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Ted Haggard sees things other people don't.
He's seen angels and demons and blood on his hands.
Sometimes, he sees things before they happen.

While fasting and praying 18 years ago on the side
of Pikes Peak, Haggard envisioned the church that
would become the largest in Colorado, where believers
speak in tongues and do cartwheels because they love
the Lord so much - a place Haggard says he'll never leave.

Haggard believes God showed him these things and
gave him New Life Church because God has a plan for
Colorado Springs.

The plan involved calling Haggard, the sandy-haired
son of an Indiana veterinarian, to become a pastor.
Haggard got this calling over a bowl of cereal
when he was 19. He's followed it ever since - to the
mission fields in dozens of countries, to a Louisiana
megachurch where he met his mentor, and to Colorado
Springs, where he's played a central role in the city's
rise as a capital of evangelical Christianity.

Haggard's mark in the city runs deep. His church,
which boasts a $12 million budget and 140 employees,
is imitated and envied.

While most churches will celebrate Christmas Eve
quietly Tuesday, New Life Church is renting the World
Arena and inviting the entire city.

Next summer, New Life will get bigger when it begins
construction on a 6,400-seat, $19 million sanctuary
the size of a Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Haggard's influence extends beyond Colorado Springs.
In 1996, Christianity Today magazine named him one
of 50 up-and-coming evangelical leaders younger than 40.

Now 46, Haggard has the ear of prominent evangelicals
such as Pat Robertson and Bill Bright. The Bush administration
asked him to join other religious leaders in crafting
a plan to provide social services through faith groups.

Haggard's profile will grow next year when he becomes
chairman of the National Association of Evangelicals,
which politicians consult to measure the concerns
of conservative Christians.

To some extent, Haggard's success has to do with
good timing. His church has grown with the city.
His chosen faith, charismatic Christianity, ranks
among the world's fastest growing, winning converts
with conservative Bible teaching and lively worship
that makes people feel connected to God and each other.

Other charismatic pastors have come to Colorado
Springs, but no one remembers them.
Haggard clearly has something, lots of things:
a regular-guy personality, a conversational preaching
style, an ad executive's marketing savvy, a drive
that pushes him to pray at dawn and the kind of smile
seen in a toothpaste commercial.

Haggard said he founded New Life Church in 1985
on the belief people want "purpose in their lives,
answers to their problems and ways to keep their families
together." He is a zealot in promoting the simplest
act of being a Christian: prayer. Haggard believes
prayer can drive away evil, cure the sick - even reduce crime.

He invests heavily in youth programs, promotes
mission work as a way for people to see beyond themselves
and connects those who might feel lost in his 9,000-member
church through "small groups" that bond over shared
interests such as dog training and snowboarding.
Above all, friends and colleagues say, Haggard
is a visionary. He sees beyond New Life Church to
the city of Colorado Springs, and far beyond that.
Haggard's vision as a pastor is grounded in his
first memories of church, sitting in Delphi United
Presbyterian Church with his three older brothers.
The boys wore dark jackets, white shirts and clip-on ties.
Their mother, Rachel, used to count the days to
Sunday, building excitement in her children.

But it was the boys' father, Marcus Haggard, whose
religious experience would change their lives - one
life, especially.

The pig farmer's son

A place of rolling hills and woods, Delphi is a
small town on the Wabash River in Indiana that once
called itself the "junior pork-packing center of the West."

Marcus and Rachel Haggard fell in love with it
while driving through on their honeymoon. It's where
the young veterinarian and his wife started a family.

The boys came first: Johnny, Danny, Timmy and Teddy.
The girls later: Mary Lois and Rachel.

Marcus Haggard, in addition to being the town veterinarian,
owned pig farms.

In his folksy manner, Ted Haggard often refers
to himself as the son of a pig farmer. But Marcus
Haggard was more than that.

He started a farm equipment company. He helped
create Gaines Burgers, the dog food. He owned a bakery.
He helped Hitachi develop cassette tapes. He gave
talks on how to be successful in sales, recorded the
talks on cassettes and sold them.

"We grew up hearing the message we could be successful,"
said Dan Haggard, who develops teacher-training programs
for New Mexico.

The Haggards grew up knowing Sundays meant church.
Ted Haggard remembers being proud of his church's
giant stones, stained-glass windows and towering ceilings.
Marcus Haggard was a presbyter, or elder, and Sunday
school teacher.

The family attended church for a simple reason:
They were Christians.

When Ted Haggard was in seventh grade, his father
started having back problems. Marcus Haggard was forced
to sell farm assets and equipment. He went broke.

While hurt, he watched a Billy Graham crusade on
TV and first heard the term "born again."

"He was flat on his back and had all this time,"
Dan Haggard said. "He started calling well-known evangelists.
He read the Bible over and over and over again. That
really changed our family. That was very new and different."

Eventually, the Haggards moved across the state
to a bigger city, Yorktown, where Marcus Haggard started
a small veterinary practice.

By then, his religious conversion was under way.
Ted Haggard described his father's rebirth like this: "He was a good man, serving a good church, but it was a cultural commitment. He had no personal relationship with God. My father, he came alive with this personal relationship. That's when we started going to a born-again church, with the Bible as authority."

In 1972, Ted Haggard had a born-again experience as a high school sophomore hearing evangelist Bill Bright speak in Dallas.

Haggard wanted to attend journalism school. His father wanted him to go to a Christian college. Marcus Haggard offered his son a deal: Go to Oral Roberts University, and I'll buy you a car.

That fall, Ted Haggard drove off to Tulsa, Okla., in a black Monte Carlo with a T-top and eight-track tape player.

The next summer, Haggard returned home. One night about 1 a.m., he was watching late-night TV.

He went to the kitchen.

He poured a bowl of Cheerios.

Suddenly, the Lord called him to become a pastor.

"It was so vivid it arrested me," Haggard said.

"It wasn't a thought. It was a vivid, dramatic encounter."

Haggard said he didn't hear a voice. When God talks to him, it's a quiet whisper in his head. He gets an idea, and he knows it's not his.

He's had visions - of angels in Africa, for example.

He said he senses them sometimes, "sees them in his spirit."

Haggard was licensed for ministry that summer at Yorktown Baptist Church.

He was Pastor Ted.

A young pastor finds his way

Haggard went to work as youth pastor at Phoenix Avenue Baptist Church near the college campus when he returned to Oral Roberts. Pastor Curry Juneau put him up in a two-bedroom house furnished with beanbag chairs.

When Juneau left for another job, Haggard took over as senior pastor temporarily. He was 21.

"The big thing about Ted is he's focused," said Juneau, now leading an evangelical church in Missouri City, Texas. "He's stubborn as a little bulldog. Ted pretty much knows where he is, what he believes, where he's going."

Two events at Oral Roberts reshaped the pastor's view of Christianity.

One was his embrace of charismatic Christianity.

Charismatics believe "spiritual gifts" described in the Bible - prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing - exist today. Most mainline Protestants and many evangelicals reject that view.

Haggard prayed for the gift of tongues. He said he received his "prayer language" sitting in a parked car listening to a Bible tape with a friend.

He said he kept repeating a phrase, something having to do with glorifying God. He said it lasted a few minutes and felt like a baptism of fire.

Haggard came to inhabit a spiritual world where prophets and apostles still exist, where demons are real and can be dispatched with holy oil, where visions and messages are a part of everyday life, if only you listen hard enough.

The second revelation at Oral Roberts involved missions.

Haggard enrolled in "Evangelicals in Communist Countries." He learned about "unreached" people in other nations who never had heard of Christianity because of restrictions on evangelism, the dominance of other religions and other factors.

"These big ideas began swirling in my head," Haggard
said. They are ideas that still shape his view of church.

He thinks this is the first generation capable of fulfilling Jesus' "Great Commission" - to make the Gospel available everywhere. Haggard and other evangelicals believe this must be accomplished before Jesus returns.

"With some people, you can see their view of the world is pretty narrow," said Ted Whaley, a college roommate of Haggard who is a New Life associate pastor. "They don't see beyond their own lives. With Ted, he sees way beyond his own life. His view of the world is really big."

At the start of his senior year, Haggard met Gayle Alcorn, a junior and the daughter of an Air Force colonel. They married in 1978 after Haggard graduated.

Haggard took a job with a West German missions group but quit after a year to join the staff of Bethany Baptist Church outside Baton Rouge, La.

Roy Stockstill, or "Brother Roy," headed the church. In him, Haggard found a mentor, someone able to make a local church care about global missions.

Stockstill gave Haggard a choice of jobs, and he picked youth pastor.

At the time, some churches viewed youth ministry as an administrative burden. Haggard viewed it as critical, in part because many people decide to become Christians during their teens.

In 1984, five years after starting at Bethany, Ted and Gayle Haggard visited Colorado Springs, where Gayle's father had retired and was leading a small church.

Alone, Ted Haggard took a pup tent, a gallon of water, Scripture cassettes and his Bible to the flank of Pikes Peak. He prayed and fasted for three days.

Four visions came to him on the mountain: a stadium full of men worshipping God, a place where people could pray and fast for revival, a center for global prayer and "a church where people could freely worship God and study the Scripture with no strings attached."

Haggard had experienced a vision in high school after he was born again.

He said he saw demons hovering over newborn babies at a hospital, waiting to instill in them negative character traits such as hatred, greed, drug use and masturbation.

These were the kind of spirits Haggard knew he had to fight. Haggard said he never thought of leading his own church.

The vision on the mountain told him otherwise.

He was to start a church, and it would be in Colorado Springs.

The grand experiment


Haggard stacked three 5-gallon buckets on top of each other for a pulpit. Visitors sat on lawn chairs.

Haggard used his father-in-law's church to advertise his first meeting.

Haggard named his fledgling congregation for a passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old had gone, the new has come!" He figured the church might grow to 250 people.

The few charismatic churches in the city were small and weren't getting larger. The big Protestant churches were First Presbyterian Church downtown and Village Seven Presbyterian Church.

Haggard offered something different: a place that
was laid back and serious. New Life was strict in its Bible and moral teachings while giving people freedom to worship how they wanted.

That atmosphere inspired experimentation. An early member drove around town anointing major intersections with cooking oil, using a 5-gallon bucket and a garden hose. The worship was unscripted and exuberant.

A woman danced with a violin. People did cartwheels. A trumpeter started the service.

At the center of it all was Haggard, the ringmaster, the teacher, the visionary. He called New Life Church "a grand experiment."

"He's just one of those one-in-a-million people," said Delroy Johnson, an original member. "When you talk to him, something clicks. You know something's going to happen. You can't ignore him."

Haggard encouraged New Life members to think of Colorado Springs as their Jerusalem.

He cut names from the phone book and had people pray over them. He urged people to pray while walking through neighborhoods, paying special attention to properties for sale. He thinks these efforts helped reduce crime and bring major Christian ministries to Colorado Springs.

New Life employees arrived at work to find the morning's obituaries on their desks with a photocopied note attached:

"Today from Colorado Springs, people will go to heaven, and people will go to hell. The percentage of people going to heaven and the percentage of people going to hell today is determined by how well you did your job yesterday. If you remember heaven today, it will help someone else avoid hell tomorrow."

One day, Haggard rented a hotel room to pray and fast. Worship music was playing. He felt as if his hands were dirty. He wrung them, but they wouldn't come clean.

Suddenly, Haggard said, he realized it was the blood of other people's lives on his hands.

"The Lord was apparently showing me that I did not have the privilege of just reading my Bible, praying nice prayers and pastoring a pleasant little church," Haggard wrote in his first book, "Primary Purpose: Making It Hard for People to Go to Hell from Your City," published in 1995. "I had to help rescue a lot of people from impending eternal disaster."

New Life Church occupied three storefronts during the late 1980s before it bought 35 acres on U.S. Highway 83, land that was affordable and in the path of Colorado Springs' growth.

New Life Church put up a concrete building that looks like a giant Lego. Haggard rejected the symbols of his boyhood church. There were no crucifixes, no stained glass.

"There's an old saying: Architecture defines a church," said the Rev. Gerald Trigg, the retired minister at First United Methodist Church. "Ted has addressed a generation that grew up out of the church, whose parents were from the rebellious '60s and '70s. (The building) symbolizes, in no small way, 'We are for everyone, come on in."

Patton Dodd checked out the church in the early 1990s during his senior year of high school. He wasn't religious.

He liked that the church hadn't spent a lot of money on a building. He liked the big crowds, where he could become invisible and figure things out for himself. But he found the church "big, outrageous and scary."
"A guy dancing in the aisle told me Jesus loved me, gave me a big hug and freaked me out," said Dodd, who eventually joined New Life as the staff writer and Haggard's editor. "Over the course of time, what was scary became attractive and infectious. They had something I didn't."

The thrust of New Life always has been one of outreach to nonbelievers. Haggard is a genius marketer. To reach a society steeped in pop culture, New Life stages an Easter passion play with a cast of hundreds, strobe lights, fireworks, fog machines and Romans on horseback. Billboards across the city this month advertise New Life's free Christmas Eve service at the 7,500-seat World Arena. The program includes a stage fashioned into a log cabin, caroling, special effects and ice skaters from the Broadmoor Skating Club.

Members of the church's 1,000-member youth group started student-led Christian clubs in more than 10 public high schools, hopeful for hallway conversions.

For adult members, there's day care, personal finance classes, a coffee shop and more.

Once Haggard gets people in the door, he starts instilling his vision of the church as something bigger than itself.

He teaches that Christians, as responsible citizens, should get involved in political issues. He's spoken out against homosexuality and abortion.

At the same time, he warns against "politicizing the Gospel" and letting one issue dominate the agenda.

He does not endorse candidates but has given a strong indication of his political leanings by saying from the pulpit he "votes a straight ticket."

Like most megachurches, New Life experimented with "small groups" in the 1990s, putting church members in small settings to discuss Haggard's sermons.

The approach failed, Haggard believes, because it arbitrarily grouped people together. So he let members come up with their own reasons to meet.

The church has 800 groups meeting over hobbies, such as quilting or rock climbing, or shared life experiences, such as living as an interracial couple.

The system makes each church member a minister.

A leader of a small group focused on dog training might share her Christian testimony with a nonbeliever once the person's dog learns how to sit. Haggard's vision stretches beyond small groups, beyond youth ministry, beyond Colorado Springs.

He's hung the flags of every nation from the ceiling pipes of New Life Church to remind worshippers of their responsibility to think globally.

Sunday school instructors provide children with maps and globes. High school students carry their passports to get them in the mission frame of mind.

The global focus broadened in 1998 with the opening of the $5.5 million World Prayer Center on the New Life campus.

New Life began a Web page this month through which registered users can submit prayer requests and become part of a network that will answer other people's prayers.

With the launch of www.worldprayerteam.org, all four of Haggard's Pikes Peak visions have come to pass.

The church he saw was New Life Church.

The gathering of men he saw was Promise Keepers, which former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney founded.

The global prayer center is the World Prayer Center.

The prayer and fasting center is Praise Mountain, a 110-acre spread near Florissant where Haggard goes
four times a year to listen for God, to seek new visions.

The visionary looks forward

When Haggard arrives at work each morning, he sees
a church that's special, that's more than he ever envisioned.

New Life is the 62nd-largest non-Catholic church
in the country and the 14th-largest charismatic church,
said John Vaughan, who heads the Megachurch Research
Center in Bolivar, Mo.

New Life has ranked in the top 1 percent nationally
in annual growth for several years, Vaughan said.

The flags, boisterous worship and prayer emphasis
give New Life Church a strong sense of identity that's
critical for independent churches that aren't connected
to easily identifiable institutions, Vaughan said.

"I don't know of any church in the country that
does a better job communicating their missions focus," he said.
"You could be deaf, walk into that church and know
what it's about."

Other Colorado Springs churches tried to mimic
New Life, with mixed success.

Trigg, the Methodist minister, said he knows of
one Methodist church that removed its organ in an
attempt to stop members from fleeing for New Life.

Haggard routinely suggests people attend other
churches that might be better fits. He received an
e-mail once from a longtime member who left because
he thought Haggard paid too much attention to evangelizing
and not enough to Bible teaching. Haggard couldn't disagree.

The Rev. John Stevens, senior minister of First
Presbyterian Church, said Haggard and other visionary
pastors "get beyond themselves and think in bigger
terms of what God wants to do, not so much for them,
but through them."

"It's really pretty hard not to like Ted Haggard,"
Stevens said. "You can not like some of the things
he does, or some of the things he might say on occasion,
but it's pretty hard not to like him personally."

Haggard often says there are better senior pastors
in town. But does he agree with his friend and colleagues,
who consider him a visionary?

He pauses. Then he says, "Yeah."

"I think I see potential," he said. "I always think
the best in people in situations until they prove me wrong.
"I don't see myself as 'the guy.' I see myself
as a guy that cooperates in the plan."

Haggard is not sure if God will give him visions
as grand as the ones he received on Pikes Peak. But
he has plans.

He will continue to speak harshly about Islam.
The public appearance of Islam "seems to be inciting
hate, killing your enemy and using the poor," he said
earlier this year.

Arshad Yousufi, a lay leader with the Islamic Society
of Colorado Springs, criticized him for talking about
reaching out to Muslims but never visiting the local mosque.

"He has responsibility proportionate to his position
in the Christian church in this community to make
sure he knows what he's talking about," Yousufi said.
"He has the potential to stir things up."

Haggard said he's visited mosques in larger communities.

But he won't back off his views.

He's working on a book examining globalization
from a Christian perspective.

He hopes to use his influential position with the
National Association of Evangelicals to give greater
voice to independent megachurches similar to his own.

He expects the Web-based prayer team to become
"a mammoth ministry," with leaders in every nation
in the world within five years and, in the United
States, prayer organizers in every city of 30,000
people or more.

Haggard doesn't talk or write about demons as much.
But he believes the spiritual world is real.
Haggard believes New Life Church will reach 20,000
members, probably in about a decade.
But New Life could be entering a challenging time.
Some megachurches stop growing after 20 years.
Others struggle after reaching 10,000 members because
people get aggravated with traffic and finding a seat,
said Scott Thumma, a megachurch researcher at Hartford Seminary.
With those issues in mind, New Life is raising
money for a 6,000-seat auditorium to be built next
to its existing sanctuary, which would be turned into
a youth chapel.
The new, horseshoe-shaped hall with stadium seats
is expected to open in two years, making New Life
the state's biggest worship space. In the interim,
New Life will put up a temporary building in March
for the youth program.
Some scholars think megachurches are a baby boomer-driven
trend that will pass as younger generations mature.
But Thumma and most religion scholars think megachurches
will continue to flourish.
"As long as people feel comfortable in malls and
big institutions, we'll have megachurches," Thumma said.
Haggard believes he never will leave New Life Church.
He doesn't need to. He can write books, travel
to Nigeria, connect the world in prayer and continue
to deliver sermons, perform weddings and conduct funerals.
He can do it all from here, his Jerusalem, from
the church he saw on the mountain.

CONTACT US:
"Do we have to talk about it?" the new priest says, laughing.

It's understandable Alfredo Garcia would respond
that way. The question is whether he came close to
getting married. Yes - three times, as a young man in Mexico.
The last time - when Garcia was 27 - he got engaged.
But something felt off. Something was missing.
So he ended it.
Maybe it was providence. Maybe it was his gut.
Maybe it was God.
The truth is, the Catholic Church needs Garcia
a lot more than those women did.
He is needed because there aren't enough priests,
here or anywhere. There are 44,874 active priests
in America - about 13,000 fewer than in 1975. The
10-county Colorado Springs diocese has one priest
for every 4,000 Catholics. The national average is
one priest for every 1,200 Catholics.
He is needed because there are more Catholics in
the United States than ever, and an increasing percentage
of them are Hispanic. The number of U.S. Catholics
ballooned from 48.7 million in 1975 to 62 million.
Hispanics account for 25 to 30 percent of the U.S.
Catholic population.
The simple math: There are too many Catholics and
too few new priests to replace ones who die or retire.
He is needed more than ever as the church finds
itself torn apart and tested because of the actions
of some priests who came before him.
Garcia and 500 other men forever will be known
as priests who were ordained and began work in the
United States in the year of the priest-abuse scandal.
He is one of four new priests assigned to the Diocese
of Colorado Springs this year.
He and the others enter with a clean slate, conscious
to avoid the mistakes of others, eager to restore trust.
After his June ordination in Mexico, Garcia became
associate pastor at 2,300-family Holy Apostles Church
in northeast Colorado Springs, the city's biggest parish.
He's the only Hispanic priest in a city where Hispanics
make up 12 percent of the population, the 2000 census reports.
In many ways, Garcia reflects the changing face
of the Catholic priesthood in America.
He is older - 41. The average age of newly ordained
priests climbed from 26 or 27 two decades ago to between
36 and 37 this year, the U.S. Conference of Catholic
Bishops says.
He is foreign-born. About 32 percent of the new
priests in the United States this year were born somewhere
else, the highest percentage since the conference
began keeping track in 1998.
Garcia's life — growing up poor in rural Mexico, coming to the United States and sharing an apartment with 18 men, struggling with English and the idea of becoming a priest, his three near marriages — gives him perspective few older priests can claim.

He can say to his parishioners, "I know — I've been there" at a time when many of the faithful feel disconnected from their church and clergy.

Garcia won't say it makes him a better priest — just different.

He doesn't talk about his vocation as a calling, as so many clergy do. There was no epiphany, no moment of clarity, no voice from above. He calls his journey a process — and a long one, at that.

Luis Alfredo Garcia Chavez grew up the oldest of nine children. His hometown in Chihuahua, a northern Mexican state, is a 1,000-family farming community where mountains meet plains.

As a boy and teen-ager, he worked in other people's fields, just as his father did, planting and harvesting cotton, pecans, alfalfa, soybeans and sorghum.

That experience strongly shaped Garcia. He likens the priesthood and life to the harvest. He talks about the patience and discipline needed to nourish something, to make it good. He keeps a chili plant in his office at Holy Apostles to remind him of his ties to family and earth.

Garcia left home at 17 to study engineering in the border city Juarez. For 10 years, he balanced working at a TV factory and attending classes, chipping away at his degree.

Then he made a decision that changed his life:

He obtained the paperwork to move to the United States and learn English, with the plan of returning to Mexico and completing his engineering degree.

Garcia said he wanted to push himself - he got Ds in English in junior high - and gain a valuable skill.

In 1988, he landed in Borger, Texas, an oil boombust in the state's panhandle. He got a job farming. He shared an apartment with 18 men and slept beneath the dining room table.

One winter, Garcia and his roommates collected aluminum cans for cash and figured out when the trash went out at McDonald's and 7-Eleven so they could salvage meals.

While in Borger, Garcia started hanging around St. John the Baptist Parish.

The Rev. Norbert Kuebler saw a spiritual, humble man who lacked self-esteem. He gave Garcia odd jobs - cleaning up the yard, preparing rooms for meetings.

The priest started talking about a seminary in Santa Fe, N.M. Garcia wasn't interested.

"He said, 'I don't have much education,'" Kuebler said. "I said, 'Give it a try.' Not having the background, education and all that, he felt, 'Gee, I can't do these things.'"

Garcia eventually relented. But he insisted he was going to seminary to learn English, not become a priest.

Something happened in those six months, however.

"I think I got swallowed," Garcia said.

After earning a general equivalency diploma, Garcia moved to San Antonio in 1993 to begin studying theology at Assumption Seminary, which draws students from around the world.

He didn't have the required bachelor's degree when he arrived. So after three years of study there, he moved to Colorado Springs to earn a bachelor's degree in religion at Regis University, a Catholic school.

He chose Regis for a simple reason: it agreed to
accept his credits from Mexico and Santa Fe.

Garcia also felt drawn to Colorado Springs, partly because the geography reminded him of home.

Knowing he needed a diocese after ordination, he chose Colorado Springs. To get a feel for the community, Garcia stayed in the Colorado Springs Diocese after finishing at Regis, doing outreach to Hispanics in 1999 and 2000.

Only after that experience did Garcia return to San Antonio for his last two years of seminary.

"He was in no rush to get himself ordained," said the Rev. Larry Christian, vice rector at Assumption Seminary and Garcia's faculty adviser. "It was a very conscious choice. It gave him a real depth of maturity and a sensitivity to the human condition."

At seminary, Garcia earned a reputation for being soft-spoken but outspoken, "a truth-teller," realist and man of the people, Christian said.

He was the seminary farmer. Garcia hunched in the dirt, wearing a straw hat, digging, tending flowers and trees he planted outside the dorm.

Garcia called one flower patch his "celibacy garden."

Christian said Garcia talked about embracing a healthy celibate life, entering it deeply. He spent hours in the garden praying and invited classmates to help tend it.

As the priest-abuse scandal began to dominate Garcia's last year in seminary, he and his classmates - there were four - talked about the issue in philosophical and practical terms.

One classmate, the Rev. Jerry Ochetti, said feelings ran the spectrum - anger at the perpetrators, frustration at being lumped with them, thoughtfulness about how to balance a desire to be yourself and help people while recognizing the new standards facing priests.

"It's a dilemma," said Ochetti, 50, now a priest in Redlands, Calif. "You've got a Hispanic guy like Alfredo, an Italian guy like me ... hugs and touching are an important part of ministry, an important part of life for us. At the same time, you have that fear."

The seminarians went so far as to discuss putting windows in confessionals to ease parishioners' concerns.

Garcia said the church can't pretend the scandal didn't happen. He compares dealing with it to moving from darkness into light: The light can be painful, but it reveals truth.

In June, the same month U.S. bishops adopted a sweeping policy meant to address abuse, Garcia was ordained in his Mexican hometown.

Colorado Springs Bishop Richard Hanifin performed the ordination Mass in Spanish on the church steps because the crowd couldn't fit inside.

Traditionally, a priest blesses his parents and relatives right after he's ordained.

On the steps of his childhood church, Garcia knelt before his mother and father and asked them to bless him first, said Holy Apostles pastor Paul Wicker, who attended.

It was a remarkable moment. Wicker called it an act of great humility.

Garcia talks often about still being a student, someone who's always learning. "I'm only three months" is his answer to many questions. He's finding his way.

One thing bothers him. Many parishioners call him by his first name instead of "Father." He thinks it means they value the priesthood less than other positions of authority such as police and firefighters.

Maybe the gap between priest and parishioner is shrinking.
Ochetti, Garcia's seminary classmate, said priests no longer are put on a pedestal. The awe and mystery are gone.

Colorado Springs' Hispanic community is quickly discovering Garcia is here. He must balance their needs with those of his parish.

He'll face more self-doubt and questioning, most likely. One in seven priests leave the priesthood in the first five years, a recent study found.

Garcia's journey has brought him here, where he is needed, at an important time for him, for all priests.

He has been many things, and they define him today: Mexican, American, bachelor, seminarian, farmer, mentor.

Alfredo.
Padre.
Father.

and
As Focus on the Family marks its 25th anniversary this month, the first impulse is to trace the organization's rise as an important voice in promoting conservative moral views.

But behind the fanfare celebrating the past, the Colorado Springs-based evangelical Christian ministry is greatly concerned about its future - more so, perhaps, than ever.

Focus on the Family is preparing for two eventualities: the departure of founder and President James Dobson and its aging supporters.

The transition to the post-Dobson era has begun, though Dobson, 66, has been more active than ever on the talk show circuit and says he has perhaps 10 years left in his career.

During the past two years, the ministry has hired or given new duties to a handful of rising stars. A successor to Dobson could be among them.

At the same time, the ministry is developing new products for young families, an elusive demographic so far.

The results of these efforts likely will determine whether Focus on the Family remains influential.

Ministry officials are focusing on five areas - the young families effort is one. Others involve spreading into new countries, reaching a secular audience, improving outreach to blacks and broadening the ministry's reach on the Internet.

To accomplish those goals, Focus on the Family will need to overcome what Dobson calls "one of the more serious economic shortfalls we have experienced for a while." Donations have been flat for three years, he said.

To raise money, Dobson is offering to sign copies of a new silver anniversary coffee table book for donations of $200.

The question of who will ascend into visible leadership positions - most importantly, who will take over Dobson's daily radio show - is the greatest challenge.

"American evangelicalism is very personality oriented," said Quentin Schultz, a professor of communications at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. "Media ministries need at least one person that represents the ministry. The problem always is continuity when that person retires or passes away. There's a tremendous upside in the visibility, but the downside is what you do with transition."

Focus on the Family's board of directors began work on a succession plan after Dobson suffered a minor heart attack in 1990. Eight years later, Dobson was stricken by a mild stroke. The succession plan was finalized a year after that.
Dobson began a daily exercise program after the heart attack and reports he is in excellent health. The succession plan acknowledges one person cannot replace Dobson, who is president and chairman of the ministry's board of directors. The plan calls for a chief executive officer to handle business matters and a "chief articulator" to be the voice of the ministry.

The articulator job, Dobson and others say, will be much harder to fill. There's internal debate about whether one person can do it or if a team approach is best.

Some Christian ministries built on a founder's vision kept it in the family. Jimmy Swaggart and Oral Roberts looked to heirs to carry on their work, and both flopped. Evangelist Billy Graham, now in his 80s, is betting on his son, Franklin, to build on the legacy of his crusades.

Neither of Dobson's grown children - daughter Danae and son Ryan - are possible successors, although both take part in Focus on the Family activities.

Ryan Dobson received $36,850 in the 2000-2001 fiscal year in "speaking and interviewing fees related to his involvement in Focus events," the ministry's income tax forms show.

With no family heir, ministry officials have looked for young talent. They found it in Dr. Walt Larimore, a family doctor who hosted radio and cable TV shows in Florida, and Bill Maier, a psychologist and radio host from Southern California whose résumé resembles Dobson's. Larimore and Maier are part of an effort called "other voices" to introduce the ministry's audience to new personalities as guest hosts on Dobson's show and in other venues.

"The 'other voices' program was designed more to give a voice to those talented people than specifically to have a crash program to identify a successor," Dobson said. "It's really hard for people to understand that. I'm not even sure that people believe it."

The program will give Focus on the Family a chance to evaluate talent. Focus has time because Dobson doesn't plan to step down soon.

"I think it's going to be gradual," said Ted Engstrom, the retired chief executive officer of the Christian relief group World Vision and a Focus board member for 22 years.

"We're not pushing Jim Dobson out," said Engstrom, the board's vice chairman. "In the minds of the people, they have to get used to a new identity, a new personality. It doesn't happen overnight."

The way Focus on the Family has evolved in the past 25 years may help it in the future, too.

The organization has been keen to develop new programs as society has changed, from movie reviews for parents to starting a single-parent ministry.

Those efforts aren't Dobson-dominated, which could help when someone else leads the ministry, said Randall Balmer, chairman of the religion department at Barnard College in New York.

"The organization is more diversified," Balmer said. "It's not merely Dobson. It's not merely evangelism. It's not one particular publication. It's a whole lot of things."

The ministry's most important new venture, Dobson said, is the young families initiative.

As with other media ministries, Focus on the Family draws most of its support from baby boomers.

The ministry and its audience bonded over a dislike for the 1960s and grew up together. Now, with 47 being the average age of a Focus consumer, ministry officials
know they must reach the sons and daughters of those boomers - now raising children of their own.

By January, the ministry expects to introduce Focus on Your Child, a newsletter with editions geared toward different ages. An edition for parents with children ages 9-14 offers advice on weekly allowances, body piercing, glue-sniffing and sex.

In the next two to three years, Dobson plans to update a landmark parenting video series for young families and may begin a new radio program aimed at them.

Some observers question whether adding programs to reach new people is the right approach.

Stewart Hoover, interim journalism dean at the University of Colorado at Boulder, suspects the ministry could become less of a movement for moral conservatives and more of a shopping center where people come to meet specific needs.

"They run the risk of losing their franchise, their brand identity, and may end up having to compete as if they're a completely new entrant," said Hoover, who has studied evangelical media ministries.

Another challenge - one that will bear on expansion plans - is money.

The ministry relies entirely on donations from people who contact it for advice, books, videos and magazines. The average gift is $30.

The ministry says donations are 2.4 percent below budget since October 1999. The situation would have been worse had donors not responded to a plea from Dobson in 2000 and wiped out a $2.5 million deficit. The ministry's annual budget is about $130 million.

Focus isn't sure whether the drop in donations is caused by the economy, donor fatigue from Sept. 11 or something else.

Dobson has pointed to increased use of the Focus Web site, speculating surfers are less likely to donate than people who call or write.

Still, issues continue to unite social conservatives - and steer them to Focus on the Family for information and commentary.

Dobson pointed to the 2000 Census, which showed an increase in single parents and unmarried adults living together.

"The biggest prospect for Focus on the Family is that there is a need for what it does," said Paul Nelson, a former Focus executive who now heads the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

"There is no sign, in my view, that the American family has gotten its act together."

Dobson has always said the ministry will continue as long it has support. He strongly endorses the succession plan.

"We're not sitting around waiting for me to die," he said.
PRIEST SHUFFLE The Rev. Tom Kloppenborg was to take a new assignment in July in Salida, part of an annual shuffling of personnel by the Diocese of Colorado Springs. The diocese will have to find another priest to take that post. In July, the Rev. Khanh Pham Nguyen will arrive in Cheyenne Wells and Kit Carson for a six-year assignment, also part of the personnel changes announced earlier this year. Other Catholic priests will fill in until that time.

CHEYENNE WELLS - Under normal circumstances, Father Tom Kloppenborg would have said Elvira Ball's funeral Mass Wednesday night at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

He would have stood at the lectern and said a few kind words, and it would have been something special because he knew her well. The priest knew everyone in the 130-family parish in this predominantly Catholic farm town, and he knew quite a few folks outside the parish, too.

Another priest - one of Kloppenborg's best friends - drove 38 miles from Burlington and said the Mass instead.

For parishioners at Sacred Heart, normalcy ended last Sunday, when a priest from Colorado Springs read them a letter saying Kloppenborg had been removed because of what was described as sexual misconduct many years ago.

The same letter was read at the 30-family St. Augustine Parish in Kit Carson, 25 miles to the west, where Kloppenborg also said Mass on Sundays. Some women wept at the news.

The Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal, which has been centered in big cities, had reached Colorado's eastern plains.

Beyond the obvious shock, the community is hurting from the departure of a man who was admired widely.

As with Catholics everywhere these days, Kloppenborg's parishioners also are struggling with what constitutes just punishment when a priest stumbles. Only now, it's personal.

Of all the stories about Catholic priests that have come to light in recent months, Kloppenborg's may be unique.

Now 51, Kloppenborg admitted that prior to his ordination, when he was in his late teens, he had sexual relations with a boy in his midteens, according to a spokesman for Kloppenborg's order, the Vincentians. The order found out not because the younger boy reported it, but because Kloppenborg himself did years ago. Criminal charges were not filed.

The incident only came to light again after the order, responding to the national scandal, undertook a review of its personnel files. With the heightened sensitivities brought on by the scandal, the order
thought it needed to remove Kloppenborg and give him a clerical job in St. Louis, away from parish life and children, the Vincentian spokesman said. There is no evidence Kloppenborg was involved sexually with minors during his nine years in Colorado, church officials say.

About 17 miles west of the Kansas border, Cheyenne Wells is one of those innumerable Plains towns whose skylines are defined by grain elevators and white water towers. The town, population 800, boasts the Loop tavern, a couple of banks that close at 3:30 p.m., a bed and breakfast, a hospital, a John Deere dealership and the redbrick Cheyenne County Courthouse.

Nine years ago, Father Tom Kloppenborg arrived here from Missouri for his first job as a pastor. The Vincentians were founded to serve the rural poor. The order's Midwest Province in St. Louis contracted with the Colorado Springs and Pueblo dioceses to serve priest-poor rural communities.

A bear of a man with a white beard, Kloppenborg became part of the Catholic community and the community at large.

He made friends with other pastors, started a food pantry, attended softball games, went to school functions and baked cakes for the county fair, friends and parishioners said. He enjoyed golf and radio-control airplanes.

Kloppenborg led an effort to remodel the front of Sacred Heart, putting on a new stucco exterior, railings and a new ramp, an important feature in a church with many elderly people. The parish found the money even though the local economy has been hit hard by drought for four years.

Wednesday afternoon, before Elvira Ball's funeral, five women knelt at Sacred Heart and said the rosary together. The women come every week, mostly to pray for peace. None of them wanted their names used, but all had good things to say about Kloppenborg.

"He's had to do a lot of tough funeral Masses," one woman said. "He always made them very beautiful and personal."

The women agreed on one thing: Their faith would not be shaken, not by a priest scandal in an East Coast city, not by news that their own priest had admitted to doing wrong.

Twenty-five miles to the west, Gene Ward was cutting down a tree that had fallen onto the front lawn of St. Augustine's parish during a windstorm the night before. The 74-year-old retired farmer recalled the moment last Sunday when he learned Kloppenborg had been removed.

"It was like someone kicked me in the stomach," he said. His granddaughter, 22-year-old Jenel Ward, said she served as an altar girl for Kloppenborg. She said she was shocked by the news, like everyone else. She thinks it was right for the church to remove Kloppenborg.

"It doesn't matter how it happened before he was a priest," she said. "It still has to weigh heavily on his mind."

The Rev. Michael Ingersoll of First United Methodist Church in Cheyenne Wells broke bread with Kloppenborg at the priest's home and chatted with him at the post office.

When Kloppenborg was out of town, Ingersoll visited the Catholic patients at the local hospital. Kloppenborg looked in on the Methodist patients when Ingersoll was away.

Ingersoll said he was saddened when he heard about Kloppenborg's removal. He said it will be hard for the community to grieve because it never had the chance to say goodbye.

As he learned the details surrounding Kloppenborg's
removal, Ingersoll said he has asked himself hard questions about forgiveness and the church.

"I'm wondering, 'Is there grace in the church?','" Ingersoll said.

He said it appears the church is more concerned about protecting itself financially.

"That's a really sad commentary on the church and on society," he said. "I'm troubled by that."

Kloppenborg's superiors considered the time that had elapsed and the fact the sexual relations took place before the priest's ordination, said the Rev. Tom Croak, a member of the Vincentian's Midwest provincial council and a history professor at DePaul University in Chicago.

He said removing Kloppenborg was appropriate.

"During another period, when something occurred like this, the methodology for dealing with it was different," Croak said. "We felt an obligation to the diocese, to the parish and to Tom in taking these steps. I don't look upon it as a punishment as much as a consequence."

On the day of his mother's funeral last week, Russell Ball took a moment to talk about his priest, parish and town.

Like most Cheyenne Wells residents, Ball has lived here all his life - 38 years. He grew up in a white brick house across the street from the church. He works for the John Deere store, where sales have fallen with the drought.

He said people are having trouble believing Kloppenborg would be part of a scandal, no matter how long ago it was.

He can understand why the Vincentians would follow a "one strike and you're out" policy on sexual misconduct.

"If it was a strike, that's fine," he said.

His memories of Kloppenborg will be of happier times, such as when the priest performed his brother's marriage. Or when he asked children to the altar for children's Mass.

"In a small community like this," Ball said, "we were very fortunate to have Father Tom."

In the state of religion and nonprofit groups and may be reached at
"How many of you have had the devil jump on you in your sleep?" the preacher asks. A murmur ripples across the hall, and hands shoot up. The Rev. Ron Jones talks about how the devil had him in a headlock one night. "The blood of Jesus, the blood of Jesus," Jones cried that night. The devil lost his grip, he says. The devil isn't scared of "kumbaya" churches, "where I'm OK, you're OK, we're all OK," Jones says. The devil feels threatened by churches withHoly Ghost-filled people. The devil, he says, doesn't like speaking-in-tongues churches.

The devil wouldn't like Victory World Outreach.

Near the end of each service, Jones invites people who need healing to come to the altar for an anointing with oil. A church staff member or volunteer will lay hands on heads and, more often than not, begin speaking in tongues.

The sounds are hard to put into words because they aren't words, as far as anyone knows. Depending on who is speaking, it can sound like a foreign language, sticks clicking together or a baby's babbling.

Scenes like this take place in Colorado Springs every Sunday. Many of the largest churches in the city - including the city's biggest Catholic parish, Holy Apostles - have members who speak in tongues.

Speaking in tongues is usually not as obvious as in the Victory World Outreach altar call. Some people confine their "prayer tongues" to the privacy of home. Others do it in small groups of like-minded believers. Rarely does an outbreak of tongues sweep over an entire congregation.

On Sunday, Christians will celebrate one of their most important holidays, Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles in a fury of wind and tongues of fire, as described in the Book of Acts. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues, the Bible says.

A century ago, that story helped trigger a revival, one rooted in the belief that God makes speaking in tongues and other "spiritual gifts" from the early church available to modern-day believers.

The Pentecostal movement led to the establishment of new denominations, launched a charismatic renewal in established Protestant and Catholic churches and helped birth the megachurch. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are the fastest-growing stream of Christianity in the world today. A Gazette survey last year found that, locally, such churches were among the fastest growing in the past decade.

There's disagreement about how widespread speaking in tongues is among Pentecostals and charismatics. Most pastors say a majority of their members speak in tongues, though not always publicly. Scholar Stanley Burgess estimates one in five Pentecostals speaks in tongues.
Few characteristics of the Pentecostal movement are as fascinating or controversial as speaking in tongues. Critics say it's a thing of the past. They don't see the value in speaking unintelligible words. Supporters point to its biblical precedence. They call it a miraculous gift available to believers, a direct line to God.

To outsiders, hearing tongues sparks questions. Where does it come from? What does it mean? One can argue about the validity of speaking in tongues, but it's hard to ignore - especially after encountering it.

"Some might think this is hype. Some might think this is fanaticism. But it's Holy Ghost power!" says a pastor at Victory World Outreach from the pulpit.

The service at Victory World Outreach has no real structure. It's free-flowing, like jazz. The choir, more than 100 strong, black and white, is so rollicking it shakes the floor of the congregation's meeting space, a former grocery store at South Academy Boulevard and Hancock Avenue. Pastor Jones rattles a tambourine.

"When you believe in God, that's what moves the hand of God," he says. "Then, signs and miracles will follow."

Tongues are one of those signs, the Bible says. To Pentecostals, like the 1,000 members of Victory World Outreach, tongues are evidence of a second blessing after the born-again experience.

The service rolls on for more than two hours. The altar call is the climax, when the many visitors can accept Jesus Christ as their savior. Several people kneel at the altar, wailing and crying. Staff and volunteers carry bottles of oil, which is smeared on the heads of those who need healing. Some people collapse onto the carpet after the laying on of hands, their bodies quaking under blankets.

Rachael Hayes needs healing. The 26-year-old Army wife stands with her palms open to heaven as a church member lays his hands on her head. She has an open wound that needs healing, she says.

As the man prays over her, Hayes' mouth is open. Her tongue is wagging up and down. The sounds are like soft cries. Her tongue works them as fingers would a guitar, changing the pitch.

Hayes explained later that she first spoke in tongues when she was 12, living in Ohio. She'd been praying for the gift, she said, and it finally came to her at a church camp. She spoke in tongues for two hours straight then.

"It feels like I'm close to God," she said. "Only God hears what I say. It's nothing I can control."

Just across the aisle from where Hayes was seeking healing, indecipherable syllables pour from the lips of church greeter Sara Vigen as she prays over a woman. Vigen, a 45-year-old accountant, said she received the gift one night 23 years ago.

"It was given it because I asked for it and desired it," Vigen said. "Some people ask, but in their hearts, they don't desire it. They're afraid people will think they're weird or acting stupid. But I longed for it."

"You can't fake speaking in tongues," she said. "You can chant, I guess. But this is different. It flows out of something inside of you."

A small crowd gathers near the front of the sanctuary at Holy Apostles Catholic Church. The praise band has finished playing "Let the River Flow." A man suddenly begins babbling a string of unfamiliar syllables that sound Middle Eastern. It lasts no more than 10 seconds. The deacon leading the service speaks...
quietly into the microphone: "We pray for the interpretation of tongues." A few moments pass, and an elderly woman begins to interpret: "I walk here among you. You are my people. Walk with me, not ahead of me." Someone else speaks: "Feel my presence. My presence is with you. Take my hand and walk with me." The service ends. The candles in the back are extinguished.

The man who spoke in tongues is Mel Lucero, a retired science teacher and school administrator.

He's attended the weekly charismatic service at Holy Apostles since it was formed in 1986 and experiences two forms of speaking in tongues.

One he calls his "normal prayer language," something he can summon on demand. He compares it to communication between mother and infant. The mother hears only gurgles, oohs and ahhs, but she knows love is being communicated, he said.

Lucero said he uses this language when he isn't sure what he should pray for, only that prayer is needed. He'll pray in tongues when he sees an ambulance because he doesn't know where it's going, for example.

The second type of speaking in tongues, which happened at the service, is more inspired, Lucero said. He can't control it.

"People will ask, 'Why does the Lord speak in languages people can't understand?'" said Lucero, 57, a lifelong Catholic. "Maybe to draw attention. When that comes out, people pay attention."