

Share and Invite: The Least (and Most) We Can Do

by Terry Read, Mission Center President

At a recent gathering I attended where “the missionary task” was the emphasis, I gravitated to one of the statements made: “each disciple, regardless of education or skill, can do two essential things that are directly part of mission—SHARE his or her story and INVITE.” Share and invite. For a reluctant missionary like me, those two actions seem pretty doable. And they’re straight from the gospel message. Jesus readily (though not thoughtlessly) shared of himself. He sought the company of others, particularly those no one else was seeking, and in so doing became an example of invitation and hospitality.

The questions for us sometimes become, however, “what do I share? And “to what do I invite?” I suggest that the answers may lie in “a moment,” either one long ago, or one about to happen. In Matthew 6, Jesus is quoted as offering the counsel, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear . . .” Taken literally, we could easily see this as completely impractical guidance. Yet taken in the context of

his time (and then applied to our time), the Great Teacher is suggesting a way to live with the Spirit and in the moment: “...strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

In his poem, *This Much I Do Remember*, Billy Collins writes of the power of a single moment, seized because of its transformative possibility:

*Then all the moments of the past
began to line up behind that moment
and all the moments to come
assembled in front of it in a long row,
giving me reason to believe
that this was a moment I had rescued
from the millions that rush out of sight
into a darkness behind the eyes.*

*Even after I have forgotten what year it is,
my middle name,
and the meaning of money,
I will still carry in my pocket
the small coin of that moment,
minted in the kingdom
that we pace through every day.*



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The Blessing of Children at Seijo Nursery School

by Masako Matsushita

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. -Mark 10:14-16

In November 2006 I traveled to Tokyo, Japan, to lead in the blessing of the children at the Seijo Nursery School. This was the sixth consecutive year I have been privileged to participate in this ceremony. I offered prayers for 24 five-year-old children at the school, sponsored by the Seijo Community of Christ in Tokyo, asking God’s blessing of happiness and health for each child.

Why in November? November 15 in Japan is the day for “Shichi-Go-San,” a day of prayer for the healthy growth of young children. On “Shichi-Go-San”—which literally means seven, five, and three years old—many children visit a Shinto shrine with

their parents. Most girls wear kimonos, while boys wear haori (jackets) and hakama (trousers). In recent years, though, an increasing number of children wear Western-style dresses and suits for this special day.

Seijo Community of Christ in Tokyo and the Seijo Nursery School choose this day to connect a Christian ordinance with an important Japanese cultural event. My prayers include recognition of each child’s personality and possibilities and then focus on “having joy and hope, bringing peace to the world with love”. The children are blessed one by one.

Beginning two weeks before the service, I went to the Nursery School each day to get to know the children, eating lunch with them, singing with them, and sharing with them in the morning worship services. How shining children’s eyes are!

Continued on page 2



Open House in Santa Barbara

by Denise Leichter and Keith Martindale

The Santa Barbara Congregation would like to invite and encourage you to attend a Community Open House for their new classroom facilities on Saturday, March 17th from



11:00AM-3:00PM. Apostle Susan Skoor will be our guest minister for the weekend's activities. This will be an exciting time to showcase the facility and new interactive Bible curriculum through study, drama and art. There will be a BBQ, music, and fun events for children, youth and parents. Your prayerful support over the years for this milestone in ministry has been deeply appreciated, and we want to have you help us celebrate and dedicate our building. The Service of Consecration for the new addition will be on Sunday, March 18th at 10:00AM; your presence is important to us. In addition to Apostle Skoor, we will be joined by Mission Center President Terry Read and Financial Officer Michael Hewitt.

We hope that the community event on Saturday will bring new children and families back to church on Sunday and your ability to help us provide 1:1 relationship ministry will help us greatly in our desire to reach out and touch this community in new ways.

For more information, please contact Keith Martindale at 805-967-5830/KMartind@sbceo.org; Mary Lou Bruington at 805-965-2102/MLB506@cox.net, or Denise Leichter at 818-996-4709/DeniseLeichter@cofchristla.org. We look forward to seeing carloads of you at this special outreach event! ■

Riddle 2: "I want to hold your hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand."

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

- 2- 3 Jr. High Snow Camp, Camp Buckhorn
- 10 Christian Ministry Colloquy, Independence, MO
- 17-19 Retreat (Canoga Park, Simi Valley, Ventura)
- 17-19 Sr. High Snow Camp, Camp Buckhorn
- 19 Presidents' Day, Offices Closed
- 23-24 Pastor's Retreat

MARCH

- 2-3 Youth Hunger Challenge, Temple City
- 9-11 High Priests Retreat (location TBA)
- 10 Daylight Savings Begins
- 17 Santa Barbara Open House, 11AM-3PM
- 18 Santa Barbara Service of Consecration, IOAM
- World Conference Delegates Meet, Temple City
- 24-31 World Conference, Independence, MO
- 31-4/1 Young Adult Event, Independence, MO



The Blessing of Children: continued from page 1

They are pure and full of hopes! As we see them, our hearts are cleansed.

As we think of all children in Japan, all children in Asia, here in America, in Europe and all other children, we learn that there are ones who face poverty, hunger, disease, and unhappiness every day. It is regrettable to see any children who face these *adult* issues. All children look at the sun, the moon, and the sky; they are creatures of God created to live in joy together on this small star named Earth. Outreach International is committed to this vision for the world's children. In the service of blessing, we shared a story about hunger in the world and the children's parents were invited to contribute to Outreach International, designating funds to be used for schools and immunizations.

As an adult and as a disciple of Jesus, I feel keenly the responsibility to work and pray for our children's futures through the pursuit of peace and justice. May the Lord bless all children is my sincere prayer. ■

Joyous News

With great joy, the Anaheim Congregation reports that Brandi Herrington has been adopted by her aunt Anna Herrington. Anna has been raising Brandi since she was eight months old and 13 years later on December 8, 2006 the adoption of Brandi Herrington was completed. Mother and child are very happy. The congregation presented Brandi with a very beautiful blanket.

Brandi and Anna thank everyone for their prayers and blessings throughout the years. ■

Communities of Joy

Deadline for the next issue of *Communities of Joy* is March 15.

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Valentine Love Riddles

Answers are located in the newsletter.

1. "What is black and white and red all over?"
2. What did the boy octopus say to the girl octopus?
3. What sound do two porcupines make when they kiss?

It's all about Love!

UPCOMING EVENTS



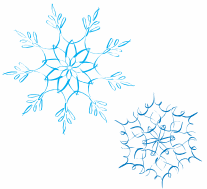
JR. HIGH SNOW CAMP February 2-3

SR. HIGH SNOW CAMP February 17-19

YOUTH HUNGER CHALLENGE March 2-4

MISSION CENTER FAMILY ACTIVITY

"Unity in Our Community" April 22



Make plans NOW to attend! Grab your parents, grandparent, aunts, uncles and friends and come! There will be all kinds of fun things to do: fun booths, great food, and lots of fellowship! Jump in the "Moon Walk", get some cotton candy, win prizes at the coin toss booth and join with the community as we create some UNITY!!!

See you at Temple City on April 22nd!

Secret Message

Congratulations Prize Winners from our last *Communities of Joy*—I hope that you enjoyed the goodies!

Children: **LAUREN REYNOLDS**, Costa Mesa; Youth: **DALTON SPOONER**, Gardena; Adult: **SARAH GURNEY**, Temple City.

Here's another secret message! Use the Key to figure out what it says! Don't forget, if you are the first to call me (909-606-8636) you win a prize! Prizes will be awarded to age groups 10 and under, 11-18, and adult.

"

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$\frac{15}{20}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{20}{8}$ $\frac{5}{5}$ $\frac{19}{19}$ $\frac{5}{9}$ $\frac{19}{12}$ $\frac{15}{15}$ $\frac{22}{22}$ $\frac{5}{5}$ "

KEY

A=1	B=2	C=3	D=4	E=5	F=6	G=7	H=8	I=9	J=10	K=11	L=12	M=13
N=14	O=15	P=16	Q=17	R=18	S=19	T=20	U=21	V=22	W=23	X=24	Y=25	Z=26

A Note from Linda

Hi Friends!
(younger friends and older ones too!)

Our daughter Andrea is studying to be an architect and design spaces and structures that communities and families. She didn't get her drafting of her artistic sensibilities—but I, along with Terry, because of our family's participation in the Community of Christian community.

architect. One day I hope she will realize her will be constructed and then enjoyed by skills from me—though perhaps I did pass along some have exposed her to a little different kind of building. Christ, we have experienced firsthand the building of

These experiences have occurred in many different circumstances but they each have one thing in common: a shared desire among participants to be in right relationship with one another and with God. They have often taken place at camps, reunions, and retreats. This is perhaps because these settings offer a concentrated time and space for the purpose of building God's community.

This last year, I shared those kinds of experiences in places that were new to me—Buckhorn Camp, Whispering Pines, Temple City—but the Spirit was the same, the Spirit of Christ's peace working among God's people. And I experienced that Spirit particularly with our young people. The numbers of our youth participating in mission center activities are not large as yet, but the experiences have been considerable. Just last month eight of SCMC's youth traveled eight hours to Arizona to share in a tri-mission center retreat. The quality of worship and fellowship was high as new relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ were formed and existing relationships strengthened. Because of the experience, our community is a little stronger, a little larger.

We have a full slate of youth activities coming in 2007 beginning with Snow Camps in February, a "Hunger Challenge" in March and several camps this summer. Also, we'll have a NEW Primary Camp. Each activity represents yet more prime opportunities to build and strengthen the community of Christ. If you are a young person, I hope to see you there. If you are older, I hope you will encourage the youth and children in your life to share in these community-building experiences. We just might develop some architects . . . of God's house. Love and blessings to each of you,

Linda Read

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Share the "Good News" about what mission center children, youth and adults are doing. Submit your stories and photos to share with others in this newsletter.



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E-Mail: Terry Read, editor TRead@CofChristLA.org



Riddle 3: "Ouch!"

Stanley Travels Around the World

by Tim Prante

Linsay Prante, of the Costa Mesa Congregation, and her third grade class have just completed a geography project with Flat Stanley. The project focused on a cut-out doll named Flat Stanley who was mailed and hand carried by friends and relatives to different locations throughout the country and the world. Short stories and photos were sent back to the students to share with their class on Flat Stanley's adventure and all of the places he visited.

Linsay's Flat Stanley made several trips. First he traveled to North Carolina where he met the North Carolina State University mascot and watched a football game. Then it was on to Garden City, KS where he visited Jennifer Orrison (daughter to Jean and Jerry Orrison from Costa Mesa), who took him to the zoo where she works. While at the zoo, he visited many of the animals. Finally, Stanley took a trip to Japan with Hiroshi Matsushita. While in Japan, Hiroshi entertained the intrepid 2D lad, taking him to many places including the world famous bullet train, a Dragon Boat, and a school sponsored by our church in Seijo. Hiroshi took lots of pictures and sent them back for Linsay's entire class to enjoy. As a souvenir for Linsay, Hiroshi purchased a Flat Stanley book printed in Japanese.

Linsay would like to thank Hiroshi and Jennifer for their time and help in participating with her project. ■



Flat Stanley shows no fear while visiting the Lee Richardson Zoo in Kansas.



Riddle 1: A penguin after her first kiss

Flat Stanley visited the Seijo Nursery School while traveling in Japan.



La Nueva Esperanza en Cristo Turns Two

by Sergio Juarez

The month of February is different in many aspects to the other months of the year to La Nueva Esperanza en Cristo. This February we will celebrate our second anniversary in our treasured house of worship in Los Angeles.

As I write this (during January), I feel the same excitement that I felt before the keys of the church building were given to us so that we could celebrate the first service in our new sanctuary. Even though at that time the building needed repairing and remodeling in many areas, we felt the Spirit of God begin to permeate the space; every area of the church was blessed by God. Soon our church was accepted and respected as a place of worship in the community. Many questions were asked of us by our neighbors: What kind of church is this? Are you Catholics? Are you evangelicals? Are you Pentecostal? What are you?

Our answer was and is simple: *We are disciples of Jesus Christ and our earthly name is Community of Christ. We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of hope, joy, love and peace.* What we mean is that we are here to bring justice, and love mercy. To make this declaration means that we must do what is just in the eyes of God; do those things that have been revealed to us as the will of God. God expects us as disciples to live well disciplined lives.

To "love mercy" means to show love to our neighbors without any interest to ourselves. The Lord said, *Blessed are those who saw me hungry and fed me, thirsty and gave me something to drink, a stranger and gave me shelter, naked and clothed me, sick and helped me to heal, in jail and visited me.* In other words, you showed mercy . . . with action; your intangible love became tangible when you acted in mercy. Love becomes practical when we manifest our love in favor of those that have a need, by giving what we can give.

We are happy to say that God has brought us here to do justice and love mercy. We know that the long journey begins with one step; I believe the long journey for La Nueva Esperanza en Cristo has began step by step. The majority of things cannot be done in a hurry; it takes time to produce a master work, or rather, the Master's work. Nonetheless, we believe that God is working in our lives by calling from us the virtues of patience and perseverance. These qualities increase the value of hope. And hope is believing in reaching the goal—the kingdom of God on earth—one day.

So our hope is to **proclaim Jesus Christ** to our neighbors and to **promote hope, joy, love, and peace** in their homes . . . one home at a time. ■

Share and Invite: continued from page 1

What “small coins” are in your pocket? When we seize moments or days in such a way, they have the power to become profound, lasting chapters in our sacred stories. Have you sorted through your “coins” recently? Looked for some newly minted? When was the last time you shared one of these treasures with someone?

One such day for me is indeed part of my sacred story. It is an early “chapter” and one I have shared with some but not all of you...

THE DAY MY LIFE CHANGED FOREVER

On a crisp, but bright colorful autumn weekend in 1967 my world was turned upside down. The images from those 48 or so hours are as vivid in my memory as any before or since. That Saturday began in near perfect fashion...as least for this 9-year-old: in the yard tossing a new football with my Dad. My little brother was also there, beaming his squinty grin in the sharp sunlight. My Dad loved his sons, loved his wife, my Mother, but his body was under the illusion that it needed something even more compelling than the love of a young family...a drink followed by another and even more.

On that near perfect day it was all there...sunlight, my Dad's love, time together, my Mother, my brother, the promises of an optimism borne of a turbulent yet prosperous time, the hope of a child in love with his Dad, and the beer—mostly beer—that was always there. There was a fight, harsh words between my parents, a kiss demanded by my Father now no longer perfect. Then a door slam and he was gone.

I knew the world was off its axis the next morning when I awoke at dawn to find my Grandmother in our house and had a faint awareness of my weeping Mother making or taking phone calls. The calls were about my Father, gone forever now, his car having careened into oncoming traffic on an old Idaho two-lane. How do you tell a 9-year-old his Dad has just died...even when he already knows?

But there's more...much more. The images are strangely less vivid, yet tenfold the magnitude of that weekend's injury. Healing is like that...never as strong in the memory as the trauma, but exponentially more lasting. What happened next is the reason I tell this story, though losing a Dad is certainly story enough and worthy to be told. But redemption was there that day right alongside a young family's broken world. And it was there because of people who care. People who are connected to little families who occasionally come to church. People who are caught in this web of lives we call the body of Christ. People who are called to be Christ to one another.

*...those good,
dear people
restored our
souls.*

I don't remember what they said, whether they wiped their feet, if they patted my head or embraced me...one day more recent than the most vivid memory of my life and I can hardly remember their faces. What I remember are people from this church we now call the Community of Christ streaming, literally streaming into our living room carrying hot dishes and fruit salads and chocolate cakes. It wasn't that the food was going to take away our pain or help us grieve a little less. It wasn't that the well meaning yet invariably foolish words that people say when they don't know what to say were going to lighten our burden. It was simply that that those good, dear people restored our souls. Though I didn't know it that day or even a day or week or year later, I know now that that day the love of God as expressed through those humble folks grasped my life, took hold of it and has never let go.

I hope this part of my sacred story prompts you to tell— or retell—yours and in so doing, you are able, in the spirit of Christ's hospitality, to invite another to share your company and the company of the Spirit, even if just for a moment. ■