



An interview regarding Highland Heights Church of Christ's latest publication, ARMS of Love Newsletter.

INTERVIEW WITH BRO. TOMMY BROOKS

By Sis. Lula Morris

ARMS OF LOVE NEWSLETTER



INTERVIEW WITH BROTHER TOMMY BROOKS

By
Lula Morris

Over the past few months our congregation has been on fire with excitement engaging in activities relating to our new **Age-Related Ministries Program (ARMS)**. The ARMS Program's mission is to provide the churches of Christ a program that will help improve upon retaining the saved, restoring lost members and baptizing new members. Each age-related ministry serves members in a particular age group.

Our very own minister, Brother Tommy Brooks, conceived, developed and implemented this highly unique, and as far as we can determine "one of a kind" program. With this in mind, our Newsletter servants thought it only fitting and proper to honor our maiden issue of **ARMS OF LOVE** by featuring a talk with Brother Brooks regarding our new and innovative ARMS Program.

Sis. Morris: Brother Brooks thank you for having this talk with us. Why did you want to develop this type of program?

Bro. Brooks: I have been called throughout the nation to talk to other congregations about the success of baptisms. I am often presented with the question about retention, and that question I have always answered in a way that said, "You know in the case of Jesus healing ten lepers, only one remained with him which was a ten percent ratio or retention rate of those who Jesus was able to keep after he healed them, and so in my mind if we baptized a hundred and we kept ten we have done pretty good." However somewhere down deep in my heart I wanted a better answer. I wanted to answer by providing a program and opportunity for congregations to have better retention rates.

The second part would be Restoration. In the case of restoration, often times congregations focus on restoring their members on a quarterly or annual basis which in my mind is a tragic mistake because those who need restoring are just as lost as those who have never been baptized. I wanted a program that puts emphasis on the lost – meaning those who don't know Jesus and have never been baptized as well as those who need to be restored. A program that looked at them all equally—whether they are baptisms or restorations—and then a program or vehicle to improve the retention of those being saved.

Sis. Morris: Do you think baptizing, restoring and retention are problems throughout the churches of Christ?

Bro. Brooks: I think they are. I think there is a problem in all three areas. Some are worse than others. I think baptism is a problem and that we could improve on baptism. I think we are scoring poorly both on restoration and retention. So yes, I think they are problems throughout the churches of Christ.

Sis. Morris: How long did you think on this before you decided to put it into writing?

Bro. Brooks: It has been something heavy on my heart and more so lately because of the fact that I just wanted to have better answers for people calling. The activation or implementation of such a program came to me on a whim, in a sense, based on a meeting I had with the young adults at this congregation who visited other congregations. A statement was made that we don't have anything here for them. This bothered me. I thought about it and decided to call a meeting on a Sunday morning after worship with the young adults that attended here. It was in that meeting when I realized we were not meeting their need; I saw a spirit I had not seen before from our young adults. It was in that meeting I realized when I started offering them things to do with their peers that the excitement, enthusiasm, and the desire to do things, the zeal that came from that discussion was overwhelming. The light came on for me that age relationship was important to them in their group.

I personally asked them about their relationship with me as a minister – whether they felt comfortable approaching me. That discussion was such that I think I came out okay but it was evident to me they felt more comfortable, to really open up and have good dialogue, when they were communicating with their own peers. When I got home I started thinking about age related relationships: What about the seniors? And what about the middle age people? This probably applies with all age groups.

So thinking of the word, “Age”, I went to Titus 2: aged women to young women, and aged men to young men. I knew there was a biblical concept here called “Age to age”. In 1 Chronicles, David divided up the kingdom by age of those who worked, and there was a twenty year increment that I saw. That night was a restless night for me because it was heavy on my mind; it was like a light bulb going off in my mind, almost like a revelation. Of course I know that is not what it was, but it was like an answer to a prayer; it was hope involved and it was on that night I came up with the Age Related Ministries concept.

Sis. Morris: So you felt you needed to take a new approach to baptizing, retaining and restoring new members because what was currently going on was not working?

Bro. Brooks: I would say it is a holistic approach. I had an approach to evangelism but as I stated earlier there were three things I wanted to accomplish at this point and that was to continue to evangelize and to improve upon them. But the two that I knew I needed to improve upon more so than evangelism—when I say evangelism I am speaking of baptism—was restoration and retention and so that would be a holistic approach to do all three, to be good at all three.

Sis. Morris: Of the three areas you wanted to address, baptizing, retaining and restoring, which one do you think is the most problematic for Highland Heights?

Bro. Brooks: I think retention is number one, the most problematic for our congregation. But retaining the saved, keeping the saved saved is a big problem. It's a huge one. You know when you baptize 100 people a year and you are not seeing 100 members grow every year you can see that retention wasn't very good. And that is our number. We do anywhere from 80 to 100 a year and granted many do not stay here for various reasons however, our retention should be much better. Second would be restoration. I just think the whole way the church has approached restoration has been in error, with a lack of concern for the lost. The bible teaches us in Galatians 6:1 if we know brothers are overtaken in faults we are to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. Retention is number one and restoration is number two, and number three we can always improve upon baptism.

Sis. Morris: When you thought about doing this program, did you survey the congregation to see if they were in agreement with you that something needed to be done to help with the retention problem?

Bro. Brooks: Initially I just started calling people that I knew would think though it with me. I didn't want to throw it out to the congregation as a whole because it was just a view, a vision I wanted to cast, a new concept. I felt really good about it and so first, before I talked to anyone, I wrote up my thoughts and that's when I came up with Age-Related Ministries and the acronym ARMs. Everyone I sent it to said, "Man how did you . . . where did this come from . . ." Everybody saw an immediate need for it. So I didn't poll. I called a special Brothers' Meeting that was well attended. The response I got from all the brothers was the same type I got from the initial individuals I talked with. It was another "WOW" moment from those people. No one from any group could find any reason to not do this. There were concerns of some basic things but nothing to say not to do it. Everyone said that the leadership was to move forward, and so I put an aggressive plan in place to implement and to activate.

Sis. Morris: So with this program, have you determined how you will define success and failure?

Bro. Brooks: I think you can be an over achiever in a sense, that you are looking for greater results than you may get because of the mere fact that we are dealing in a spiritual realm here. What I mean by that is I consider saving souls a success. You may want great numbers but if our retention improves any, in my mind, that is a success. If we restore, that is success. How many, the greater the retention the more successful I think I will feel about it.

Sis. Morris: Retention is the key thing – not so much that you baptize more, but that you retain more, is this true?

Bro. Brooks: These are the two areas I want to see improve: retention and restoration. They work hand in hand. I want to see improvement in these two areas; then I will say it is a success. If after a year we look back and say, "Well you know we are up ten percent on retention," I am going to say that is a success. However, if you say, "We only got one person," spiritually speaking, that is a success.

Sis. Morris: Are you saying that if you don't see this, then you will determine the program a failure as a whole?

Bro. Brooks: I think I will determine if the program is a success or failure based on input from those who are involved. I think eventually we will see results here at Highland Heights and the congregation will be the ones who will say to me through some type of survey where it has been successful. It may be successful in other areas than those mentioned. Some immediate success we have seen already are in bonding relationships and building fellowships.

Sis. Morris: So then, even if after six months or so the numbers have not improved but you do know that relationships have improved, bonding has improved, the overall atmosphere of the congregation, as a whole, has improved then is that success?

Bro. Brooks: Yes that is success because that is keeping the saved saved, offering all our members—not just our youths—but all of our members some ways to fellowship, to bond, to develop relationships, and I think that is going to be a huge benefit to this congregation.

Sis. Morris: Once the program has been in operation for at least a year, what will you do with the results?

Bro Brooks: My long term goal as a minister is to be able to reach out to other congregations, and I am starting to do that through workshops. I want to impact the Brotherhood through workshops and presentations, and I want Highland Heights to be the beacon, the light, the example. I don't want this to be misunderstood as glory for me. I want people to feel my passion for the lost through my presentations, and I want my family at Highland Heights to get recognized, in a sense, for going through programs and doing things that we thought would benefit the Church of Christ as a whole and not be a congregation “on an island” only focusing on the spiritual well-being of the people here at Highland Heights. If I had to say what the overall goal would be, the long term goal for me will be to take the ARMs Program from here and bless the lives of many other congregations.

Sis. Davis: What do you think a Newsletter for the ARMS Program will do for the congregation?

Bro. Brooks: Well first of all I think it is an exciting idea. When I first heard you mention it, I thought “WOW”! Now that is a powerful thought. I think it is not only going to be a benefit to the success of the program but it is also going to help educate the group and show benefits as well. The newsletter becomes a tracking system with actual pictures, comments, interviews – the real-time stuff!