

The LCF Connection

October 2026

Toxic Religion and Cults

A Message from the Pastor

By Reuben Sairs

Toxic means poisonous, and poisonous religion comes to us by degree of intensity. Some of it is a little bit venomous, and some of it is lethal. Bad religion is all around us, and is not hard to find. It can be quite seductive—

often telling us what we want to hear, believe or practice as a way of pulling us in. Only when we figure out the rest of the agenda do we realize we're off the path. Not all bad religions can be called cults.

The word cult gets thrown around. That term has been mishandled and someone has said, "A cult is defined as a religion I don't like." Nonetheless, there are religions that can be described as cults. They have special revelations, practices, and a centralized leadership around a prophet or inspired leader who gets special privileges. They sequester their followers and cut them off from the balancing voices of family or society at large. Cults have their own understanding of things filtered through the leader, and everyone else is blind, lost and headed for disaster. Cults appeal to people with deep wounds, emotional need, unhealed hurts, and who are often already alienated from normal society. Cults appeal to those who already feel like outsiders. There have been some big names in cults in my life: Jim Jones, David Koresh, Sun Myung Moon, David Berg, Marshall Applewhite and that's a short list!

One can distinguish cults from sects. Sects are protest movements in religion. Sects have many standard beliefs, but also have a gripe or two with the larger group. They often see themselves as the true inheritors or preservers of the religion, and think the main group has gone astray. They don't really consider themselves as completely different, and often seek understanding. Cults, though, are innovative. They don't really care if you understand them. They don't need the established groups. Cults have their own way. It's completely different, and they are sharply opposed to other ways.

Cults can turn into religions. A second generation cult is an oxymoron. Once the original blueprint is laid down and a second generation rises, institutions are developed and what was once a cult simply becomes a new religion.

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London Christian Fellowship seeks to develop authentic and passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

Prepared to Care

By Martie George with Russ Hauge and Doris Swartz



A shout-out to Russ Hauge and Zach Freer, who serve on the LCF Council, for providing LCF with an opportunity to have a refresh of CPR, a bit of training with our AED (automatic external defibrillator) equipment, and a review of choking procedures. This is one of the first steps that we have taken to better prepare ourselves as a congregation to be more knowledgeable and better equipped to handle a medical emergency.

After church on Sunday, August 30th, about 14 of us participated in the medical information session held in the fellowship hall. We were able to learn valuable information from Nick Ma, a Paramedic from Madison County Emergency Medical District. Afterward, he invited anyone interested to practice their CPR skills with the resuscitation models he brought along.

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He suggested that in the event of a medical emergency it would be helpful if there are about 4-5 volunteers to assist the individual accessing the situation and/or performing lifesaving measures. The first person to respond will be looking for individuals to assist, call 911, stay in place, evacuate the area, etc. If you are nearby and have medical or CPR skills, it would be helpful for you to make that known. Everyone else should simply remain calm and pray.

We hope that we never have a medical emergency that requires this training but being prepared may be likened to the Good Samaritan in the New Testament who was willing and ready to provide help to someone in need. Nick told us that it's reassuring to know that Ohio has Good Samaritan laws in place that protect citizens who are trying to provide lifesaving help in an emergency.

CPR training, refreshers, AED training, and first aid training are sometimes available through the Madison County EMD. The American Red Cross also provides training opportunities. We encourage you to pursue any of these opportunities to be better equipped, if you'd like.

We want to be prepared and ready to do all we can to help save someone's physical life, but we especially want to be ready to introduce someone to Christ, who alone can give them spiritual life—that lasts forever. If you have any thoughts or questions feel free to contact Russ or Zach. Thanks and blessings.

A Special Service

By Jodi Traverse

We were looking forward to our annual outdoor service on September 13th but after getting some heavy rainfall near the end of the week, we learned that the property we were planning to use was underwater. We decided to move our outdoor service back to LCF. After the service, we held the baptisms of Hadley Dean, Scarlet Dean, and Emma Hostetler at our typical baptism location near church. Then we went back to church to enjoy a potluck meal together.

Obviously, we were disappointed in the change of plans, but were very thankful that we were still have to have the baptisms in the creek followed by a fun potluck. It was a beautiful day of celebration and fellowship together!



When Trees Speak

By Pam Stanforth

Because I deal with obtaining bids for work around the condominiums where I live, I recently found myself tasked with getting estimates for the removal of one of our huge trees. Since then, trees have been on my mind.

I began wondering things I had never seriously considered before. Do trees feel pain? Do they communicate? Do they somehow “speak” to one another? Why do some trees live hundreds, even thousands of years, while human life is so brief?

So I spent time researching what scientists, arborists, and tree experts have discovered. To my surprise, I found remarkable things. Scientists now believe trees communicate through underground fungal networks beneath the soil. Some call it the “wood wide web.” Trees appear to send nutrients to struggling trees, warn neighboring trees of danger, and even nourish younger saplings through what are called “mother trees.”

Older trees help younger ones survive. I paused when I read that. Because suddenly science sounded strangely familiar to Scripture. *“One generation shall praise thy works to another...”* Psalm 145:4.

The Bible begins with a tree. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil stood in Eden beside the Tree of Life. Humanity’s story began among trees, and Scripture ends the same way: *“And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”* Revelation 22:2. Between Genesis and Revelation, trees stand silently through the entire story of mankind.

As I thought about all this, old memories surfaced. I remembered being around seven years old, sitting beneath the huge oak tree near Sookie’s pen. Sookie was my pig—the runt my Uncle Oliver reluctantly allowed me to keep. I raised her myself, loved her, fed her, talked to her. Then came hog-killing season. My family needed meat. Sookie became part of the winter food supply, and my child-heart broke. I remember hiding beneath my bed crying, then later sitting against those giant roots under the tree asking questions no little girl could fully understand. Did Sookie know? Was she afraid? Did she cry when I was gone at school? The tree never answered aloud, but somehow it felt as though it listened.

Years later my brother built a beautiful porch and partial sun deck around a massive tree rather than cutting it down. For years the tree stood in the middle of family gatherings, shade, laughter, and life itself. Eventually the tree died, but even then it had held people together for a season.

Another brother, James, once found a tree that had grown completely around old farm equipment. The metal remained trapped deep within the trunk—evidence of injury long ago—yet the tree still lived and thrived. Wounded, but alive. Scarred, but growing.

I could not help but think of James himself after losing his young son Jeremy in drowning waters. Some grief never fully leaves the human soul. Like metal buried inside living wood, tragedy becomes part of us. Yet somehow life continues growing around the wound.

Trees preach sermons if we are willing to see them. In Louisiana, massive roots sometimes rise from the earth looking like giant alligators crawling beneath the soil. I have photographs of roots twisting and stretching across the ground like living sculptures. Beneath every visible tree exists an unseen system holding it upright.

Again, how much like human beings. We see smiles while hidden roots battle fear, grief, memories, survival, hope, and faith. The trees speak, though I cannot hear their language. But God speaks too. And because human ears are often dull, He gave His Word physically. A burning bush that would not be consumed. Stone tablets written by the finger of God. Parables about seeds, vines, branches, fruit, fig trees, cedars, olives, and mustard trees.

Jesus Himself was placed upon a tree. The cross was not only an instrument of death—it became a doorway to eternal life. Trees give their lives to build homes for people. Jesus gave His life upon a tree to prepare a home for us.

Even now, as I write this, two doves sit quietly among the flowing branches of a willow tree outside my window. Their presence reminds me of Noah releasing the dove to discover whether the floodwaters had receded and whether hope still existed in the world. The dove returned with evidence of life.

Perhaps that is what trees still do for us. They remind us life continues. Roots still hold. Spring still comes. Healing is possible. God still speaks. And perhaps the deepest truth of all: creation itself seems to strain toward its Creator. The heartstrings of humanity are waiting to be touched by the song of love, redemption, mercy, and salvation. Amen.

Elders Notes

By Brandon Wengerd

On September 22nd, the elders team gathered at the home of Rob and Doris. We opened our time with prayer, and Rob led a devotion on Hebrews 13:7, 17 about the leadership role of elders. Next, we spent time in prayer and praise for the church body and giving thanks to our Heavenly Father for what He is doing.

Pastoral Internship - We spent time evaluating and discussing how Corin's pastoral internship has gone over the past year.

Council Nominations - As a congregation, we are working through the nomination process for a new council member. There will be a new council chair for the upcoming year since Russ Hauge will be ending both his term on council and also being council chair.

Coffee - We appreciate having a coffee bar in the foyer on Sunday mornings and the volunteers who serve it. We are evaluating ways to help transition from fellowship in the foyer to joining worship in the sanctuary as it begins.

Budget - We discussed a couple items that we would like to evaluate more with the council as next year's budget is developed.

We closed our time with prayer. Our next elders' meeting will happen on Wednesday, October 21st. As always, we welcome your thoughts, comments, or concerns to be shared with any of us on the elder team.

Council Update

By Russ Hauge

Attendance: Sarah Eichorn, Rhoda Sommers, Zach Freer, and Russ Hauge by Google Meet video conference.

August income was \$30,184 which was more than our expenses of \$17,973 by +\$12,211. Our YTD income is \$170,760 compared to our YTD expenses of \$124,842, which leaves a YTD balance of +\$45,918.

CPR and AED training was conducted on August 30th by the Summerford Fire Department. Thank you to each person who attended.

Sarah will be sending emails to all group leaders during September asking for feedback on anticipated financial needs as we start work on the 2027 church budget. As stated previously, our goal is to have the budget completed and reviewed by the congregation during December 2026.

The remainder of the meeting continued to focus on maintenance projects both within the church and on the church grounds. The following is a list of topics from last month that now includes updates:

- A plan to improve the handicap access to the playground has been approved and will be completed during September.
- HVAC maintenance was completed during August.
- Whole church carpet cleaning has been approved and will now be scheduled.
- Playground mulch and signage around the playground, among other smaller budget items, were also discussed.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 27th, at 7 pm by video conference.

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How do we keep ourselves and those we love away from toxic religion like cults? First know that the Bible says believers are susceptible. Paul told the Ephesians, *"Savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."* He told Timothy, *"The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving head to deceiving spirits..."*

My free pastoral advice is to stand back from leader centered movements rather than idea centered movements. Cults love the languages of insiders and outsiders, appealing to that great need to belong, but also the desire to be special—one of the enlightened. Any leader or group who says everyone else is dumb, deluded and unclear sounds cultish to me. Maybe one of the chief defenses is humility. When all is said and done cult members are a weird combination of too secure and very insecure, and out of that combination refuse to listen to counsel that doesn't confirm their newly acquired and life-changing beliefs! Be willing to listen to the stable voices God puts in your life through sober Bible interpretation, accountable leadership and the church as a much larger body than even one small congregation, and don't dismiss loving and reasoning family and friends when they try to slow you down.



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A monthly newsletter designed to enhance communication at London Christian Fellowship.

We would love to hear your feedback. Email us at secretary@lcfweb.org.

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