

La Nueva Esperanza Celebra

by Linda Espiritu Santo



Photos by Tonia Cooper & Linda Espiritu Santo

On February 26, 2006, La Nueva Esperanza en Cristo began a new chapter in its history with the consecration of its building on 21st Street in Los Angeles. It has been a year packed with renovations, growth and learning. There is still work to be done but it is exciting to see all the possibilities that lie before us.

It was truly a celebration! About 90 people attended the service—and the “convivio” (food and fellowship) afterwards. It was exciting to have visitors from the community and from other congregations—Simi Valley, Temple City, Basileia, Gardena, Canoga Park, Costa Mesa and others. John Hatton and his group of musicians provided music along with the praise group and children’s choir from La Nueva Esperanza. People were dancing in the aisles!

Terry Read shared greetings from the First Presidency and the Southern California Ecumenical Council. Paul Davis of the Presiding Bishopric provided the message for the morning which was very fitting since he was involved from the beginning with the purchase of the building when he was SCMC President. Heather (Erika) Weeks capably provided translation of both Terry’s and Paul’s remarks.

The building has been a great blessing and challenge for the congregation after years of wandering from place to place. As co-pastors, Sergio and Sara Juarez work together in the ministry and development of leadership, and with God’s blessing, we look forward to a promising future in the middle of Los Angeles as this congregation strives to become “la nueva esperanza en Cristo” (the new hope in Christ) in the community where it is planted. 🌸

The Volatile Power of Crucifixion and Resurrection

by Terry Read

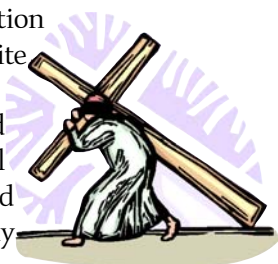
In the minds of many, religion and politics is a volatile mix. I would agree. With a slightly different wording, however—faith and politics—I believe they are inseparable. Please don't misunderstand. I'm not referring to the divisive partisan politics that has come to define the public arena in our nation. I am speaking of matters of justice that become political because they concern people and because people disagree about how they should be addressed. Even when issues of justice become political, they cannot be separated from Christian faith; the gospel of Jesus calls us into the mix.

Just last week, discussion took place in the U.S. Senate on a bill for immigration reform. It is related to HR 4437, passed in December by the House of Representatives. It contains a provision that would criminalize social service workers and others who provide compassionate or humanitarian aid to undocumented people, including churches and faith-based organizations. If enacted into law, such assistance would be a felony, punishable by fine and up to five years in prison. This is a serious issue for us here in southern California. At the outset of Lent, Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony declared that if Congress passes the law, he will instruct the priests in the archdiocese's 288 parishes to defy the law in civil disobedience (from "Faith in Action" by Jeff Carr—*Sojo Mail*—March 15, 2006).

This is potentially volatile stuff. It's a conflict we would just as soon avoid or hope goes away. Living in Los Angeles, we know that's folly. This is about human beings who live here and who, in the tradition of Jesus, are our neighbors. No one can deny that our country needs immigration reform; the current approach is ineffective, insecure, and is demeaning to people. But we do not need reform that preys upon fears of voters or is about meting out harsh punishment against persons who simply help other human beings. It is up to people of faith like us to call for reform that is compassionate, that is in harmony with the gospel imperatives of loving the neighbor and welcoming the stranger. The *Justice for Immigrants* campaign, begun by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and joined by numerous other denominations, calls for such reform, including the following:

- ▶ A broad based legalization (permanent residency) of the undocumented of all nationalities;

- ▶ Reform of our family-based immigration system to allow family members to reunite with loved ones in the United States;
- ▶ Reform of the employment-based immigration system to provide legal pathways for migrants to come and work in a safe, humane, and orderly manner, and;
- ▶ Abandonment of the border "blockade" enforcement strategy.
- ▶ Restoration of due process protections for immigrants.



It further calls for continual attention to the fight against poverty, the existence of which is a primary factor in emigration to developed nations like the United States.

What occurs to me as I consider the crucifixion along with matters of justice like immigration (as well as a host of other complex social issues) is that the spirit of Christ crucified—the One who suffered agonizing pain for the sake of reconciliation, the One who forsook violence for the sake of forgiveness, the One who gave his life for the sake of love that conquers all—is alive in those places where forces of death are at work and where people of faith stand up in compassionate witness. And what occurs to me as I consider the resurrection along with justice issues such as immigration is that the spirit of the Resurrected Christ—the One who took his ministry to EVERY one, the One whose defining purpose was and is that humankind have life and have it more abundantly, and the One who conquered violence and death—calls disciples to those places and situations where we'd rather not go. It occurs in places fraught with risk, discomfort, and often without a lot of company.

As a people of faith, we are called not only to face difficult questions but also to take difficult action. It would be easy for many of us to ignore this political issue (for some of us, to ignore it would be to our great risk). But as people of faith, we must not settle for such convention. Did not Pilate do the same? He heard no voice of dissent, no alternative to the injustice being demanded.

Immigration policy will continue to be a complicated, divisive, volatile issue. It's not "what would," but rather, what DID Jesus do in the face of such division, volatility, and injustice? He called for love of everyone. He welcomed the stranger as neighbor. He picked up his cross. And then came the Good News. 🙏



Buckhorn Camp Work Week

May 23-28, 2006

CALLING ALL WORKERS:

Expert, Novice, Young or Young-at Heart

Earn free camper days for reunion or other Community of Christ camps. Food and lodging provided.



Please contact Ron at 951-659-2995 or e-mail BuckhornCamp@myway.com to arrange your work days.



Communities of Joy

What's happening in your congregation or personal discipleship? Deadline for the next issue of *Communities of Joy* is May 10. Send items to Tonia Cooper:

MAIL: PO Box 4077, Huntington Beach, CA 92605
E-MAIL: Tonia@cofchristla.org

Editor Terry Read
Typography & Layout Jean David
Technical Advisor & Publishing Tonia Cooper

Bridge Builders Gift Fair

by Linda Read

Sharing our Gifts . . . Sharing our Lives

On Saturday, March 18th over 55 Saints of all ages came together to share their gifts with one another! We had singers, readers, storytellers, crafts and collectors of all sorts, artists, a gardener, a drummer, a writer, and a couple of pianists plus a cupcake walk and a piñata. We had those who shared experiences of faith, a fabulous band from the Orange Congregation and many others including "Hunger Challenge" participants from Canoga Park and Simi Valley Congregations! Our youngest participant was four and our oldest was ?



The planning was completed by chairperson Charlotte Jones and her committee of lovely side-kicks: Mary Farley, Shirley Gomez and LaVona Davis, with Gary and Margie Haas handling registration and the inimitable Paul Shiota as our terrific emcee!

Don't forget, *God's gift to us is our lives—our gift to God is what we do with that life!* 🌸

Covina Congregation

by Eileen Cockcroft & Katherine La'Veaux



Fifteen years ago, a Super Bowl Sunday prayer inspired a group of young people to do something more than celebrate a football game. They created the Souper Bowl of Caring, a youth-led international event to raise money for the homeless shelters and soup kitchens around the world. Covina Congregation has been participating in this event for 3 years now. This year, Derek Beck hosted the event and helped raise \$150.00 plus food and toiletries for our local charity! We are very proud of our young people for "making a touchdown" for Christ!

On Saturday, February 25, 2006, Covina Congregation hosted a Winter Coffee House to help raise money for building repairs. Family and friends joined us for an evening of food and fellowship. All in all, it was a good time for a good cause, one we'll be repeating again soon! 🌸

Christ's Kids Hunger Challenge

by Joy Harris

The Simi Valley and Canoga Park congregations are very proud of their youth. On March 18-19, 8 Christ's Kids and 6 leaders from Canoga Park and Simi Valley participated in the 3rd annual Outreach International Hunger Challenge. The youth received pledges from sponsors for a 24-hour fast. They learned about



world hunger, studied scriptures that told how Christ would want them to respond to those less fortunate, and went on a "Can Hunger" scavenger hunt for donations to Care and Share.

The group also visited the Bridge Builders Spring Fair in Temple City where they shared a skit about the reality of poverty in the world and gathered some additional sponsors. Approximately \$2,400 was pledged for Outreach International to help fight world hunger. The call of Christ is being heard and acted upon by Christ's Kids. 🌸

Wordens Celebrate 60th Anniversary

by Jean Gibo

June was 14 years old when they first met at the old 4th Church in Kansas City. Robert spied her at the Ice Cream Social and they were sweethearts from that time on. Bob enlisted in the Air Force and was a gunner on B-17's during World War II. Thirty days after his discharge, Bob and June were married on February 8, 1946. Bob worked for 42½ years as an electrician for the Montgomery Electric Company. They have three children, 3 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.



Robert has served as pastor of the Orange and Anaheim Congregations. The Wordens remain active in Anaheim. 🌸

Aaronic Ministries Event

High Priest Patti Page will lead discussions on *How to Discuss What Matters Most* at the next Aaronic Ministries Event, April 29, 2006, 9:00AM-5:00PM at the CCM in Temple City. This activity is open to all who would like to improve communication skills. Registration is \$10 per person and includes lunch. Registration deadline is April 24. If you would like further information, call 714-847-5731.

SCMC Missionary Workshop

Register Now!

Pastors, congregational leaders, and other interested persons are invited to participate in a missionary workshop, Saturday, April 8, 2006, 10AM-4PM at the CCM in Temple City. Seventy Karin Peter will share her dynamic ministry on *The Power of Personal Invitation*. Suggested donation is \$10 per person. Child care provided for pre-registrants. Registration deadline is April 3. Call Tonia at 714-847-5731 to register, or e-mail Tonia@cofchristla.org.

Bridges Already Underway

by Terry Read and Hiroshi Matsushita

On the weekend of March 11-12, 44 high priests and their companions gathered in retreat in Ventura. With the theme *Building Bridges to Communities of Faith*, guest minister Don Compier acknowledged the tremendous presence of religious pluralism in our communities and the opportunities we have to build those bridges. By recognizing the presence of God's Spirit in many other trails of faith alongside our own Christian path, we are helping to create what Diane Eck wrote in *A New Religious America*, "a truly pluralist American society in which this great diversity is not simply tolerated but becomes the very source of strength." Doing so, we can truly become instruments of peace.



Don Compier teaches a class at the High Priest Retreat.

Building these bridges in Los Angeles, however, is well underway. There are courageous witnesses who have already helped reach across divides, some of which have been surprisingly narrow. Our friend and guest speaker at Saturday night's banquet, Father Alexie Smith, President of the Inter-Religious Council of Southern California, recounted numerous stories of such connections between groups that were previously isolated, even fearful of one another. Carol Kostura of the Basileia Congregation shared the rich blessings she has experienced through her associations with the Southern California Ecumenical Council. For further information, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SCMCInterfaithNetwork>. Consult this site for more wonderful opportunities and help us fill it with stories of bridges underway as you sense and recognize the presence of God in your neighbors from other faiths. 🙏

SCMC Family Reunion

AUGUST 12-18, 2006

CAMP BUCKHORN / IDYLLWILD, CALIFORNIA

Let the Spirit Teach...Let the Spirit Bless...Let the Spirit Speak...Let the Spirit Heal...Let the Spirit Breathe

GUEST MINISTERS:

Steven P. Veazey
Community of Christ President

Cathi Cackler-Veazey



Make plans now to attend this experience in Christ centered community! Watch for more details!

Spring SCMC Conference

April 23, 2006

Peace Be With You will be the watchwords of the next SCMC Conference to be held at the CCM in Temple City, 8:30AM until 3:00PM. We will worship, fellowship and make joyful noise as we sing praises to God. There will be both a pre-legislative and legislative session. We will celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at the 10:45AM worship service. Bishop Mike Hewitt will bring the morning's message. Come share in this community building event! For more information, call 714-847-5731 or e-mail Tonia@cofchristla.org. 🙏

Upcoming Events

APRIL

- 8 Congregational Leaders Meet
- 8 Missionary Workshop
- 9 **Palm Sunday**
Basileia Passover Seder
- 13 Burbank Maundy Thursday Service
- 14 **Good Friday**
- 16 **Easter**
- 23 Mission Center Conference
- 24 SCMC Office Closed
- 29 Aaronic Priesthood Workshop

MAY

- 14 **Mother's Day**
- 23-28 Buckhorn Camp Work Week
- 26-29 Long Beach Congregational Retreat
- 29 **Memorial Day**, SCMC Office Closed

JUNE

- 4 Basileia Orange County AIDS Walk
- 18 **Father's Day**
- 18-24 Senior High Camp at Happy Valley
- 25-30 Junior High Rock 'n Water Camp with SWIMC

