



LASTORY

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

FORGING OF FAITH

A Kingdom Pictures Release "COURAGE UNDER FIRE" A KINGDOM NEWS NETWORK PRODUCTION

Featuring: AL BAIRD • JOHN BRINGARDNER • JOHN & KAREN LOUIS • MAX FELDMAN • AFRICAN CHURCHES

PRODUCED
BY AL BAIRD

DIRECTED
BY ROGER LAMB

SCREENPLAY
BY MARCIA LAMB, MARYANN ROSE & ROBIN FAWCETT

PRODUCTION
DESIGNER EMILY BRINGARDNER



Church of Christ

KNN

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Editorial

by Al Baird

KINGDOM MILESTONES

COUNTRIES PLANTED	153
NUMBER OF CHURCHES	352
SUNDAY ATTENDANCE	184,952

LA SUNDAY ATTENDANCE

1/10	11,638	1/31	12,929	2/21	12,375
1/17	12,603	2/7	12,262	2/28	12,550
1/24	12,524	2/14	12,312		

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Matthew 5:10-12

LA Story celebrated its fifth birthday in January. I just spent the last hour leafing through all of the past issues. It felt good to relive those five years because God has tremendously blessed them. During that time, I wrote about 50 editorials covering many subjects. As I re-scanned them, I was surprised to realize that I had not written a single one of them about persecution. Why not? Because we have faced very little overt persecution in the United States during the past five years. In one sense, persecution is relative – what may be called persecution in one part of the world might be considered as nothing in another. Today, brothers are beaten and imprisoned for their faith in several different countries around the globe. But not in the USA. Never let us take for granted the protection that our basic right of religious freedom gives us. People insulting us and "falsely saying all kinds of evil" against us is about as bad as it gets.

While I am thankful that our persecution is minor, we had better be careful that we do not try to avoid it. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:12, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Someone has asked the question, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Well, would there be? I am concerned that we are

too eager to be seen as a legitimate religious group and too afraid that someone may call us a cult. If the day comes when we are accepted as legitimate, then we will die as a movement. Jesus was never accepted as legitimate. The first-century church was viewed as a cult. The message that Jesus and his church are the only way to God is the "smell of death" to those who refuse to accept it, but the "fragrance of life" to those who embrace it (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). The recent attack by FOX Files and the continual string of attacks on the Internet should stir our spiritual juices for the spiritual battle that surrounds us. Our admonition to you with this issue of *LA Story* is to have courage under fire.

COURAGE UNDER FIRE must start with prayer – not a prayer, but continual prayer. I am very thankful that Kip McKean called the LA Church back to a focus on prayer last August. And that focus has continued. The World Sector Leaders recently met for several days here in Los Angeles. Can you guess what the focus was? Yes, it was prayer. The meeting was probably the best ever. Prayer unleashes God's power and bonds God's people.

COURAGE UNDER FIRE must be fueled by our convictions. As the movement grows by more than a thousand people every month, a difficult challenge is to instill in each disciple the conviction that he/she counts. The world will hear about the good news of Jesus through the prayer, faith and sacrifice of each of us, not by massive programs of a faceless organization. I am alarmed by a growing lack of personal urgency for the lost. As we enjoy our life of grace, we must renew our deep conviction that we are men and women sent by God to hold out life to a dying world.



ROGER LAMB

In 1998, *LA Story* featured a story about the lives of two brothers in the Middle East who were imprisoned because of their faith in Jesus. One brother, Sami, was freed after several months and is now reunited with his family. He continues to spread the gospel as an evangelist in the Middle East World Sector. Our prayers are needed for Nazar who remains in prison. Though his wife now has visitation rights, the date of his release is still unknown.

COURAGE UNDER FIRE must result in action. Last year the Kingdom grew by more than 13,000 disciples – nearly 14 percent. As encouraging as that is, it can be better. In the United States there was one baptism for every three disciples. We can do much better than that. God has promised us the harvest, but no crop is harvested without laborers. God is already preparing people to receive the good news, but we must open our mouths. That takes courage.

Courage leads to fire. It leads us to do things that we didn't even know we could do. It leads to fire in our bones. It also leads to a different fire, the fire of persecution. Jesus calls us to rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted because of righteousness. Refined by fire, may we always be unashamed disciples of Jesus, compelled by love, prayer and conviction. May we be a people of God, like the prophets of old, who are driven by

COURAGE UNDER FIRE! ■

"GO TELL THAT FOX... I Will Reach My Goal." Jesus (Luke 13:32)

Recently, a television tabloid show called FOX Files broadcast a story on the International Churches of Christ. The following comment is written by Al Baird, Elder of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ and Leader of the Media & Law World Sector.

On January 21st, *FOX Files* aired a very negative segment about the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) entitled "Cults on Campus." *FOX Files* is a sensationalist "National Enquirer" type show, as was evidenced by the sexually explicit segments that we were sandwiched between – "Gay Gangbangers" and "Pornography on the Internet."

As is typical of every negative program that has been produced about the ICOC, the producers spend several months interviewing people opposed to the church. Then a couple of weeks before the show airs, they come to us to get a few sound bites so as to appear to be fair and objective. Even under these circumstances, getting our few, badly-edited words aired is better than their being able to say that we refused to comment. *FOX Files* was the most negatively biased (14 minutes of negative in a 15-minute show) and dishonest television program that we have dealt with (deceitful reporting using lies and hidden cameras, purposefully creating false impressions through visual images, not giving us a chance to respond to most of their negative allegations, and repeatedly editing my answers out of context).

The damage of the program comes from the insidious way that they weave lies, half-truths and truths.

The damage of the program comes from the insidious way that they weave lies, half-truths and truths. We make no apologies for expecting every disciple to be totally committed to God and his Kingdom, for helping everyone deal with every sin, for expecting every disciple to have the purpose of making disciples, for expecting every disciple

to be in a discipling relationship, and for every disciple to give sacrificially and willingly of their time and money. However, three of their allegations are outright lies: that we encourage students to drop out of school, that we try to divide families, and that Kip McKean lives a rich lifestyle at the expense of sacrificial members.

First, we expect every student to be the best student that he/she can be. Not only do we not encourage students to drop out of school; we want them to become better students after they become disciples. In December, I received the results of a study done by Doug Jacoby about the grades of disciples on the 69 campuses included in the US churches of the Comrades World Sector. The average cumulative grade point average was 3.0 (2.5 is considered average). We are very proud of our students.

Second, the show pictured a distraught mother and father who could not understand their daughter leaving after her parents tried to have her deprogrammed. While I, as a parent, hurt for these parents (and we will try to bring reconciliation when we get more details), it is hard to believe that they do not understand that their actions scared their daughter away when they tried to destroy her faith with a deprogrammer. So many parent-child relationships are dysfunctional in the world. So many parent-child relationships have been healed in the church. However, Jesus said that there would still be occasional times of division (Matthew 10:34-36).

Thirdly, the most potentially damaging part was the attack on the integrity of Kip McKean. While showing a picture of the apartment complex where Kip and Elena live and intentionally and deceitfully presenting the entire 12 unit structure as the McKean home, the reporter gave this voice-over, "We don't know what he is giving [for his church contribution], but he sure is getting a heck of a lot, including this nearly half million dollar home in LA which the ICOC owns and provides him." Once again, like much of the program, we see the malicious use of half-truths. The church's purchase price was \$483,000, but it has only 2,000 square feet and three bedrooms – not large at all for a family with three teenage children. To a college student or single adult or someone not familiar with LA real estate prices, it may sound expensive; but that is just what real

estate costs in West LA and many other parts of LA. The picture implied that it was the McKean house; in fact, the picture includes 12 apartments. The ICOC purchased the apartment as a parsonage, and the McKean family pay fair-market-value rent. Kip and Elena own no real estate.

We make no apologies for expecting every disciple to be totally committed to God and his Kingdom...

There is an increasing attempt by our enemies to convince people that Kip and all ministers are living high while the ordinary member sacrifices to fuel our lifestyle. Earlier last year we commissioned an independent law firm in Washington, DC who specializes in non-profit groups to do a study on our salary and benefits package for all of our US employees (including the McKean family). The story on page 5 includes a copy of the letter, dated January 5, 1999, with the results of their study. Let me quote their closing paragraph.

"During the course of our review we noted that the compensation of your ministry leadership tends to be less than what is provided for comparable positions in churches of similar size and location. In addition, we found that other employees, such as administrative, secretarial, and other staff positions, were compensated on the higher side of the reasonable range. The result appears to be a more equitable compensation structure than is typical of comparable organizations."

The power of this letter is obvious. We have already posted it on the website along with a link to the latest audited financials of the LA Church. Use this information freely. As we approach the 20th anniversary of the Movement and as we approach the beginning of a new millennium, let us thank God for bringing us this far. Let us not be distracted by the real enemy, who is Satan; but let us keep our eyes on the Cross and press on toward the goal of an evangelized world with renewed zeal and reliance on God. And to him be the glory! ■

" REJOICE AND BE GLAD..." Matthew 5:12

Singapore High Court Rules in Favor of ICOC

by John Bringardner, General Counsel, International Churches of Christ

In the fall of 1998, God gave us a tremendous legal victory in the Republic of Singapore. Eight years ago, our brothers and sisters were publicly maligned in one of Singapore's major newspapers, alleging that the Central Christian Church (CCC) of Singapore, which is a part of the International Churches of Christ, was a cult. God led us to some prominent attorneys who were eager to help us clear our good name. Seven years later, the case went to trial. After hearing all the testimony of both the disciples and our critics, the trial judge was persuaded that the church was not a cult. In fact, the learned judge said:

SINGAPORE COURT STATEMENT OF THE JUDGE:

"As we know the facts, the CCC, of course, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be equated with such groups. One can say straight away that CCC is not a commune of half-crazed people living in isolation from the world at large worshipping and kissing the foot of some self-appointed messiah or prophet. Most of its members carry on with their full-time jobs just like members of other churches. Its members do not give up their assets to a commune, and its leaders do not live in riches on the backs of its members. It is not a secret organization run by persons with an agenda which is kept secret from its members. People are welcome to join its meetings and services. In fact it actively tries to get people to attend these meetings and services so that they can see if they wish to join. They are made fully aware of what being a member would involve. People are never deceived or tricked or trapped into joining it."



▲ Top photo: A group of disciples enjoy fellowship together, grateful to be a part of the church in Singapore.

▲ Above: Lead Evangelist John Louis and his wife, Women's Ministry Leader Karen, lead the church in Singapore (pictured here with their children). They are also Geographic Sector Leaders for South East Asia and Australia in the Commonwealth World Sector.

The newspaper filed an appeal to the Supreme Court. Jesus told his followers they would be blessed when people insult them, persecute them and falsely say all kinds of evil against them because of him (Matthew 5:11). This past fall the Supreme Court of Singapore upheld the lower court ruling that we are not a cult. Praise God for this great victory! ■

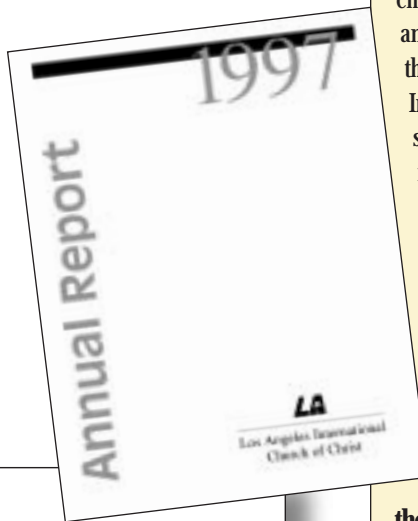
THIS LAST FALL, THE SUPREME
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THE LOWER COURT RULING
THAT WE ARE NOT A CULT.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsley say all kind of evil against you because of me . . ." Matthew 5:11

LETTER OF COMMENDATION

“For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.”

2 Corinthians 8:21



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January 5, 1999

Mr. Cecil Wooten, President
International Churches of Christ
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Los Angeles, CA 90010

--- VIA FACSIMILE ---
213-385-5730
AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Re: (379-4) International Churches of Christ
Analysis of Employee Compensation

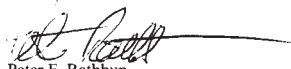
Dear Cecil:

Several months ago, you asked us to conduct a comprehensive review of the compensation provided to the employees of all U.S. churches and church-related organizations affiliated with the International Churches of Christ ("ICC affiliates"), and to advise you whether this compensation was fair and reasonable. We compared the 1997 compensation of all 1445 U.S. employees of ICC affiliates to compensation provided for comparable positions in similar organizations, using ICC job classifications, job descriptions, and total compensation. Based on this comparison, the compensation of ICC affiliate employees appears overall to be fair and reasonable.

During the course of our review we noted that the compensation of your ministry leadership tends to be less than what is provided for comparable positions in churches of similar size and location. In addition, we found that other employees, such as administrative, secretarial, and other staff positions, were compensated on the higher side of the reasonable range. The result appears to be a more equitable compensation structure than is typical of comparable organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the International Churches of Christ.

Yours truly,


Peter F. Rathbun
George R. Grange II

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Disciples are committed to carrying out Jesus' dream of making disciples of all nations. When they sacrifice financially for that purpose, the funds given must be treated with the utmost integrity. The International Churches of Christ (ICOC) leadership expects our larger U.S.-based churches (500 or more members) to have an annual audit by an outside accounting firm. As the largest of the ICOC churches, the Los Angeles International Church of Christ has had its financial statements audited annually since 1995 by an international firm of independent certified public accountants.

Reflecting an "open books" policy, these audited financial statements are included in an annual report that is distributed to the entire membership of the church. In the interests of making this information readily available to other interested parties, the 1997 annual report was recently posted on the IAICC website (www.losangeles.icoc.org). Printed copies are available upon request from the church office. The 1998 annual report will be made available upon completion of the annual audit this summer.

God has blessed the Kingdom with talented, spiritual men and women with the gift of administration who have been given the charge of administering the finances and business of the church with the highest ethical standards. Where appropriate, the ICOC and its local affiliated churches supplement this talent with the services of outside accountants, attorneys and consultants to help ensure that we are operating within the biblical principles of obeying the governing authorities (Romans 13:1), doing what is right in the eyes of men (Romans 12:17), not showing favoritism (James 2:1) and being good stewards of God's resources (Matthew 25:29).

Compensation for all U.S.-based full-time employees of ICOC churches is determined using a salary model that incorporates such factors as marital status, number and age of dependents, housing costs, and ministry responsibility to provide a level of compensation that enables employees to be effective in their ministry. Recently, the ICOC commissioned a legal firm specializing in non-profit organizations to study the salary structure of our ministry and administrative employees. Results of the study show that compensation of "ministry leadership tends to be less than what is provided for comparable positions in churches of similar size and location." The entire letter reporting the firm's findings is re-printed on this page and available on the ICOC website (www.icoc.org). ■

" BLESSED ARE THOSE . . .

WHO'S BRAINWASHING WHO? by Marcia Lamb

Strong convictions from the Bible resulted in persecution, deprogramming and an involuntary stay in a mental hospital for one young man we will call "John." In a search for real meaning to his life, John and his best friend "Tom" began reading the Bible. As the Word convicted them that their life of drugs, drinking and immorality was wrong, their lives radically changed. In fact, they left their university after their junior year to focus on God.

That summer, John felt compelled to tell his parents about the inconsistencies that he saw in their lives and faith as compared to the Bible's teachings. Shocked and distressed, John's mother, who was a minister of her own church, took him to a psychiatrist. "They thought I was losing my mind. I had never before been interested in the Bible," says John.

"I had read enough in the Bible to know that the church would be persecuted. This gave me more confidence that we had found the true church. I was knee-deep in a spiritual battle . . ."

Early in the summer, John's close friend Tom was baptized in the Boston Church of Christ. John was excited for Tom and wanted to learn more. When John's mother heard this she shouted, "The Boston Church of Christ? That's a cult!" John's parents then presented him with a stack of articles against the Boston Church. John recalls, "I had read enough in the Bible to know that the church would be persecuted. This gave me more confidence that we had found the true church. I was knee-deep in a spiritual battle. My mother was not the enemy. Satan was opposing my desire to be with God." He visited Tom, studied the Bible, and was baptized seven days later.

John returned home to face deprogrammers hired by his parents. "I thought I could disarm them with kindness," he said, "But apparently that was their plan as well. At first they deceitfully offered 'insight' to help me better serve God, and made no mention of leaving the church." After enduring eight hours of puzzling questions, and attacks on his still-new understanding of discipleship, John felt weakened. "I must confess," he said, "they played on my pride about my friend Tom's being 'over me' as a discipler, and I took the bait. This subtle issue became the 'devils foothold.' At this point, I agreed with the deprogrammers that the church must be a cult."

Left feeling empty and vulnerable, John was advised to take some time away to rest, pray and meditate. His parents made arrangement at what he thought was a 'bed and breakfast.' Mentally exhausted and dazed, it was only after the facility's doors were locked that John realized he was in a mental hospital. He was in their custody and under medication, facing a permanent medical record for mental illness if he resisted any treatment. Five weeks later John was released to his parents' home. He felt bitter and abandoned. In spite of everything that happened, John resolved, "I couldn't deny my baptism. I knew my sins had been forgiven through the cross, but questions about the church haunted me."

John decided to return to the university still seeking God, but avoiding disciples. During his first week, he frequently bumped into Tom. No one knew why John left the church, but the brothers' and sisters' warmth and straight answers challenged him to get back to praying and reading his Bible.

John searched in desperation for God's guidance. One day while on campus, he prayed, "God, please have Tom come up to me so we can talk!" Several minutes later, Tom emerged from a crowd of students. After John spoke with him and with the local evangelist, and saw how the deprogramming had robbed him of his trust and faith, leaving him embittered and confused.

God used these times to refine his faith and forge John into a loving man of courage and conviction.

Placing his faith in God and choosing to trust the disciples once again, John was soon restored.

John returned to his parents with deep convictions about his relationship with God. He offered to fund his own college education if his parents discontinued financial support, but he would not leave God or the church. Believing that "his foolishness" would come to an end, they continued to support him. John is confident that God moved their hearts.

God has richly rewarded John's tenacious love for him and his Word. In the fall of 1996, John entered the full-time campus ministry and was married in August 1998 to a great woman of God. They now lead a singles and young marrieds ministry. How does his family feel today? They are proud of all the changes John has made in his life and they love his new wife. God used these times to refine his faith and forge John into a loving man of courage and conviction. ■

Urgent Prayer Request

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA – Random acts of terrorist violence underscore the tense political situation in Columbia. On the afternoon of Sunday, January 21, 1999, a bomb exploded near a meeting location for disciples in the Bogota Church. Three disciples, Luz Angela Urrego, Yenny Rincon and Nelson Sanchez, were waiting for a bus when the blast occurred. Each person sustain major injuries, from glass cuts to a fractured skull and a punctured lung. All have been hospitalized. Nelson, is listed in critical condition in intensive care. Our prayers are desperately needed for him, his mother, who is a disciple, and the other wounded Christians and their families.



MAXIMIZE THE MISSION

– VLADIVOSTOK, RUSSIA

When he was old enough to go to school, Max Feldman's father put him on his knee and said, "Whenever people make fun of you because of your name or your religion, hit them in the nose until it is bloody." Max fought his way through life until he was baptized as a disciple of Jesus in 1991 in Moscow. He made a promise to God that he would never allow persecution to keep him from staying strong and faithful to Jesus Christ.

That promise was tested just two years later. Max and his then girlfriend, Natasha, were part of a small mission team sent to Vladivostok, Russia, from St. Petersburg. The church had great beginnings and soon attendance was up to 60 on Sundays. One day Max found his apartment was ransacked, his computer and cash were stolen and he was threatened, "We don't want this church here. Leave in 48 hours or we will kill you."

Max was shaken up, but was determined to remain in Vladivostok and preach the gospel. Two days later, he and another disciple were studying the Bible with a young man, Aljosha, in his apartment. They had just studied Jesus' call to discipleship and Max asked Aljosha, "Are you willing to die for Jesus, like the apostles were?" At that moment, six men broke into the apartment. Four men took Max into another room and beat him, while the other two beat the remaining young men. They took the meager valuables left in the place, and left with another threat: "Leave town, or we kill you." The young men, bruised and bloodied, gathered at the kitchen table and the college student studying with the disciples turned to Max, exclaiming, "I am so inspired by you! I want to become a disciple!" He was baptized soon after that day, and they went together sharing their faith.

All the brothers involved in this incident remain strong and faithful to the Lord. The church in Vladivostok now numbers nearly 400 in attendance on Sunday. Max married Natasha and has never regretted his decision to remain steadfast. God has now called the Feldmans to be part of a church planting in the Middle East World Sector. ■

DOUBLE THE FAITH

– ZAGREB, CROATIA

A double blessing came two months after the church was planted in Zagreb, Croatia, in late 1996. A young college student, Stefica, became a disciple and two weeks later her twin sister, Maria, was baptized. Although they traveled over an hour to church, their devotion to God and the disciples never wavered. However, their greatest obstacle was not distance but persecution from home.

Their parents were religious, but refused to support their daughters' new active faith. Out of fear and frustration, the parents became physically abusive and refused to allow the young women to attend church. Not wanting to upset their parents, the sisters offered to move out and support themselves. In desperation to keep their daughters at home, their parents agreed to allow them to attend church. However, for the next year and a half their return home from church events was always met with verbal abuse.

Recently the young women, now 21 years old, moved into Zagreb. "They are renting a small room in the city with the desire to grow more spiritually," said Mara Winchell, Women's Ministry Leader. "They both have impressive hearts for the Lord." ■

... WHO ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. " Matthew 5:10

OUT OF AFRICA

■ Disciples Missing

BRAZZAVILLE, CONGO – Twelve disciples of the Brazzaville Church of Christ, including the women's leader Hortense Bandila, are still missing after renewed fighting broke out between government militia and rebels in the Congolese capital on December 16, 1998.

A few disciples escaped to the home of administrator Geoffroy Gankoue-Dzon. Without daily necessities and traumatized by the war, they are still determined to do their best for God.

■ The Freetown Rescue

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE – Civil war has been raging in the city of Freetown since January 6, 1999, as rebel forces torture and kill Nigerians in the city. In 1997, six Nigerian disciples who

planted the church in Freetown were captured, beaten and tortured by rebels for 13 days. Now, as bodies pile up in the streets, the city remains with no communication, transportation, medical care, or food.

Johnson and Gloria Daniel, Nigerian-born leaders of the Freetown Church, had given up any thought of escape or medical care for their unborn baby. Mike and Anne-Brigitte Taliaferro, Geographic Sector Leaders for Africa, sent Dr. Mark Ottenweller from Johannesburg, South Africa, and Oneychi Oguagha, the Evangelist from Lagos, Nigeria, to organize the evacuation. On Monday, January 17, they flew in by helicopter and dramatically rescued Johnson and Gloria and four Nigerian disciples.

The 108 disciples and their 31 children who remain in Freetown continue sharing their faith under the threat of violence, disease, and malnutrition. WE NEED TO PRAY EVERY DAY FOR THEM AND FOR PEACE IN THEIR COUNTRY. Thankfully the Daniels' baby was born back home in Lagos, Nigeria.

■ Africa's "First Century Sunday"

ACROSS AFRICA – All the churches in Africa held "First Century Sunday" services on Sunday, January 24, 1999, with a combined total attendance of 46,200. Bible Talk leaders all over the continent preached God's word in approximately 1,000 different homes as well as in local hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged. IN JOHANNESBURG, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN ATTENDANCE WAS 12,900!

ACES ONLINE: For more details on these stories and other ACES World Sector highlights, visit the ICOC website of the month, ACES Online at www.acesonline.org



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Stan & Nita Hallowell(310) 826-6575
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Curtis Reed(310) 559-8898
Staci Gallusser(310) 313-4991
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Jeff Hickman(310) 322-9157
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