



Church of Christ in Gwinnett

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*The birds of the air come and perch in its branches.
- Matthew 13:32*

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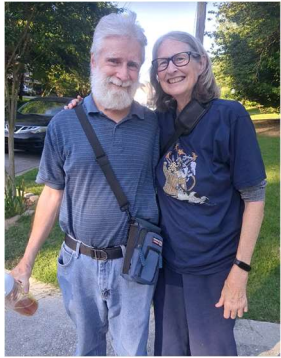
Familiar faces starting new lives in Christ

The month of May saw two of our teens reach a vital decision point in their lives—they turned “from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18), and we are excited to welcome them to our fellowship!

First, on May 12th, Chandler Ross was baptized into Christ—



With thanks to Sherry Rouse for help with pictures!



—and a week later, on May 19th, David Ruiz-Diaz was reborn—







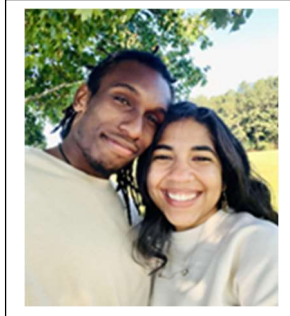
Thank you, Mark!



On Sunday, June 9th, the Church of Christ in Gwinnett took the opportunity to bring a behind-the-scenes servant up onto the stage, to honor him and express our appreciation for all his hard work on sound and technology for our worship services. Mark Vogt recently stepped down from this role after decades of making sure everyone attending or watching our times of worship could hear voices and instruments clearly and in balance, every song, every speaker, every time. This meant he (and Larry Cole, working in partnership) had to show up early for every service, to adjust the sound levels and other controls to create the right calibration every week, whether in the Meadowcreek auditorium, in their commons area, in their parking lot during Covid restrictions, or in parks for our outdoor services—wherever we gathered to praise God, to learn and to encourage one another. Our leadership presented him with a crystal microphone to commemorate his service and dedication. Lisa Duhaney and Tommy Underwood volunteered to learn from him and have stepped into his role upon his retirement from this aspect of service—but Mark and his wife Kathy are still serving in other ways, taking care of needs without calling attention to themselves along the way. They are among the powerful examples God develops among us, living out His words—"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10)—amen!

With thanks to Alan Rouse and Peter Berry for their help!

Catching up with...



Austin & Dee Hartman

Where are you from originally? What would you like people to know about where you're from?

Austin: I'm from Georgia—I'm actually from Lawrenceville. And downtown Lawrenceville has the best tea shop I've been to—Boulder Creek Coffee. They have a really cool mint tea drink.

Dee: Originally, I'm from Palm Beach, Florida. I like Florida, it's a great place to visit for the beach, but I love the southern hospitality here.

How did you come to live in Lawrenceville?

Austin: I guess I never thought about leaving, because I heard that this is the most diverse county outside of the perimeter, and I really like that. And this is a place that has all four seasons.

Dee: My dad found a job here, so he moved our family to Georgia. I was 16, and we lived in Norcross and then I went to college in Lawrenceville. I love how there's a community here—there's still little mom-and-pop shops, and people wave at each other and say hello. I think Norcross is more like, everyone's kind to themselves. I like that I can approach somebody in the grocery store and say, "Hey, what kind of pork chops do you buy?" and not feel uncomfortable.

What do you do for a living? How did you choose/come to be in that field?

Austin: I'm an RFP writer; I write requests for proposals. We basically write proposals for businesses, trying to win their business, essentially, and we'll fill out the questionnaires and stuff they send us. I got into that field, oddly enough, from my mom's coworker. I majored in psychology in college, with a minor in software development, so I wasn't planning to go into marketing, but they said because I have some psychology background I might be able to understand and answer some of the different questions—the questionnaires can ask the same questions over and over in different ways. A friend said, "Hey, they're looking for an intern," so I said, "All right," and I've been there ever since, almost two years.

Dee: I'm a property accountant for Greystar; I went to school with a concentration in accounting, and while I was in school I already worked in a property management job that I got through my aunt, who was part-owner of the business. So when I graduated from college, I didn't have much experience other than property management so I've had this job since October of last year, for 8 or 9 months now, which is a blessing. A huge selling point is that both of us can work from home! We've enjoyed that.

Tell us how you first got involved with disciples – what was your first impression of them?

Dee: I grew up in the Pentecostal denomination, which is pretty strict in some senses, like they think women should not wear pants, they should wear skirts, and no makeup or jewelry, things of that sort. And it was a really small church, so me and my siblings would be the ones taking care of the little kids—and we were also children, so that was just kind of funny. But eventually my parents thought that we could get a better spiritual education if we went to a different church, and so one of my aunts, her husband went to the Church of Christ in Honduras, so when they were recommending some churches to us they mentioned the Palm Beach Church of Christ. I was a teen, and it was from that point I just grew up around disciples and people that love God. I just loved how much of the family feel there is—it's not just like, "Oh, I know this old person in our church" or "I know this young person or this teenage person," it's like, "Oh, we try to get to know each other and do events together and things like that," which I thought was really cool in comparison to what I had before, which was like a classroom with crayons and coloring books and taking care of kids. So that's what stood out.

Austin: I grew up in a Baptist church, so I grew up hearing about God a lot, but when I got to college I started hanging out with some other people and ended up with basically an evil spirit living with me for a couple of months. I thought I was going to hell, and I had some suicidal thoughts, a whole bunch of stuff, out of fear of that thing hurting me. There was a lot of really weird stuff happening in my life, but I was looking for God, and praying; so I went to church, and I basically did the altar call and I raised my hand and they prayed over me and then I left, and God gave me a sign that that thing was removed and that He was going to multiply my life. When I got free of that thing, when it was removed, it was still kind of haunting me, so I had a really rough time that night. So the next day when I was in the library at GGC I was just praying, and asking God to show me a sign, and God was telling me to go get some coffee—and as soon as I walked out the door to get coffee I ran into Jennifer and Bree, and they invited me to the Bible talk that Tuesday. I had just, quote, unquote, "given my life to Christ," so I just made that decision to go, instead of following my friend to do some other activity that night.

And then I met John Yang and Blake Pulliam and everyone in there, and I first thought they were kind of weird. I remember asking John Yang, "What are the 12 commandments?" so I could know how to live as a as a Christian. He said, "Just read this," and then I just said, "OK." and then I just started walking out of there—I didn't stay for fellowship or anything like that. And he came and ran after me; he opened the door and put his hand on my shoulder, inviting me to something. The way he just came out with me was really weird to me at the time, I didn't know how friendly he is, but I was like, "This is strange!" But I said, "I'm gonna go," and then I hung out and started studying the Bible.

I think my first interaction with disciples was when my brother Carl came here, and he brought me once. I barely remember that day—Abram was in a wheelchair, that's about all I remember.

What has surprised you most about life as a disciple?

Austin: I think it was seeing all types of people; I grew up in a Baptist church in Decatur, so it was predominantly black people, so when I came in here I see all these people, I thought that was really cool. And then the idea that we have so many sister churches all over the globe, that kind of helps us feel like we're a real church community. It feels like we're doing what God wants us to do, and telling everybody. It's just cool to be part of something that has such a far reach, that it's all connected.

What lesson have you learned as a disciple that continues to help you every day?

Austin: Mine is that I'm safe, that God's protecting me. Before I was baptized, I was going to hell, He wasn't protecting me—but He is now. I think it's a good reminder when I get afraid, and think in certain ways, it's easy to just be in contact with His blood, then I'm good.

Dee: When I first got baptized, it was like, "Oh, God loves me so much and He chooses me!" And that's encouraging because I'm realizing my primal question is "Am I loved?" and God shows me that I am loved. Even when I got restored, it was like, "Oh, well, I'm still loved, He still loves me for me, He chooses me." And even now—grace is Him loving me; I can have a hard time accepting His grace, but that's not to say that it's not there, that He's not loving me, it's just continuously remembering how God loves me. I know He loves everyone, but specifically me.

What do you wish people outside the church knew about following Jesus?

Dee: It's something that I wonder about—the Bible only makes your life better, so why doesn't everybody do this? If I choose not to follow the Bible, I grant you, life could be a little worse or a lot worse, you could get hurt, you could get sick, and a lot of things happen—I was like, "Why doesn't everybody just wait till marriage, and love people, and not drink and get drunk, and all these other things?" Their lives would be so much better! The Bible says, "Don't worry"—you don't have to worry, it can make you sick, and it just doesn't help. God's just trying to help us! If you do what it says, you don't have to worry about STDs or baby-mamas or anything like that, you can just be happy with somebody you love! As disciples, we know this. If people live by the Word, this world is such a better place. You know how people say, "If I don't do this—oh, what's the worst that could happen? Heaven's not real, hell's not real"? I'm like, "OK, so if you follow the Bible, what do you lose? It only helps you, it only guides you correctly." Even if heaven isn't real, I'm happy here, doing what God tells us to do.

What has your biggest challenge been in following Jesus, and how do you deal with it?

Dee: I think for me it's just being still. I think I've always had a problem with being still, and it's not to say I don't trust God, but I don't love the anticipation of something about to happen. It's those moments where I'm like, "Well, you need to be still and trust God—just be still and trust!" I think my brain sometimes can act really frantically; house church was last Sunday and we were hosting, and I woke up at 4:00 in the morning thinking, "I need to clean, this house needs to be clean, and I can't sleep until it's clean"—even though house church is at 11 so I had plenty of time! It still presents to be a challenge for me. I need to trust God, I need to trust that He has my best in mind.

Austin: I think early on, it was just believing that I was saved even if I sinned—like, if I do something I'm not supposed to do, am I going to lose my salvation or something like that. I've just got to remember—I don't want to make Jesus out to be a liar, I believe that He saved me, I believe that I'm saved. Just because of my history, I might have some random thoughts that are not mine, that normally comes whenever I'm not reading as much as I should, and that is something that I've been working on now, making sure I don't slip back. I notice that when I have these thoughts, I've stopped reading, I haven't read, I wasn't seeking knowledge. So that's what I'm trying to do now, is just be more disciplined—I can go to sleep, wake up and go to the gym, and I can read my Bible, study something, if I'm more disciplined.

What is your favorite scripture?

Austin: Ephesians 5:8-11, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."

Dee: Hebrew 12:5-11, about how God disciplines us out of His love, and that discipline isn't a bad thing; it's just like He's saying, "I love you so much, I need to correct you." Like when you have a booger—"You might wanna wipe that," it's out of love, you don't want someone to walk around with a booger on his nose. God has that same attitude towards us, like, "It might be hard, you're gonna be put on time-out for a little, but you need to learn this."

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time—interests, hobbies, etc.?

Austin: I like to play games, but I haven't been playing many games lately; right now I'm trying to create a game, so in my spare time I've been working on finishing that game. It's a Roblox game where basically you run around pressing buttons and you're rolling for a chance of a rare button, common to rare to mythic. "Oh, I got a rare," or "I'm learning something really cool"—I'm just basically selling that excitement.

Dee: In my free time I like to watch shows and movies, and I like to read. Right now I'm trying to finish this anime called "One Piece"—they just made the live action version, so a lot more people know about it, but we're trying to finish the original version from the comic book, which has been fun. I also like to eat new foods!

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Dee: I feel like people don't think that I'm Latin; more specifically I'm Dominican, so I don't know if they didn't know I was Spanish or Dominican or both.

And I think maybe most people would be surprised that Austin eats grits with jelly.

Austin: It's not like no one knows—I think Allison knows.

If you could speak to yourself as you were ten years ago, what advice would you give yourself?

Austin: I think maybe it would be, "Just pursue one of your dreams; stick with it." I had a lot of opportunities to do things I like to do, like video games or YouTube and stuff like that. I just think I've never stuck with it, and that's all it really is—if I'd just stuck with it then, five years later I'd be where I wanted to be.

Dee: I guess I might just tell myself, "It's not that serious!" That would have been my second year of college, and I just took a lot of things really seriously; it caused me to stress a lot and worry a lot. Now I'm getting older, and I think, "Was it so hard to just trust God, to just sleep when you were supposed to?" I think I'd also tell her to stand up for herself more; in the house I was raised in, it felt like I was walked on a lot, I just didn't realize.



Praising God in the midst of His creation

On the first Sunday in June, we met in the pavilion by the lake at Rhodes Jordan Park for an outdoor worship service. The weather forecast had warned that rain was coming, but it turned out to be just a cloudy morning, without too much heat, providing the setting for a wonderful time of worship, followed by fellowship over picnic or cooked-out lunches. Here are some scenes from that day—





(Abram and Shannon announced their engagement)







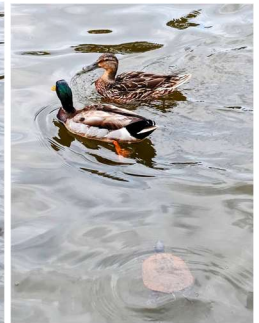
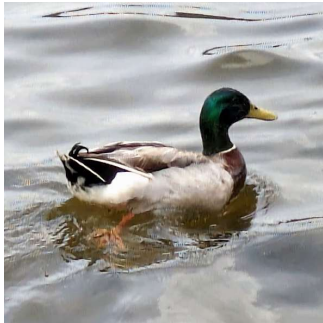
(Lamar Moore shared his birthday celebration—and cake—with us)







The beauty of the park setting, with its lake hosting ducks, geese and turtles, added to our enjoyment of this special day—



We welcome news and pictures on interesting personal stories, family group activities, and more. Please send them to Nancy Berry, nberry2@gmail.com. Thank you!

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