

Fall 2025

Primeline

SENIOR ADULT MINISTRIES



Behind the
Iron Curtain

SHERRY SABELLA
IN EUROPE

+
DECIDEDLY
PENTECOSTAL,
COMMITTED
TO MISSIONS

AGWM

Stay Close to Jesus— And Don't Get Grouchy

What does one say to senior adults when many of them have heard it all?

First, stay close to Jesus. Do not neglect your daily time with the Lord. Read His Word. Even if you have memorized many portions of Scripture, you still need spiritual nourishment from the Bible every day.

Paul said to be “renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV). He gave this imperative in the context of our physical bodies “wasting away.” Even with physical limitations, we can still be refreshed and renewed inwardly by reading and meditating on the Word of God. It is alive and can feed our souls each day. During difficulties His Word will keep us centered on the right things. Through God’s Word He strengthens “you with power through His Spirit in your inner being” (Ephesians 3:16, NIV).

Second, don’t become grouchy. Allow the fruit of God’s Spirit to emanate from your life, even when your physical body is wearing out and the aches and pains are new every morning. Even when the difficult diagnosis comes. Even when heartbreak and loss come. Even when the style of church service is so different from what we remember in our earlier days. Even when our

favorite hymns and gospel choruses aren’t sung much anymore. Stay positive in your outlook.

The generations coming after us are watching us. Do we smile more than we frown? How do we respond when things don’t go our way? Do we model Christian grace? Do we reflect the love of Christ in our everyday lives?

Next time you’re at church, be friendly. Greet a teenager with a smile. Help that single parent having difficulty with his or her kids. Encourage your pastor. Be the hand of Jesus to someone today.

BOB COOK
Senior Adult Ministries director

Reflections Reflections



Behind
the
*Iron
Curtain*

BY
Holly A.V. Knapp

Sherry Miller, along with two Polish friends, fled through the streets and alleys of Gdansk, Poland. Russian soldiers with machine guns were chasing them, demanding that the girls stop. The girls ran until they were safely home.

This was summer 1979. Sherry was 18. Her two Polish friends were daughters of underground church pastors. The girls had gone to the cinema to watch an American movie. The movie ended late; thus, they were out past the Communist-mandated curfew.

When Sherry was safely in bed, she thought, *Did I realize how dangerous that was?*

After accepting Christ at 14, God called Sherry to be a missionary. She repeatedly heard about the persecuted church behind the Iron Curtain. “There was no witness, there were no Bibles — or, they had one Bible to share among 50 people. People would tear out pages so they could have a piece of a Bible. They had one songbook. I remember thinking, *Who’s going to this part of the*

world. *Who's going to share the light there?* says Sherry. This burden played a role in Sherry's decision to attend Valley Forge Christian College (now University of Valley Forge).

At VFCC, Sherry befriended the music instructor, Elizabeth Dawidow

Ait. Elizabeth was from Warsaw, Poland. She had immigrated to the United States on a visa for a music scholarship. Sherry told Elizabeth about her burden. Elizabeth's parents, Boleslaw and Stanislaw, were pastors of an underground church in Warsaw. "I want you to pray about spending the summer with my family. I cannot return. The

government will arrest me. I don't want to put my family in jeopardy. Will you go as my representative, see my family, and use this experience as your internship?" Elizabeth asked.

Sherry went to her college Communist prayer band. She told them about her opportunity and that she needed money for airfare, a \$10 daily allowance, and a visa. Sherry's visa was miraculously approved. Her home church paid for her airfare, and her prayer band collected money for her daily allowance. "I've never seen anything like this. Clearly, this is God," said the college's missionary-in-residence.

One month before Sherry's departure, the government arrested

Boleslaw at the Poland/Ukraine border for smuggling Bibles into Poland. The government put the family under house arrest. Sherry sought the Lord. During revival services at her home church, Sherry and Elizabeth were kneeling at the



Sherry Sabella (right) and Jolanta Dawidow

altar, unsure of what to do. The evangelist placed his hand on Sherry's head, and said, "I don't know the circumstances, but I want you to know that God is telling you to be the handmaiden whom He's called you to be and do what He's told you to do." This was the confirmation Sherry and Elizabeth needed. Sherry would go.

One month later, Sherry was at the Warsaw, Poland airport. She had stuffed her luggage with Bibles, religious materials, and money for Elizabeth's family. The most dangerous task was getting through airport security. Sherry watched as airport security officers searched luggage. However, the day Sherry arrived Pope John Paul II also

arrived. Millions of people were at the airport to see him. As Sherry was about to go through customs there was a massive rush of people — Pope John Paul II was entering the airport. Suddenly, a female airport security officer grabbed Sherry's arm, pulling her toward the exit gate and delivering her to Stanislaw, Elizabeth's mother. "It was like an angel grabbed your arm and took you through the crowds to bring you to the other side of the gate and deliver you to us," Stanislaw explained. "No one looked in my suitcase. No one checked my ticket, my passport. ... That was a miracle. That was the first of many miracles that happened that summer," says Sherry.

Two weeks later Sherry was alone at Boleslaw and Stanislaw's home. She heard a knock on the door. Opening the door, Sherry saw Boleslaw. The government had released him. He told Sherry, "When they found out that an American was staying at my house, they released me."

Sherry listened to, encouraged, and taught those in the persecuted church. She shared her testimony at secret children's and youth camps, prayed for persecuted church members, attended underground church services, and reminded them that they were not alone.

Church members told Sherry, "Go back to America and tell them this is what we are living under," said one member. "Don't pray that God takes away the persecution, because we're getting strong, we are thriving. We pray for the American church. If they are ever confronted with persecution, they will be able to stand." The bravery, perseverance, and adaptability of the underground church in Poland astonished Sherry.

Under Communist rule, visitors had to register with the police so the government could track their location. The government censored all mail and tapped phones. Elizabeth's family kept a heavy blanket over the phone to prevent the government

from hearing their conversations. They could only speak freely in quiet voices behind closed doors. Evangelism was illegal. The only legal churches were those that had registered with the government. The government required pastors to submit their sermons for approval. Spies attended every service to ensure the pastor was preaching the government-approved



Sherry and Jim (left) Sabella

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Behind the *Iron Curtain*

sermon. To purchase a Bible, you had to visit a state-owned business and register with the government. Many Christians attended underground churches, primarily in homes. Dates and times of services varied. People entered at different times to not attract attention. “We would close the doors, close the windows, and it would be very low-key. No instruments. They would sing quietly.

After Sherry graduated from Valley Forge, she and her husband, Jim Sabella, whom she met at college, pastored in New York and Pennsylvania. In 1994, AGWM appointed Sherry and Jim as missionaries to the Czech Republic, where they served for 10 years. “When we went to the Czech Republic, our number one job was to train pastors coming out of the underground

church. I felt it was a continuation from when God called me at 17 into missions behind the Iron Curtain,” says Sherry. In 2004, Sherry and Jim were elected as the area directors of Central Europe. In 2017 the Sabellas transitioned to area directors of Southeast Europe.

After Jim’s passing in 2022, Sherry courageously decided to remain as area director. “The Lord keeps telling me, ‘I called you when you were 17. It hasn’t changed. Just keep on that road.’” Sherry faithfully serves the area the Lord laid on her heart almost 50 years ago – supporting Southeast Europe missionaries, speaking at conferences, engaging in administration, and continuing to follow the Lord.

HOLLY A.V. KNAPP
AGWM Communications



Sherry Sabella

But the pastor would preach, and it would be from the Bible. This is what the people wanted,” says Sherry.

Sherry gained valuable experience during her internship. “God sends. Sometimes He sends you to a ministry because you need to do a ministry that only you can do. Sometimes He sends you to a ministry for you because there’s no other way He can fill you, give you, or train you in the way He needs to unless He puts you in this position. I look back and see that my whole life, my whole ministry, has been in Eastern Europe with these people,” says Sherry.

2026

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DECIDEDLY PENTECOSTAL, COMMITTED TO MISSIONS

BY

Richard L. Schoonover

Byron Klaus grew up in a Pentecostal pastors' home. Both parents were ordained ministers in the German district. Byron says, "I never knew who was going to preach — mom or dad. I didn't know there was a problem with women in ministry until I went to seminary. I just saw this as normal." As a young person, Byron had speaking and musical skills. "When you're in a little church, you are up front a lot and people think, *you're going to be like your parents*. I rebelled, but not in a negative way. I just didn't want to be a minister."

Byron's goal was to take over his grandfather's farm in Whitney, Nebraska. He attended the College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to earn an animal science degree. While there, Byron attended church in Urbana led by Dick Foth, a young church planter. Dick had a tremendous influence on his life.

Byron recalls, "I had an increasing awareness that God was speaking to

me. In my sophomore year I finally understood that God wanted me to go into ministry. I left the university to attend Bethany Bible College in Scotts Valley, California, because that's where Dick had attended."

Lois grew up in the Norwegian Pentecostal community in Brooklyn, New York and attended the historic Salem Gospel Tabernacle. During her teenage years her family moved to Ventura, California. Lois says, "Following high school I didn't have any specific direction for my life, so I served in an orphanage in Puerto Rico led by Sally Olsen, a Norwegian missionary."

After her time in Puerto Rico, Lois attended Bethany Bible College, where she met Byron. Lois comments, "Our first date was at the county fair in Salinas. Byron tried to impress me with his knowledge of livestock." Byron and Lois married the Christmas before he graduated from Bethany.



Byron & Lois Klaus

After graduating from Bethany, Byron worked on staff at three churches and earned a masters degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. In those churches, along with his degree from Southwestern Baptist, Byron believed that he had a teaching ministry. “I felt most at home when I was teaching the Bible. I wanted to train ministers.”

In 1980, Southern California College (now Vanguard University) President Wayne Kraiss asked Byron to come to SCC. He served there for 20 years in teaching and administration. While at SCC he earned a D.Min. from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. Byron became president at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (AGTS) in 1999.

Throughout Byron’s ministry, Lois worked various jobs and then became the chief operating officer of a large commercial real estate firm. When they came to AGTS Lois decided to work alongside Byron in serving the seminary community.

“At AGTS I was committed to furthering education for missionaries,” says Byron. One of the influencers in founding Assemblies of God Graduate School (now AGTS) was J. Philip Hogan, then executive director of Assemblies of God Foreign Missions. Assemblies of God Graduate School opened September 1973. Prior to this, it held a special summer session in June and July for AGWM missionary candidates. The first class at AGTS in 1973 was a continuation of this school of missions session. “I believe that AGWM and AGTS have been joined at the hip from its inception.”

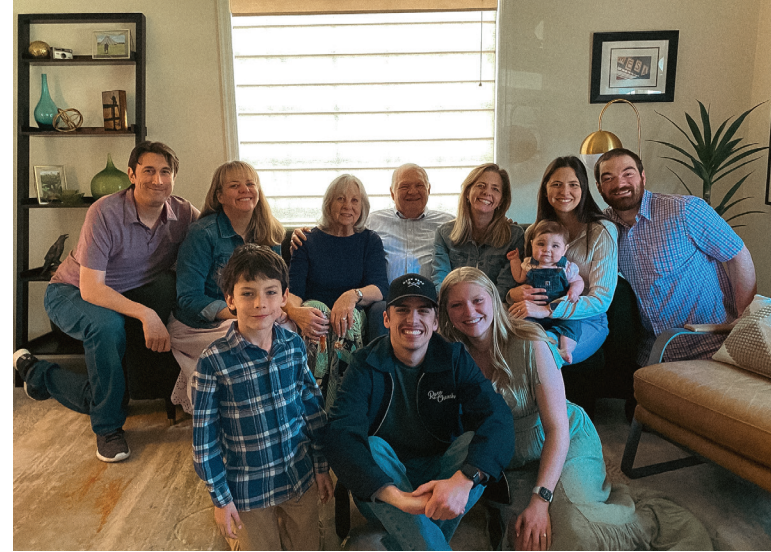
Byron continued this legacy of partnership with AGWM and AGTS through initiatives such as the Institute of Muslim Studies and the Summer Institute. He also was instrumental in developing doctoral degrees that would bring together the vitality of AGWM missions with an education that would help missionaries continue to be effective.

Byron believed that AGTS needed a nonresidential Ph.D. in missiology and in intercultural studies. He approached the accrediting association. Byron says, “We contended that our primary students in these programs would be missionaries who could not leave their ministry for a three-to-five-year residency program. We believed that the European model — short bursts at seminary for research — could work.”

John Easter personifies the result of this program. He was the first Ph.D. graduate at AGTS. The degree program simply coalesced John’s missionary ministry with his education and put it together in a system. Now John, as AGWM executive director, is influencing the Assemblies of God.

Another example is Barnabas Mtokambali, superintendent of the Tanzania Assemblies of God and president of the African Assemblies of God Alliance. At AGTS he developed the plan he had for Tanzania that has spread throughout Africa.

Byron’s passion for Pentecost and mission is evident in his writing. He and Doug Petersen wrote *The Essential J. Philip Hogan* (The J. Philip Hogan World Missions Series) published in January 2006. He also worked with Murray Dempster and Doug Petersen in



Lois and Bryan (center) Klaus with family

editing *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* and *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*.

Retirement for Byron has not been a life of leisure. After retiring from AGTS Byron became interim president at University of Valley Forge. He also started coaching presidents and boards of Christian universities.

Byron had been vice president for ChildHope, formerly Latin America Child Care (LACC). He recently resigned from that position but remains connected with ChildHope as president of ChildHope Network, a fundraising arm of ChildHope.

In 2018, Byron and Lois moved to Oregon to be close to their kids and grandkids. Byron says, “When I got here, I immediately became an interim pastor and started teaching in the doctoral program at Northwest University.” He also began to work with the In Trust Center for Theological Schools, Wilmington, Delaware. This organization helps faith-based universities and seminaries strengthen their presidency and

governing boards. “This has become a new career for me. I’ve served this board for nine years including being the chair of the board.”

Byron believes it is important to understand the dynamic of the

Pentecostal experience. “God is moving in places where the gospel is least accessible, and if that is the case, we need to listen to those people,” says Byron. The last two years Byron has been helping a large church in Singapore develop a series of theological conferences. We bring in *global Pentecostal* scholars who welcome the gifts of scholarship and theological reflection in the context of a vibrant local church. His newest book, *Voices Loud and Clear*, GPVoices.org is a product of these conferences. It is the first book in a series with colleagues Doug Petersen and Kong Hee, pastor of City Harvest Church in Singapore.

Byron sums up his ministry: “For nearly 45 years, my ministry has focused on teaching the Bible, training leaders for ministry, and advocating for the poor in the most desperate places on earth. I joyfully serve an effort that is replicating this passion on emerging leaders who will far surpass my effectiveness in these areas of ministry.”

RICHARD L. SCHOONOVER
AGWM Communications

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