

glyph notes

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Maya Epigraphy and Archaeology Support the Great Changes Described in The Book of Mormon for the Years AD 34–231

By Sherrie Kline Smith

*S*cholars continue to come to new understandings about epigraphy and archaeology in the Maya region that we believe validate the account found in *The Book of Mormon*. Some of these insights were presented at two recent conferences—the *Symposium in Homage to Linda Schele in California, April 2015*, and the *Maya at the Playa in Florida, September 2014*.

Maya Theology

Clearly no symposium in honor of Linda Schele would be complete without the participation of the pre-eminent Maya epigrapher David Stuart, Schele's protégé. His presentation at the symposium in 2015 did not disappoint.

Stuart is working on a new book about the Cross Group at Palenque (a group of three buildings, two of which have a cross engraved as the central motif on the back wall panels). He said, "To understand Maya religion, one must always go back to the Cross Group" and commented that Maya theology is very complex and difficult to grasp.

According to Stuart, the Maya used four terms to refer to their "gods." 1) *K'uh*, deciphered in the late 1980s, means "god, divine thing or being." 2) *K'awiil* is a powerful spirit, but Stuart said is "complicated to explain because in a sense, it is also a god." In hieroglyphic texts, the term *k'awiil* refers to *spirit*. 3) *Winkiil*, is "a sacred being but also a divine person." Stuart explained this is a "new perception difficult to explain and not yet fully understood." He also commented that God GI* (actual name unknown) of the triad of Palenque gods is *both* a *k'uh* *and* a *winkiil*. 4) *Wahy* denotes an animal, transformer, demon, or demonic beings from the underworld and is part of the "dark side" (meaning evil) of Maya kingship during the Classic (AD 250-800).

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* For an explanation of God GI, see the May/June 2006 issue of *glyph notes*.



With new understandings of Maya epigraphy and archaeology, the list of correlations between the political, social, and religious life of the Maya as compared to that found in The Book of Mormon grows more impressive.

Maya Epigraphy

(Cont. from Page 1)

Wahy is also associated with death gods and disease.

For a Christian, it appears fairly obvious that these four terms seem to reference the Godhead and Satan: k'uh, God the father; k'awiil, the Holy Spirit; winkiil, Jesus Christ, both a "sacred being" or god and also a "divine" person; and wahy, Satan and his angels.

Stuart also discussed what epigraphers call Triads of Gods, known especially at Palenque, but also Caracol, Tikal, and other sites. According to him, they all had their own Triad of Gods. The triad is an ancient concept that originated in the Late Preclassic. (See the section below for more about the Late Preclassic.) One of those ancient triadic concepts found expression in what is called "triadic architecture," which

consists of a principal pyramid, plus two other ones which face each other, with all stairs leading from a central plaza. Richard Hansen [lead archaeologist for the El Mirador Basin project] suggests a mythological basis for the pattern, perhaps a triad of gods such as we find much later at the Classic city of Palenque. (Coe 2005:82)

The number three also is significant in our beliefs: three-in-one—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost/Spirit; three attributes of salvation—water, blood, and spirit; three crosses; three hours on the cross; three days in the grave; three glories in the millennium; three Nephites who tarried; three domains of creation—heaven, earth, and waters; and the list goes on.

Maya Poetics in Architecture

As mentioned above, the Cross Group at Palenque figures prominently in understanding Maya theology, but another presentation at the symposium in California called attention to the way the texts and images are displayed in the Cross Group. The paper was given by Jamie Lynn, a masters' student at Texas Tech University. It was a short overview of her master's thesis which examines the "poetics" found in the art and architecture at Palenque.

Lynn credited Michael D. Carrasco and his chapter in *Parallel Worlds* where he examines the poetic structure of the texts at Palenque for giving her the idea to look for the same poetic structures



Don Beebe

The Cross Group, key to understanding Maya religion according to Stuart, originally had only three buildings. The one in the forefront was added later.

in the art and architecture in the Cross Group. She suggests that not only the inscriptions or texts employ the poetic structure called chiasmus but also the iconography and images. To demonstrate her theory, Lynn used the back wall panel from the Temple of the Cross. She highlighted the slide in her presentation by working from the outside in: first, the two texts mirror each other, then the two human figures mirror each other, and this visual chiasm is completed with the image of the cross in the middle, thus focusing the viewer's attention on the most important aspect of the engraved panel—the cross. See Figure 1.

Late Preclassic Maya versus Children of Christ Era

Archaeologists also have come to realize that the last part of the Preclassic (ca. AD 40-300) was a time of major transition in the Maya area. At the California symposium, archaeologist Julia Guernsey stated that the Late Preclassic experienced "enormous change." Other archaeologists have also endorsed this as a time of dramatic change.

[The] transition from the Late Preclassic to the Early Classic was an *undeniable turning point* for many regions of the Maya lowlands and represents the first major transitional period for which there is significant archaeological data. There is evidence for either *site abandonments* or *settlement pattern shifts* for a number of regions.... Explanations for these mini-collapses range from droughts or other *environmental changes* . . . to *economic collapse* . . . to the

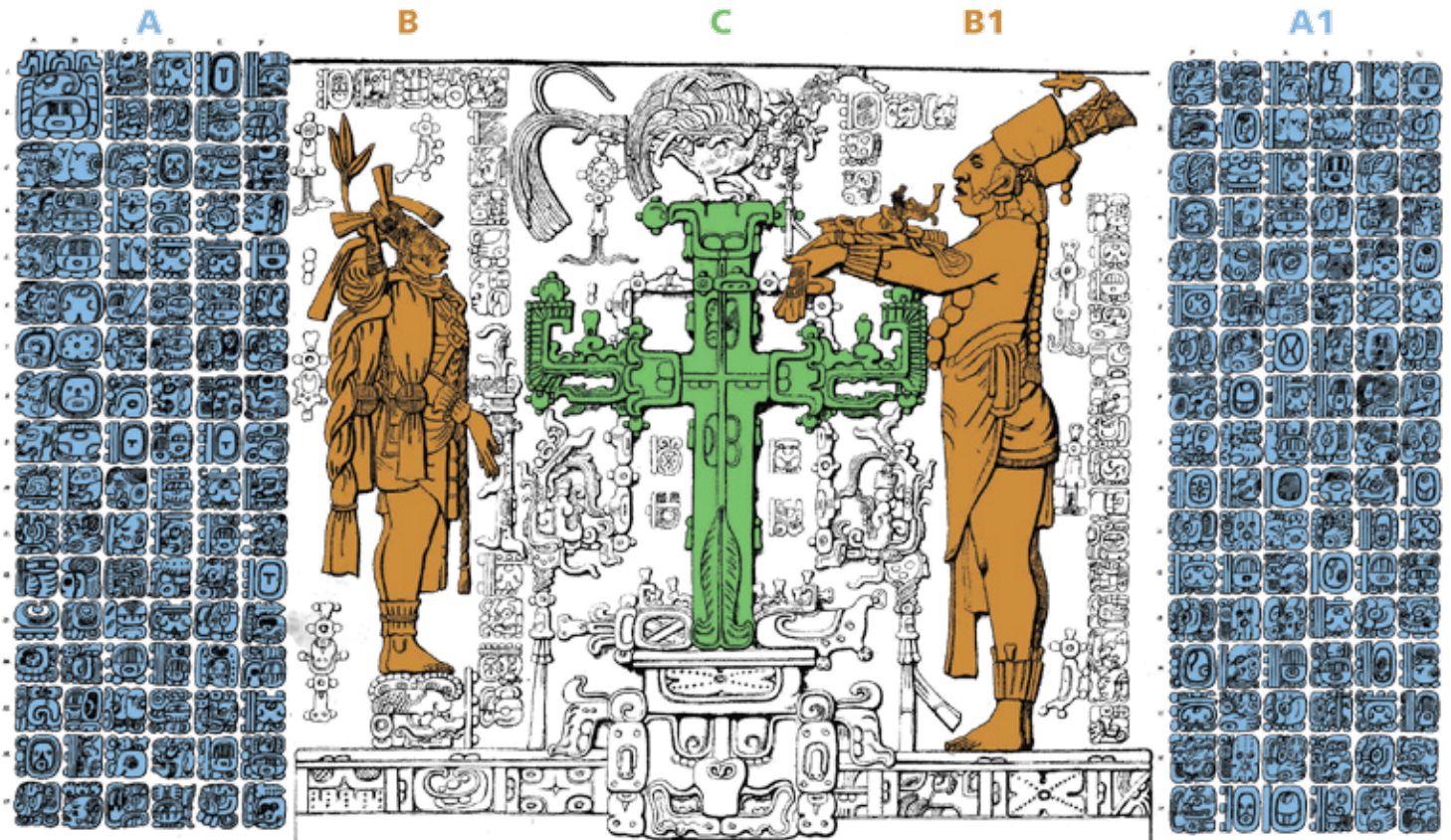


Figure 1. Tablet of the Cross (after A. Maudslay) is high-lighted according to Lynn’s presentation showing the artistic layout of the whole composition to form a visual chiasm: the two texts (A, A1), the two human figures (B,B1), and the cross (C) at the center. This concept of iconography, art, and architecture forming mirror images has also been explored by Lyle Smith in his article “Mirror Images in Mesoamerica,” *The Witness*, Fall 1989, No. 66, pages 4-7.

early failures of the *institution of kingship*....
 (Garrison and Dunning 2009:545, emphasis added)

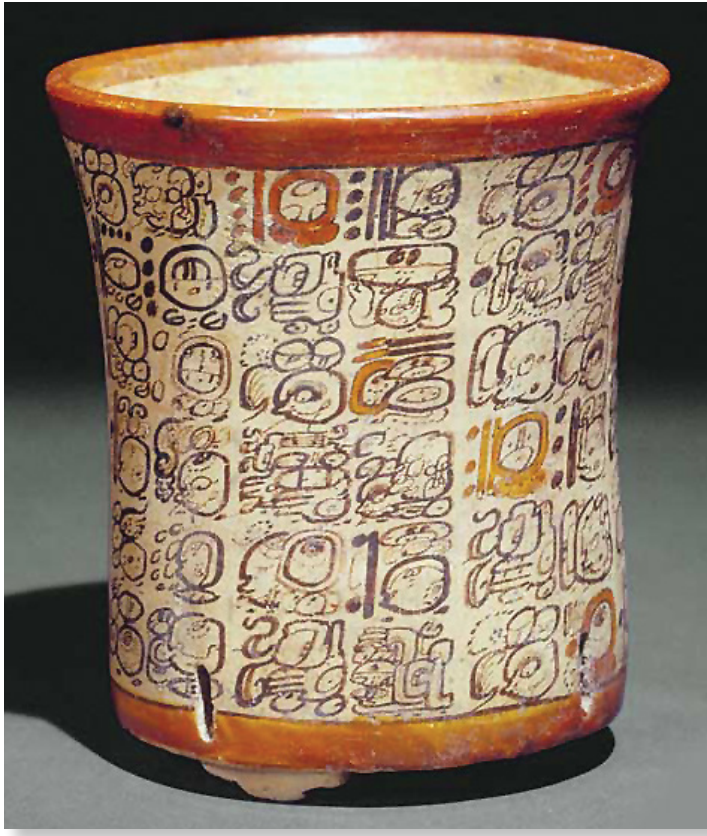
Examined against the events in The Book of Mormon, these observations about the Late Preclassic find answers. At the time of the crucifixion, AD 34, and later, around AD 36, *enormous changes* did take place both in the environment (great storms and destructions of many cities) and in their economic, social, and political organization. By AD 36 “the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites,” and they had all things common (4 Nephi 1:34 [LDS 1:31]). Between AD 36 to approximately 201—the era of the Children of Christ—the “people had multiplied . . . and were spread upon all the face of the land, and . . . they had become exceeding rich, because of their prosperity in Christ.” Around AD 194, however, “a small part of the people who had revolted from the church . . . took upon them the name of Lamanites.” And from AD 201 onward, the people began to divide into classes and no longer had all things common. In AD

231 “a great division” occurred, as they once more divided into “ites”—Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites (4 Nephi 1:26-38 [LDS 1:23-34]). This division resulted in “settlement pattern shifts” as people moved to be with their group.

As for the institution of kingship, Australian epigrapher/archaeologist Peter Mathews presented papers at both the Florida 2014 and the California 2015 conferences, mentioned earlier. Mathews’ presentations discussed approximately a dozen Maya Classic-era vases with painted glyphs that list the ancient kings of the *Kan* (snake) dynasty. The vases have “varying lengths of a single, long hieroglyphic text...,” as opposed to vases with court and other worldly scenes. The glyphs give the accession dates and names of a series of 19 kings of the Kan dynasty. It appears that only one (Figure 2, page 4) has the full list of the 19 kings; others are incomplete. The vases were commissioned by kings from the Late Classic site of Calakmul (ca. AD 650) but seem to have been painted in the nearby Mirador Basin instead of

Cont. on Page 4

Maya Epigraphy (Cont. from Page 3)



Justin Kerr

Figure 2. Codex-style “Dynastic Vase” created in the Mirador Basin and painted with glyphs giving the names, titles, and accession dates to kingship of 19 kings of the Kan Dynasty from 393 BC-47 AD. Designated as K6751 in the Maya Vase Database, this photo of the vase and its “roll-out” image can be seen online (research.mayavase.com). Photo used with permission.

Calakmul (Guenter 2009:1).

By examining the glyphs painted on the vases with other sources, Mathews has created a working genealogy for the Kan dynasty kings. Although the vases were commissioned around AD 650, the list *does not* include the kings from that era. Instead, the list begins around 393 BC and ends at AD 47. Much later—ca. AD 400s—the kings’ names and accession dates begin again but are now gleaned from the hieroglyphic inscriptions engraved on large stone stelae. Mathews refers to the timeframe from AD 47 to the 400s as a “dark period” in the royal genealogy because the record is silent concerning kings for this particular dynasty during this time. It’s believed that the Kan dynasty originated at Nakbe but moved to El Mirador, where it appears to have ended around AD 47. After a hiatus of about 400 years, the dynasty reappeared in Dzibanché and ended at Calakmul.

Other kingly dynasties, like Tikal’s, also have been documented from texts on vases, but all evidence for dynasties of kings in the lowlands indicate that kingship began to appear again around AD 300. (See Martin and Grube, pp. 22-23.) This perfectly matches The Book of Mormon narrative.

According to The Book of Mormon, in Nephite territory—believed to be the Maya central area or lowlands—kingship changed to a system of judges at 91 BC (Mosiah 13 [LDS 28:20-29:47]), while the southern area, or Lamanite territory, still maintained their kings (Alma 12:78; 25:16 [LDS 18:9; 56:15]) until AD 36 when all the people were converted to a belief in Christ and his kingdom. During the Children of Christ era there were no kings. It’s not certain when kingship was once again reinstated. The first mention of a king in The Book of Mormon following the Children of Christ period is at AD 330, but they may have come into power earlier.

Conclusion

With these new understandings, the list of correlations between the political, social, and religious life of the Maya as compared to that found in The Book of Mormon grows more impressive.

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The Ambassador Stone

By Sherrie Kline Smith

One of the sites included in some PSI tours is La Venta Park in Villahermosa, Mexico. The park is a combination zoo and outdoor museum with monuments from the ruins of La Venta—a site just north of Villahermosa. The archaeological work that began in the 1940s at La Venta resulted in the discovery of a culture unknown until then. This culture was named the Olmec—a people that appear to equate with the Jaredite civilization. Numerous massive stone monuments were uncovered as well as burials rich in jade and cinnabar. Later, when excavations for petroleum threatened the site, the monuments were moved to the park in Villahermosa.

Set in a meandering lush nature trail, where coatimundis and white-tailed deer wander throughout, the exhibits include the magnificent colossal Olmec head, La Venta Monument 1. For believers in The Book of Mormon, though, Monument 13—often referred to as "The Ambassador"—holds particular interest.

Engraved on the stone is the figure of a man holding a "flag" and three iconographic elements plus the outline of a foot, a well-known iconographic element throughout Mesoamerica that indicates a journey by walking. Archaeologists are not sure what the other three elements represent except they identify them as early writing symbols. One of the three elements is the head of a bird, and birds in



Maya iconography many times represent deity.

The combination of all of the components—a man walking holding a flag and the three "glyphs" seem highly suggestive of Chief Captain Moroni's travel throughout Nephite territory as recorded in Alma 21:40-61 [LDS 46:11-28]. Moroni "rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it, In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom,

and our peace, our wives, and our children; and he fastened it upon the end of a pole thereof.... [And he] went forth among the people...." Moroni's journey impacted the lives of all the Nephites as some entered into a covenant to protect their freedom, religion, and families. Was this stone carved in remembrance of his historic action?

Chief Captain Moroni, though, was not a Jaredite (Olmec) but a Nephite (Maya). So if this engraved monument commemorates Chief Captain Moroni's journey throughout the land, why was it discovered


at a former Olmec city? A careful re-reading of this pertinent passage of scripture (above) sheds a little light. The enigmatic wording of verse 46 intimates that Moroni perhaps blessed "all the land which was south of the land Desolation...." Earlier, in Alma 13:74 [LDS 22:31], the land of Desolation was described as "being so far northward, that it came into the land which had been peopled, and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken...." This would include the site of La Venta where The Ambassador stone was discovered.

Until very recently, this stone had been dated to

Cont. on Page 6

Ambassador Stone *(Cont. from Page 5)*

500-400 BC. This puts it much too early for Moroni's historic journey which, according to The Book of Mormon, occurred in 73 BC. At the symposium in California, mentioned in the prior article, archaeologist Carolyn Tate stated in her presentation "that the Ambassador Stone, La Venta Monument 13, shows

the person on a journey, but that the glyphs do not include a place name because it was placed at the end of the figure's journey—La Venta." She said the stone dates circa 150 BC and was post-Olmec. This date comes much closer in time to Chief Captain Moroni's call for the Nephites to covenant to preserve their liberty, belief in God, and families. 

glyph quotes

By Eric English

Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation...." — Helaman 2:74 [LDS 5:12]


In the summer of 2010, my family and I were traveling across the state of South Dakota in our minivan on the way to the North Dakota reunion. We had left home a couple of days early and were excited about the opportunity to stop for some sightseeing at Mount Rushmore. As we progressed across the state on I-90, the clouds began to grow dark and a violent storm arose. Hail larger than we had ever seen before began to fall, and the winds were so strong that the hailstones quite literally bounced across the flat open prairie until they struck something. Unfortunately, there was nowhere to take shelter, so we and the other drivers around us were all forced to just stop on the side of the highway and wait out the storm. Afraid that the hail might break our windows, we prayed throughout the experience, until the storm finally let up enough that we could all drive on and get out of it.

After the week was over and we had returned home, we could see that Helaman's advice to his sons had described our experience (Helaman 2:74-75 [LDS 5:12]). Helaman talks to his sons about the need to build a firm foundation because the devil is going to send mighty winds and hail and storms to beat upon them, but that it won't drag them down if they have that sure foundation in their lives. Helaman doesn't talk about IF the devil will send forth the storms, but when. And so, he counsels his sons (and us) to build their foundation upon Jesus Christ who is the rock that is stable and secure and immovable. On our trip, Satan had attempted through that storm to drag us

down by the damage to our van and to our spirits, but in fact, that week became one of the best reunion experiences that our family has ever had.

So, the question for us to reflect on then becomes, how are we building our foundation upon Christ? Are we keeping His commandments in our daily lives or only when it's easy or convenient? Are we spending time in prayer and scripture study every day or only when we think about it or on Sundays? Are we investing in the lives of other people as Christ's hands and feet on this earth or only helping others when we need something from them in return? Will the kinds of foundations that we're building in our lives really hold when temptations and storms come upon us? When was the last time we took a minute to reflect on what we base our life upon?

Perhaps these are difficult questions to think about—but, as Helaman said, the storms WILL come. During the midst of the storm, when darkness is all around, is not the time to think about our

foundations. We often can't even tell how severe it really is during the storm. In our family's vacation experience, it wasn't until a week or two later that we read in the news that the largest hailstone to ever fall in the US (it was the size of a volleyball!) fell only a few miles from where we had been and in the very storm that we had endured. As followers of Christ, we can't avoid the storms, but we can make proper preparations for them by intentionally securing a firm foundation rooted in our relationship with Christ. 



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Glyph Dwellers

Dwellers - to live and have a home in a particular place

The Adventures of Beezrom

By Mindy Mulheron
Illustrations by Aaron Presler

Yes, God gives us so much. And yet, we usually, or at least sometimes, forget to thank him and show that we're grateful—at least in any kind of lasting way or attitude. I can't believe he loves us so much: we definitely don't deserve it. Last time we were talking about the bad things that happened to the Jaredites when they quit listening to God and following his plan. Isn't it interesting that people who know Jesus is really great and have been blessed by God so often forget to live like they should? I've been thinking about that quite a bit lately: the idea that it seems like we keep making the same mistakes over and over when we should really know better.

I've been thinking about myself a lot as well since we talked last. It's so easy to talk about everyone else and what they're doing wrong, but it's hard to admit that I might be doing the same thing myself. I think that's why we all keep getting in trouble and losing our way. We don't take the time to make sure we're really doing what we should. Too often I find myself thinking about David and Abraham and Moses and the Jaredites and everyone who's goofed up, congratulating myself on not being as bad as them, when really I am just as bad. And even though these people didn't always do the right things, they all had amazing relationships with God because they kept trying—even after they messed up. I could learn a lot from them in that way. I spend a lot of time hiding from God after I goof up, not believing he could really love me or forgive me if he knew what I did. But he's God! He already knows! He's seen it all and just wants me to come and talk with him about it. And if I would do that, I would be just like David and Abraham and Moses and everyone else—in the way that really matters: because I'd be forgiven. And that's the only thing that is worth anything.

I just wanted to remind you of those things. So, remember, next time you mess up (because



Hi guys! I've been thinking about God a lot lately... He's so amazing and he gives us so much.

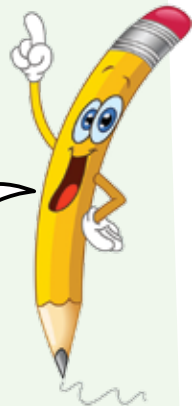
we all do), go talk to God about it. Don't hide. Trust that he loves you and will forgive you. Remind yourself that the God of the universe loves YOU! No matter what. Pretty cool, huh?

It's crazy we have a God that is that awesome. I hope you'll never forget that. Just keep doing your best and stay as close to him as you can: even when you're afraid that he'll be mad at you. Because, trust me, he'll never, ever not be happy to see and talk with you. He is waiting for you always. Go to him: over and over and over. You will never regret making Jesus your best friend and talking with God daily. Make a pledge to yourself today that you will always do your best to stay close to God. Write it down. Then keep the pledge some place where you can see it so you'll be reminded.

I'm so glad I got to talk to you today! I hope you'll always do your best to stay close to Jesus: be a David or Abraham or Moses. I can't wait to see how God will use YOU!

Scriptural Reference: Ether 5 & 6 [LDS 12-15]

Here's a neat reminder to stay close to God. In the Pledge Card below, write your name and today's date, cut it out and carry it with you! Or clip it to your school backpack. Or put it somewhere you can easily see... and remember.



My Pledge to God



I, write your name here,
promise to always try to stay
close to God, to talk with
him daily and remember
that Jesus is my best friend.
today's date

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*Maya Epigraphy and
Archaeology Support the
Great Changes Described
in The Book of Mormon
for the Years AD 34–231*

The Ambassador Stone

Glyph Quotes

The Adventures of Beezrom

In Memory:

Jacqueline E. Powell

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In Memory: Jacqueline E. Powell

With mixed emotions—sad for us, joy for her—we relate that Jacqueline E. Powell, a PSI volunteer editor/proofreader, died January 17, 2016, in Fort Dodge, Iowa, where she lived. Her battle with cancer was swift and a shock to her husband Ray and those of us who knew her.

I “met” Jacquie about four years ago via email, when she wrote to respond to an advertisement we had published requesting proofreading help with *glyph notes*. This developed into a wonderful “pen pal” relationship as she contributed her excellent editing and proofing skills to *glyph notes*. She was meticulous, thorough, knowledgeable, and easy to work with, always adding in her comments and explanations that these were “suggestions” that the authors could implement or not. In addition, she provided a sounding board about all aspects of an article. I valued her opinion greatly. Jacquie had taught at the Fort Dodge Catholic School System and as an adjunct instructor for Iowa Central Community College, retiring from Iowa Central in 2012.

My husband Lyle and I did meet Jacquie and Ray

“in person” when we went to Des Moines to provide ministry at the church. They drove down to Des Moines on Saturday evening to go to dinner with us, and, on the next day, worshipped together with us.

Many Sundays, Ray and Jacquie would visit isolated Saints in the central and northwest area of Iowa after attending church. A dedicated gardener, Jacquie would begin seeds in early March and worked diligently the rest of the year in the garden providing food for others and themselves.

As I write this, I imagine her proofing this and telling me where to put the commas, how to change out a sentence or two to be more

understandable, and telling me, once again, how she “loved patterns!” There is no question that the quality of the readability of the articles in the *glyph notes* these past few years is mainly due to her many hours of editing and proofreading. Her expertise, congeniality, and assistance will be missed immensely.

Sherrie Kline Smith, editor

Her obituary can be read on the Gunderson Funeral Home of Fort Dodge, Iowa, website.

gundersonfuneralhdome.com/bituaries/ 