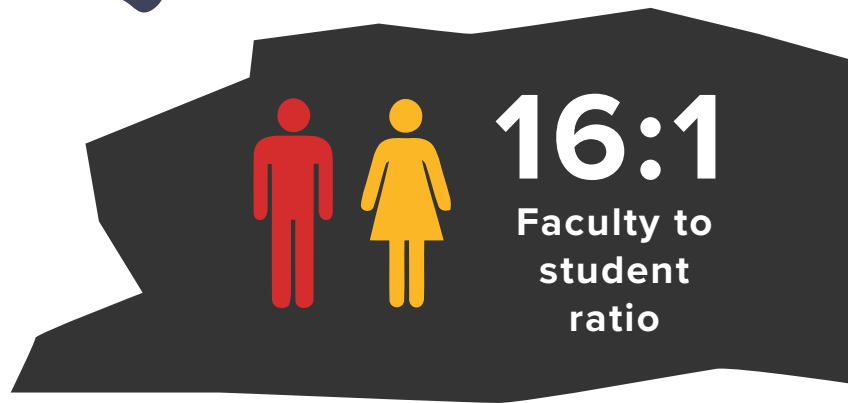
**YEARS IN A ROW**  
by U.S. News & World Report  
**BEST VALUE**



**125**  
NON PROFIT  
ORGANIZATIONS  
SERVED BY ACU  
STUDENTS



NAIA SCHOLAR TEAMS



**20**  
BACHELOR'S  
& MASTER'S  
DEGREES



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

**46**  
AREAS OF  
STUDY



A portrait of Brent Veach, a middle-aged man with a friendly expression, wearing a light-colored plaid blazer over a white button-down shirt. He is seated at a dark wooden desk with his hands clasped. The background features a window with blinds and a decorative teal plate on a stand.

# BRENT VEACH

Faith, Entrepreneurship, and Generational Influence

# AND TESTIMONIES

Born into a family of entrepreneurs, Brent Veach and his twin brother grew up in a Christian home in a small town outside Minneapolis, Minnesota. For Brent, the transition from high school to Baylor University was a pivotal new beginning. "High school was all about sports for me," he recalls. "But when I went to college, I was faced with the decision of what type of person and man I wanted to become. Would I follow Christ or the world? I chose Christ."

Brent's faith journey was profoundly shaped by the life of King David. "I have made many mistakes throughout my life," he admits. "But when I start to get down on myself, I fall back on my biblical hero, King David. David was a murderer, adulterer, and liar, yet God called him 'a man after God's own heart.' David's steadfast commitment to confession and repentance exemplified faith, trust, love, integrity, humility, forgiveness, and worship of the God he served. That's the kind of heart I strive for."

At Baylor, Brent majored in accounting, but his first job quickly revealed that it wasn't his calling. After just three hours at Coopers & Lybrand—a nationally recognized accounting firm that later merged with Price Waterhouse—he knew it wasn't for him. Nevertheless, he honored his commitment, spending three years there and gaining valuable business experience. In 1988, Brent relocated to Phoenix to join Motorola, where he managed semiconductor manufacturing. His boss entrusted him with major responsibilities, overseeing production, manufacturing, and financial operations while traveling internationally. Over 11 years, he honed his leadership skills and developed a passion for building businesses.

When presented with an opportunity to relocate overseas, Brent realized it

didn't align with his vision for his life. Instead, he stepped out in faith and returned to his entrepreneurial roots. After researching various fast-food franchises, he was drawn to Del Taco for its commitment to "quality food at affordable prices." In 1999, as Del Taco began expanding into Arizona, Brent signed on to open three restaurants in the Valley. His initial success fueled rapid growth, and over the next eight years, he and his team opened an average of one new location per year.

The 2008 recession was a defining moment for many businesses, but Brent's belief in Del Taco never wavered. While other franchisees looked to sell, he saw an opportunity to expand. He acquired additional restaurants in Arizona and extended his reach into Colorado and California, ultimately growing his portfolio to 57 locations and generating \$75 million in annual sales. Throughout this expansion, his mission remained the same: striving for excellence while positively influencing lives.

In 2023, Brent sold his Colorado stores and began exploring what new opportunities God might have for him. He and his wife of 15 years, Maria, had long been active members of Christ Church of the Valley and had anonymously supported numerous students through college scholarships.

## **BUT BRENT SENSED GOD CALLING HIM TO DO MORE TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM.**

That calling became clearer when Brent was introduced to Arizona Christian University through Convene, a Christian CEO peer group. After hearing ACU President Len Munsil, a fellow Convene member, share stories of transformation and spiritual growth at the university, Brent felt inspired to invest in the next generation of business leaders.

President Munsil invited Brent to speak to a freshman business class about franchising. "I was amazed at the quality of students in that class," Brent recalls. "They were attentive and proactively engaged in the entire presentation. We began and ended the class in prayer, which was led by a student who volunteered. I left that classroom feeling remarkably blessed for having the opportunity to interact with such amazing students and desired more."

When President Munsil later invited him to join the ACU Board of Trustees, Brent and Maria prayed over the opportunity and felt it aligned with their calling. Since joining the Board, Brent has taken an active role, leading key committees and contributing to strategic initiatives, including market analysis and branding for the university.

Brent's vision for Kingdom influence extends beyond his business and board service. He plans to build his Del Taco franchises into a generational business, with one or more of his three adult children and grandchildren carrying on his legacy. His son Jacob and daughter-in-law Jenna are already part of the business, and as Brent turns 60 this year, he remains passionate about marketplace ministry and its impact.

The extra time gained from selling his Colorado stores has been reinvested into ACU. "I don't love spending," he says, "but I love to invest. When I attend the graduations each May at ACU, I see huge returns on my investments."

Brent Veach's story is one of faith, resilience, and a relentless commitment to excellence. Whether through business or ministry, his life is a testament to the power of investing in what truly matters.

# Discipleship IN THE CREATOR'S GAME



In just its third year of existence, the Arizona Christian University men's lacrosse team is not just building a competitive presence on the field, it is also forging a deeper spiritual identity among its players. Under the leadership of Head Coach Jake Landon, the Firestorm lacrosse team has developed a culture that embodies the university's mission to "transform culture with truth," using the sport as a platform for personal growth, spiritual formation, and leadership in the ACU community.

When Coach Landon was selected as the inaugural ACU men's lacrosse coach in 2021, his vision for the program extended beyond athletic excellence. He saw lacrosse as a means of discipleship. "We're here to compete at a high level, but more importantly, we're here to develop men of character," Landon shared. "Wins and losses matter, but they pale in comparison to the eternal impact we can have on these players."

A key component of that spiritual development is the team's C.A.R.E.D. groups—small accountability groups focused on Check-in, Accountability,

Repentance, Encouragement, and Dreams. "It's a space where guys can be real with each other," Landon explained. "A lot of teams might do a devotional or pray before a game, but this is a space where they can practice genuine community and not hide from the struggles they are facing."

That mindset has fostered a unique culture within the team—one that emphasizes accountability, servant leadership, and biblical fellowship. Players are encouraged to support one another in their walk with Christ, creating a bond that goes beyond the game.

"Our guys are learning that lacrosse is really a vehicle for something greater," Landon explained. "We talk a lot about how competition can teach us resilience, discipline, and perseverance, but ultimately, it's about how we glorify God in the process."

One powerful example came during a game last year against an in-state rival, the University of Arizona. "Kieran Weydmuller, a freshman

defenseman, got pushed from behind," Landon recalled. "Back in high school, he would've immediately retaliated, hurting his team competitively and compromising his witness. But he remembered what we had talked about in our pregame devotion and immediately thought, 'Who am I to wear a cross on the back of my jersey and then turn around and push a guy back?' Instead, he just got up and smiled and walked away. That's transformation." And ACU defeated the U of A, 16-7, one of 7 wins over NCAA D-1 opponents in the past two seasons.

Like any developing program, ACU lacrosse has faced its share of challenges—building a competitive roster, securing resources, and establishing itself within a collegiate lacrosse landscape that includes competing against much larger schools like NAU, UC San Diego, U of A, and the University of New Mexico. Yet, through every obstacle, the team's focus on their spiritual disciplines has remained the foundation.

"We've had moments where things didn't go as planned—injuries, tough losses, logistical hurdles," Landon admitted. "But those moments have also been opportunities to trust God more deeply and rely on each other as a team."

One defining moment came during a recent game where tensions were high, and emotions flared. Sensing the need for a reset, Landon called a timeout—not to draw up a play, but to pray as a team. "I reminded them, 'Eyes up—who are we playing for?'" he recalled. "We took a deep breath, focused back on Christ, and played with love and unity. That's when we play our best." The Firestorm went on to win the game, overcoming a two-goal deficit and injuries to multiple key players in the process.

At the core of ACU's mission is the call to transform culture with biblical

truth, and the lacrosse team is living that out in tangible ways. One initiative is the *Helmet Stickers for Scripture* Memory program, where players earn a special emblem for memorizing Bible verses. "You can't follow Jesus and be obedient to Him if you don't know His Word," Landon emphasized. "So, we challenge our guys—when you're anxious, do you turn to Philippians 4:6? When you face trials, do you remember James 1?"

Beyond the field, the team actively serves the community. One of their most impactful outreach efforts has been running lacrosse clinics for elementary school students. "The kids treated our players like superheroes," Landon said. "It really humbled our guys to see how much impact they could have just by showing up and investing in others."

The program also emphasizes servant leadership on campus. Nearly half of the returning players hold student leadership roles, from resident assistants to peer mentors. "We don't just want to produce great athletes," Landon said. "We want to develop purpose-driven leaders who will carry these values into their future careers, families, and communities."

For the Firestorm, success is measured not necessarily in wins, but in transformed lives. Their team mantra, *Total Release*, comes from Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."

"We tell our guys, you may not always be the best player on the field, but you can always give your best," Landon said. "That's the victory—not the scoreboard, but how faithfully we pursue Christ in everything we do."



A portrait of Robby Lashua, a man with dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a patterned button-down shirt over a black t-shirt. The background is a dark, wood-paneled wall.

# ROBBY LASHUA

A Heart for Apologetics, Truth, and the Local Church

# Heart FOR APOLOGETICS

Twenty years ago, as a student at Southwestern Bible College, Robby Lashua discovered a subject that would shape his life and ministry—Apologetics. For Lashua, what was profoundly transformational about apologetics was the idea that *truth is knowable*. That God himself could actually be known. Moreover, Lashua recalls a time while thinking about the truth of Christianity where God impressed on him these words: *“And the truth resides in you, because I am in you.”*

That simple yet profound truth became a turning point. Apologetics was no longer just an academic pursuit for Lashua; it was a living reality, affirmed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This revelation not only deepened his faith but solidified his passion for sharing it with others.

Lashua’s love for apologetics found an early outlet during his time as a youth pastor at Desert Springs Community Church in Phoenix. His approach to teaching was anything but conventional—he believed apologetics should be experienced, not just studied. Rather than merely reading about worldviews like Mormonism or atheism, Lashua challenged his students to engage with them firsthand. He would equip them with knowledge of Mormon theology, then take them to Salt Lake City to converse with members of the LDS community and share the gospel. Similarly, after discussing atheism and its challenges to Christianity, he led his students to Berkeley,

California, where they engaged in real-world dialogues with those who held opposing worldviews.

The impact of Lashua’s hands-on approach was undeniable.

As students learned to articulate and defend their faith, their confidence grew, and so did their desire to share the gospel. What started as a youth ministry initiative soon caught the attention of the larger congregation. Adults at Desert Springs began seeking apologetics training as well, leading the church to create a Pastor of Apologetics role specifically for Lashua. This sparked a season of renewal, as believers embraced the importance of knowing and defending their faith in a culture increasingly skeptical of biblical truth.

Seeing the transformative power of apologetics in his church, Lashua began to dream of a broader impact. Could this same model be replicated across the country? God opened the door for him to do just that through Stand to Reason (STR), a nationally recognized apologetics ministry committed to equipping Christians to think critically about their faith and defend it with clarity and grace. At STR, Lashua not only spoke at conferences and trained believers but also pioneered the Outposts program—local communities dedicated to answering tough questions about classical Christianity. Reflecting on this season, Lashua remains humbled by God’s grace in allowing him to build a ministry

that helps churches grow in their understanding of the gospel.

Yet, even as he invested in STR’s national mission, Lashua felt a growing pull back to the local church—the very place where he first saw the power of apologetics come alive. That longing became a reality when Palmcroft Church in Phoenix invited him and his family to prayerfully consider leading their congregation. After much prayer and reflection, he embraced the call to pastoral leadership at Palmcroft, eager to invest in a community where he could nurture the congregation’s faith on a daily basis.

At the heart of Lashua’s ministry is an unwavering commitment to truth—not just in intellectual discourse but in practical faith. His passion is to equip the next generation with the knowledge, confidence, and conviction to stand firm in their beliefs and share the hope of the gospel with a world in need.

As he reflects on his journey, Robby is reminded that his calling has always been about more than just defending a set of beliefs. It is about helping others experience the life-transforming truth of God’s love, grace, and sovereignty. Whether training students, preaching from the pulpit, or engaging in personal conversations, his mission remains clear: to make the truth of Christ known and help others walk in it with boldness and joy.



# FIRESTORMFAMILY



**1. JASON AND LINDA (TROWER, '98) GREGG ('01)** after returning to the Valley from being on the mission field for almost 20 years, both work at Valley Christian Schools where Jason is the Vice-Principal at the high school and Linda is teaching 5th grade Bible and social studies at the junior high. Three of their four children are also in Arizona. Their oldest son recently married and is serving in the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in Oahu, Hawaii.

**2. RILEY (AKRE) SCHNEIDER ('20)** and her husband, Adam, celebrated one year of marriage on April 21, 2025 and are expecting their first child in September. Riley is the Development & Communications Director at Voices for the Voiceless, while Adam recently started a new role as a Project Engineer at DPR Construction. Riley recently returned to the ACU campus to be a guest speaker as part of the Pre-Law Society's ACU and Beyond Series.

**3. MATTHEW AND JENNA (CASTILLEJA, '19) MARA ('18)** are enjoying their life as new parents. Their son, Jonathan, will turn one in June. He is the light of their life and brings them so much joy. Matt is a Project Manager with Ferguson Enterprises and Jenna is staying at home with Jonathan, as well as taking a class to become a doula. They are very involved in their church, North Phoenix Baptist Church, and love their community there. They also have two dogs that keep them on their toes. They are enjoying God's blessings!

**4. TREVOR AND MADISON (LAPIERRE, '22) MCGEE ('20)** welcomed their first child, Jamison Lee McGee on February 20, 2024. The McGees live in Florida, where Trevor is a Sales Manager for Grand App AI. The McGees adore Jamison more than words can express!

# CLASSNOTES

## '20s

▼ **NESTOR "MANNY" HIGUERA RODRIGUEZ ('22)** who recently earned his Master of Arts in education with a concentration in instructional leadership at ACU in December of 2024, recently signed a contract as the kicker for the Washington Wolfpacks, an Arena Football League team. Manny was kicker for the Firestorm football team and helped ACU win a SAC Championship in 2021 and 2022, and holds the program record for his 49-yard field goal in 2019 as a freshman, which he broke in 2022 with a 52-yard field goal as a senior.



▼ **DAWSON AND SARAH (COOPER) LANDERS ('22)** welcomed their first child in 2024. Dawson is an officer with the Phoenix Police Department.

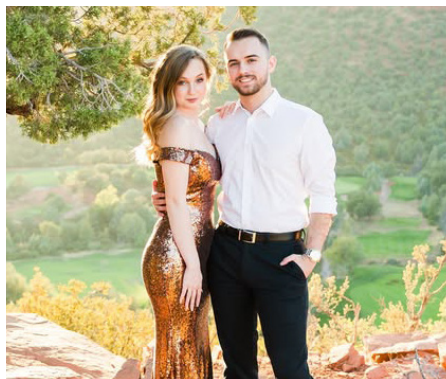


**AIDAN QUINN ('22)** is an officer with the Phoenix Police Department. He recently became engaged to his fiancée, Jessica Garcia, who is a nurse for Honor Health in Scottsdale. They plan to marry in Spring 2026.



▲ **EMMA STEVENS ('21)** was hired as a student mentor for Summit's Gap Year program after working last summer on staff for Summit Ministries Summer Conferences. She mentors seven 18 to 19-year-olds for six months in the mountains of Colorado as they do life together, dive into theology, culture and worldview, and go on some awesome outdoor adventures. Emma loves that she gets to play a part in the spiritual formation of the 31 students in the program and help prepare them for life as ambassadors for Jesus. She will also be staffing this summer and the next Gap Year, as well.

▼ **SARAH MANCUSO ('20)** is currently a JD candidate at the Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law at Arizona State University. Sarah's husband **NICK ('19)** is the manager of a family owned Italian restaurant called Mancuso's in Phoenix, AZ.



## '10s

**MELISHA BRYANT ALHAMBRA ('18)** was chosen by Extreme Makeover Home Edition to receive a new home for her and her family. Melisha adopted four siblings out of a rough situation. She invited Pastor Tim Reed to be a part of the filming journey and watch party. You can celebrate with Melisha and her family and stream her episode of the show on Hulu.

**MICHAEL DUNNEBECKE ('18)** is a National Account Director for Staples Facility Solutions. He and his wife, **AMANDA (SHOWERS, '17)**, met at ACU, where they were both student athletes.



▲ **JACOB RICHARDS ('17)** received his Juris Doctorate from Harvard Law in 2022, cum laude, where he served as the President of the Harvard Federalist Society and Executive Editor of the Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy. After graduation he served as a law clerk for Judge Patrick J. Bumatay of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He is currently an Associate at Lehotsky Keller Cohn LLP. Jacob recently married Lindsey (Powell) in October of 2024 in Boston, MA. After Lindsey graduates from Harvard Law School this May, they will relocate to the Washington, D.C. metro area, where she will join the law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell. Jacob will remain with the law firm Lehotsky Keller Cohn.

**LAUREN (JOHNSON) LERMAN ('17)**

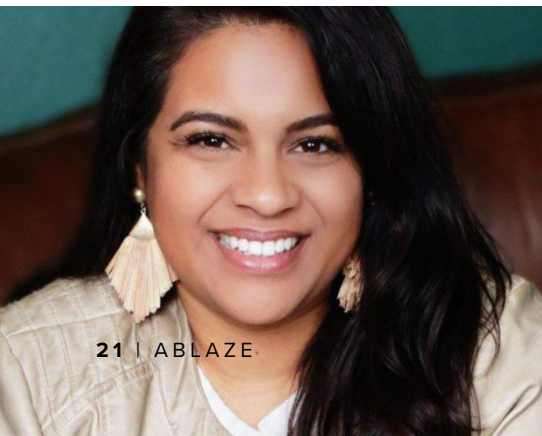
received her Juris Doctorate in May 2022 from the University of Virginia School of Law, where she served as Editor-in-Chief of the Virginia Law & Business Review. She is currently an Associate at Wiley Rein LLP where she advises telecommunications, media, technology, and fintech clients on a variety of regulatory and compliance matters.

**ASHTON GOULD ('16)** graduates this spring from Midwestern University Dental Institute with a DMD - a doctorate of medicine in dentistry. He will begin as a dentist in Loma Linda California at the Veterans Affairs Hospital.



▲ **GERRIT GROENEWOLD ('15)** a former educator, is now a police officer for the City of Surprise and also serves as a resource officer for local schools. Gerrit, a former Firestorm quarterback on ACU's first football team, along with his wife and new daughter, attend church at Scottsdale Bible.

▼ **LINDSAY MCKIN STEWART ('15)** is a licensed professional counselor and the owner of Haven Holistics in Phoenix, AZ. She is trained in EMDR and has experience in Internal Family Systems.



▲ **JOSH COLE ('12)** is in his fourth season as head men's basketball coach at Sandra Day O'Connor High School and was named December Coach of the Month by the Phoenix Suns/Phoenix Mercury Foundation for his dedication to positively shaping the lives of student-athletes and for his contributions to the game of basketball across the Valley. Josh earned \$1,000 for SDOHS to support their athletic program. Josh starts this season coming off a 6A state championship loss in 2024, but his program has clinched the No. 5 spot in the Open Division this year. His wife, Jessica (**SMITH, '12**), also plays an instrumental role teaching, developing curriculum and coaching other teachers in her district.

**JOY ELAINE ('10)** is self-employed as a musician.

## '00s

**AMY (SHOWERS) WALL ('09)** is starting her seventh season as head coach of Camp Verde High School's track and field teams.

**STEVE VALDEZ ('09)** is the Jr. High Lead at Arcadia Christian Academy.



▲ **JEREMIAH AND AMBER (MOLLERUP, '09) HANN ('07)** met at ACU and have been married since 2008. They have

five children, three biological and two adopted through foster care. Jeremiah was on staff as a pastor at Palm Valley Church for 16 years and three years ago, God called him to a new type of ministry. He is now in administration at West Valley Christian School and is months away from earning his Master's degree. Amber started out as a public school music teacher and then stayed home to raise their children for 10 years. A few years ago, she went back to full-time teaching at West Valley Christian School as the kindergarten through high school music teacher.

**JEFF WOLFE ('03)** is the new Chief Operating Officer at NPHX Church in Phoenix. He will oversee the Executive Team and help in the day-to-day operations over all areas of the church. Jeff has over 20 years of executive leadership experience in the church and in the nonprofit world. His wife Amber ('01), has a heart for ministry that will be an asset to the church as well. The Wolfes have four children, Ethan, Ella, Madalyn, and Annie.



▲ **MATT BRECHT ('02)** and his wife, Jenny, were married in 2003 and currently live in Laveen. Matt is a Probation Officer with the intensive probation supervision unit of Maricopa County. Their daughter, Kyla, will graduate from GCU in April and their son, Chase, is a Political Science major and freshman at ACU. Matt and Jenny have been exceedingly blessed over the past two decades with children who love the Lord and want to serve Him in their respective careers.



▲ **BRETT DARLING ('02)** is in his ninth year at Mica Mountain High School in Tucson as their assistant football coach, his defensive coordinator skills helping to earn them the 2024 AIA 4A State Championship this fall with a record of 14-0.

▼ **SARA DELGADO ('01)** married Matt Ham in November 2024.



## '90s

**DANIEL ZIMMERMANN ('99)** is the Director of Business Development at Kraus-Anderson Construction in Phoenix, Arizona.

**DANNY HUNKIN ('94)** has been the Worship and Arts Pastor at Desert Springs Bible Church in Phoenix since 2006.

## '80s

**DAVID BURI ('87)** is the Director of Government Relations at Eastern Washington University.

**CRAIG MORGAN ('85)** lives in Tucson where he works at Sage Creek Furniture and Cabinetry as a custom cabinet maker and for God's Vast Resources, which helps to provide food, clothing, and spiritual and health resources. He and his wife, Cheryl, have three adult children and four precious grandchildren.

**STEPHEN AMBROSE ('84)** is living and working with Amazon in Washington state.



▲ **JIM AND TERI BAUGH ('82)** have been married for 43 years, and have five children and 12 grandchildren (#12 coming soon in June!). Jim has served as a lead pastor for 20 years, as well as a few associate pastoral positions until 2008, when he and Teri joined Global Training Network. GTN is a mission ministry started by another ACU alum (Paul Madson) that exists to, train, equip and encourage pastors of the emerging world who have little to no ministry training. GTN has trained pastors in 87 countries! Jim serves on the executive team, as well as leading MDM training (Make Disciples Multiply) which has now expanded into 14 countries, continuing to reproduce committed followers of Jesus. Teri has had opportunities to travel and train with Jim a number of times. Jim is also a part of Via Ministries, which exists to train missionaries globally and nationally to be fully funded in

order to fulfill the ministry vision God has given them. Jim and Teri are both authors! Jim has his new book, *"Good News Going Bad"* (Redemption Press) which highlights a warning against a new missions worldview and methodology that syncretizes the gospel to the global community in a failed attempt to "reach more people" for Christ. Teri has written portions of two books, *"The Path To Epiphany"*, and *"Trusting God"* a devotional for women (also Redemption Press). She is also working on her new book which provides hope for believers who are living for Christ while also living with mental health struggles. Both Jim and Teri were a part of the Chenaniah singers while at ACU (Southwestern), and Jim has continued his music by recording five albums. Jim has also served on the ACU board of trustees on and off for 17 years.

**TERRY DALRYMPLE ('81)** is ministering with Global Che Network, a trade network that helps equip the church worldwide. They are currently in 118 countries and 14,107 villages. The network represents 498 organizations and is spearheading the million village challenge (<https://millionvillage.org/>). Terry will also be part of the International Wholistic Mission annual global conference in Albania this fall.

## '70s

**DAN AND ROMA GAVAZA ('71)** both 1971 grads, continue ministry together. Dan is over Pastoral Care at Palmcroft Church in Phoenix.

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