



FROM THE EDITOR



By Mark A. Taylor

God's Call to a 'Christian Only'

Are we evangelicals? That was the question considered in our March 16 issue. Just as we were finishing it, the news broke that one of the Christian church ministers mentioned in the issue was leaving to join the staff of an evangelical congregation.

Gene Appel, senior pastor with Central Christian Church, Henderson, Nevada, was cited in one article because of his frequent association with the Willow Creek Association. He announced in February that he will become associate pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, in June. Senior pastor at Willow Creek is Bill Hybels, portrayed among the leading evangelicals on our March 16 cover.

Does Appel consider himself an evangelical? "I see myself as a Christian only," he answered when I posed the question to him. At least one Christian church minister has asked him whether this move means he is leaving the Restoration Movement.

"I'm not sure I even understand that question," Appel responded. "The dream of the Restoration Movement has always been to restore the kind of church we read about in Acts 2—a biblically functioning community without denominational barriers.

"Members of Christian churches have said for years that they're not the only Christians," he added.

"We've always believed that the church is bigger than 'us.' If the question means am I abandoning those ideals, then the answer is no. I've never been more passionate about giving my life for that dream."

Both Appel and Hybels believe strongly that God has inspired this move.

"For 17-and-a-half years I have been convinced, for reasons I don't fully understand, of God's calling on my life to serve Central," Appel said in a news release posted on Central's Web site. "However, I am now equally convinced to the core of my core that He has released me from this calling."

"The Willow elders and I have been in conversation with Gene for six months regarding this opportunity," Hybels said in a letter broadcast via e-mail and also posted on Central's Web site. "We believe that . . . additional leadership horsepower is essential to fulfilling all the plans that God has laid out before us. We are convinced that Gene is the right person for this critical position." Appel will have leadership and teaching responsibilities with the suburban Chicago church.

Hybels praised Appel for his humility, courage, and character. Mike Bodine, executive pastor at Central, said the church is conducting a "national search" for Appel's replacement. "Though this is the end of a chapter, it is not the end of our book. Our ministries will continue. Central's mission will continue."

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Cover photos ©Artville and ©PhotoDisc.

CHRISTIAN STANDARD logo, cover and interior design by Andrew Quach.

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Volume CXXXVIII, Number 14, CHRISTIAN STANDARD (ISSN 0009-5656), published weekly at 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. Periodicals postage paid at Cincinnati, Ohio.

Printed in USA. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Standard Publishing, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. Phone: 1-800-543-1301 or 1-513-931-4050.

Subscription rates: \$24.99 per year plus \$5.00 postage/handling (plus sales tax in FL and WA; \$10.00 postage/handling per year for Canadian subscriptions; \$12.50 for Mexico and all other foreign subscriptions). Two to fourteen copies to one address, \$5.00 each per quarter. Fifteen to thirty-four copies to one address, \$4.75 each per quarter. Thirty-five or more copies to one address, \$4.50 each per quarter. Send address changes to CHRISTIAN STANDARD, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. Send old and new addresses, complete with zip numbers, at least six weeks before delivery date. Unsolicited manuscripts that are not accompanied by return postage will not be returned. This publication is available in microform from UMI. Phone: 800-521-0600 toll-free; 313-761-4700 collect from Alaska and Michigan; 800-343-5299 toll-free from Canada.

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