

My New Life

■ A young adult who lives in Norway recounts his story of being called into God's Church.

by John Wennström

The biggest change I made in my life occurred early in the year 2007 after I moved from Sweden to Norway to start working as a machine operator. Little did I know that while living in this new country something marvelous was going to happen that would change my life.

The Homeless Fellow

My family kept asking me if I was thinking about joining a local church group. They didn't want me to lose the Pentecostal faith I shared with them since I was on my own in a different country. One day after work, I drove around the city to find a church that didn't look boring. On a busy street, a Baptist church announced a Saturday night service for young adults.

On the following Saturday when the sun went down, I walked on the streets of Oslo heading for the church. As I was approaching a poor fellow begging for money, I began to search my pockets. But for some reason I felt that I should save whatever money I found and give it to the next homeless fellow that came in sight.

At the Baptist church there were a dozen people gathered around three tables. A lady welcomed me, but no one else said anything to me. So, I just took my place at an empty seat in front of a guy who looked more willing to talk. After a few awkward moments of silence, we said hello.

While talking, he revealed to me that he was here for the first time, just like I was. He came from Romania and had been in Oslo for just a couple of days, trying to find a job.

He began to open his well-marked Bible, and I got an uncomfortable feeling that he was going to start preaching to me. I quickly asked him where he lived. That's when he told me that he was homeless and had come to the church service to find brothers in Christ who would be willing to help him.

As he browsed the Bible and showed me scriptures describing brotherly love, I was astonished over the difference between what the Bible actually said and how I lived my life as a supposed, Bible-believing Christian. I soon realized that no one in this assembly really knew what they believed in or what the Bible said. Neither did I.



As I grew spiritually through daily study, the Bible started to make sense from the first page to the last.

The Sabbath Command

During the following months my excitement and curiosity was solely focused on the Bible. I kept my Bible open and read about how Jesus Christ, as well as Paul, preached on the Sabbath and how the Sabbath was a sign between God and His people. Phrases like the "Kingdom of God" and "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" bewildered my mind. I had to find the truth.

I googled for the Sabbath and found Herbert Armstrong, a man who believed God had restored the truth of the gospel, including the meaning of the Sabbath, through him. I was astonished by the things that he had written and said.

While I gained more and more knowledge, my life began to feel exciting and purposeful. I partly understood the Sabbath command and the Kingdom of God, and the day came when I had to decide whether I would keep the Sabbath.

No matter what would happen or what anyone would say, I was determined to keep the commandment. It meant not working overtime, no more partying on Friday nights and no more invites to friends on Saturday. For me it would mean just being home or wherever I happened to be, studying the Word, praying and reading booklets.

I learned that when we give God our time with sincere joy and enthusiasm, He gives the time back to us. We have less stress and feel that we have more time for other things.

Discouragement

More than a year had passed since my first sincere study of the

Bible. I had read every booklet that Mr. Armstrong had written, including the books *Mystery of the Ages* and *The Missing Dimension in Sex*. I had also seen many of his telecasts.

When I saw the video *Ambassador for World Peace: Behind the Work 1985*, I was convinced that this Church was doing the work of God. When I found the United Church of God in August 2007, I sent an e-mail to what I imagined was the Swedish UCG congregation. I asked if it was possible to meet someone in the Church in my area. It turned out that there were only two members in all of Scandinavia. It got me discouraged.

My girlfriend at the time didn't like what I was becoming. I followed the commands very strictly. I didn't want to talk about any-

thing else other than the new truths I had found. I told her that I would never again celebrate Christmas or Easter.

Christmas was the time of the year that meant the most to her, so I understood why she broke up with me just before the year was over. I was dismayed; but during this trial I got stronger, and it persuaded me to keep going the

The Sabbath was the hardest part to stick to. I lost many of my contacts and friends, and suddenly I noticed that most things in the world happen on Friday night.

My life decisions felt like a win-lose situation, where no matter what, I had to lose something in order to win something else. But the Bible showed me I needed to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Gradually, God showed me that His way truly was a win-win situation. As I grew spiritually through daily study, the Bible started to make sense from the first page to the last.

"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!"

(Psalm 119:1-2). These words gave me encouragement, because I already had experienced the truth of it without reading it.

The New Family

While visiting my parents in Sweden, I told them that my beliefs were almost 100 percent different compared to their Protestant beliefs. My dad was shocked, and from that day on he was convinced that I lived in confusion and that I had been cursed by Satan. I wrote him a list of 20 differences to explain what I meant.

A year later he brought the list up in a discussion to tell me that everything I believed in was

against his conviction. I was worried that I had written something critical and harsh. Of course, back then I hoped the list would make him try to refute me and that by searching the Scriptures he would then find the truth.

Even though I do not have the support of my family, I have an inner peace and confidence, knowing that I will meet them in the second resurrection—unless God decides to call them in this life. There, they will have the opportunity to receive the knowledge of the truth, believe it with their hearts and live forever in a renewed and purposeful world. This is the hope I have, which I live by.

That summer of 2008 I went to a summer gathering in Sweden. I met brethren from Germany, Latvia and other Scandinavian countries; and there were also people from America. This weekend was unforgettable. Here I made my biggest decision—getting baptized.

What the homeless fellow was desperate to find was given to me. I got a new family with brothers and sisters all over the world. I cannot imagine how it is to have grown up in the Church. It must be unbelievably wonderful, having the knowledge of being a part of the biggest and most precious work in the universe.

If you look back and see how the work has been growing, how the people have been devoted and determined, it gives you courage, and inspiration. You want to study more; and the more you study, the more you understand. The more you understand, the happier you become, because then you actually live by the Word, by the tree of life. And when you reject the world and your ideas about what is good and evil, then you are not just a bystander in life, but a purposeful and useful part of the greatest happening in the universe. UN

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(photo by Jesmina Allaoua)

direction I had already taken. I knew too much to stop.

It happened that the UCG senior pastor for Scandinavia, Victor Kubik, had planned to travel through Scandinavia to visit brethren. I had to wait four months, but in the first week of January 2008 he and his wife visited me in Oslo. I was eager to move forward and asked them about tithing and baptism. We also talked about the situation of there being just a few people scattered in Scandinavia. They encouraged me to stick close to God's Word and pray every day.



John Wennström (center) stands with Jim Franks, Victor Kubik, Johnnie Lambert and Britton Taylor after his baptism in Sweden (photo by Jesmina Allaoua)