Buffalo, NY

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood

Portland
“I got God!”

Evansville
Missionary Adventures

People of Praise
Hard to Understand and that’s OK
On December 2 the Indianapolis branch held their 30th annual service of Lessons & Carols at their community center.

On December 2 the Indianapolis branch held their 30th annual service of Lessons & Carols at their community center. (Photo: Left: Cathy Walters; Right: Glenn Rymsza.)
My name is Agapanincher Engkichy Meither. People call me Pena.
I was born in Guam and raised in Hawaii. When I was seven, I moved to Portland, Oregon.

One day in 2014, my parents were driving around and saw Trinity Academy. I was already looking at a different school, but my parents said to me, “If we let you shadow at the other school, then can you come shadow at Trinity Academy? We want you to be surrounded by Christians.”

Trinity Academy was way different than the other school. I noticed the students were very cheerful. I had never met anyone as enthusiastic as Dr. Jo Clark. She welcomed me with open arms. Dr. Clark told me that if I wanted to go to Trinity Academy I’d have to repeat eighth grade, so I talked to my family about it. It took me a couple of months, but I felt like God told me to come to Trinity. I gave up playing volleyball and basketball because I found it hard to concentrate on homework. I loved the classes.

The next summer my grandma passed away. After that I was mad at the world and mad at God. I didn’t want to talk to anyone. In October, a classmate invited me to the Action kickoff. I was hesitant. I told her, “I don’t think God wants me back, because I’ve been avoiding him.” She was persistent, and other girls from Action were persistent as well, so I went. I talked to some of the college women that help in Action and they helped me realize that God will always forgive you. They kept encouraging me. My relationship with God grew a lot stronger.

Sam Mertz, our Action leader, talked to me about applying for an Action internship. I applied really early, then I got a call from Chris Vieck. She was telling me about Evansville, how the neighborhood they live in used to be called “the devil’s corner,” and how there was so much shooting until the People of Praise came. I thought, wow, this is fantastic, I want to be there. I want to go somewhere they really need me.

When I first got to Indiana, I stayed with the Gonzalez family near Indianapolis. I was pretty antisocial, but they weren’t pressuring me or judging me. They welcomed me. I also experienced welcoming when I got to Evansville. Chris came out the door running and hugged me. I barely knew her, but she said, “I’m so happy that you’re here!”

I loved that neighborhood and all the kids. I saw God everywhere. Back at home, if you’re an islander, you keep it within the island community. The People of Praise likes to keep it diverse. If you’re a Protestant, if you’re a Catholic, they welcome you with open arms. If you’re black, Hawaiian or white, they still welcome you with open arms. I have never felt God’s love so strongly—towards the point where I wanted to break into tears.

Before I came, I had a lot of back pain due to scoliosis. At first, in the summer of 2016 after I was diagnosed, it wasn’t a big deal—probably 10 degrees of curvature. Then it got worse and the pain really kicked in. I couldn’t sit or stand for a long time. One day in Evansville, one of the other Action girls looked at me and said, “Why don’t we pray over your back?” They prayed, and after that I felt no pain.

When I got back home, I got an X-ray. Before, my back had been at 32 degrees of curvature. The X-ray showed it had gone down to five degrees. It’s getting better and better now that I’m more active, and people are still praying for a complete healing.

Since the summer I’ve been more persistent in my relationship with God. I don’t just go to him in distress or when I need something. I go to him as a friend. I talk to him throughout the day. My phone used to be a huge distraction from my spiritual life. First thing in the morning, I would get up and look at Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. I wouldn’t talk to God. So I told my dad to disconnect the phone. I don’t regret it. Sure, a lot of stuff is happening on social media, but guess what? I got God! Now, every day I feel God’s love.

“I GOT GOD!”
A Testimony
By Pena Meither

Pena is in the 10th grade at Trinity Academy in Portland.
The Black Rock neighborhood of Buffalo sits on a bluff overlooking the Niagara River. It’s an area of once stately homes where neighbors can recall children playing outside safely until the street lights went off. Today, there are gangs and drugs and low-cost housing that attracts immigrants from all over the world. It’s not uncommon to meet neighbors from Myanmar, Eritrea and Afghanistan along with the long-time residents who raised children in the area.

Four years ago, after prayer and discernment, the Buffalo branch decided to start a prayer meeting in Black Rock. “Initially, we did a fair amount of advertising in the local newspaper and church bulletins and by flyers and word of mouth,” explains Bud Northway, who leads the branch’s outreach efforts. Branch members walked the streets, visited a local soup kitchen and hung flyers, praying with strangers and talking to anyone they could. They forged a connection with Fr. Richard Jedrzejewski, the pastor of Church of the Assumption, a local Catholic parish, who was eager to host the meeting in his church.

The prayer meeting eventually took hold, drawing faithful participants from Black Rock and from the branch. The branch’s outreach team formed a men’s group and a women’s group for the prayer meeting regulars, and both are still going strong. The prayer meeting takes place on Thursday nights, drawing about 20 people and lasting about two hours. Branch member George Meyerhofer plays the guitar alongside Jim, a longtime Black Rock resident and baptized-in-the-Spirit Catholic who, with his wife Patty, hosts the men’s and women’s group meetings at the former convent they call home. Of the women in the women’s group Marilyn Northway says, “Once they started coming, they’ve all been faithful. We support one another’s lives just as we do in the branch.”

George recalls a funny moment when he and Bud wanted to introduce the practice of birthday honorings to the Black Rock men’s group. “We probably spent 45 minutes trying to explain what we were proposing,” he recalls. “I don’t think the men really understood what we were trying to do because they thought we were just going to be saying all this flowery stuff. They felt they might be a little embarrassed. So Bud and I looked at each other and we just launched into doing it. As we finished up the honoring, the other men were like, ‘So that’s what you meant! Wow.

Jim and Patty home is the meeting place for both the men's and women's groups in the neighborhood.
That was pretty cool.” Honorings have been a tradition in the group ever since.

The last few summers, the branch paid the costs for children from the Black Rock neighborhood to attend their annual Buffalo Camp. Seven children came to camp in 2017, and afterward they brought their families to an event the branch hosted in Black Rock, trading stories and introducing their parents to branch members.

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When Bill, an attendee of the prayer meeting and a member of the Black Rock men’s group, first brought his daughter Tina to the prayer meeting, she had been addicted to cocaine for more than 15 years.

One night in 1994, Tina, a young hairdresser and dance instructor, was in a car with some friends when the driver turned up the music, floored the gas pedal, and took the car off the road to kill herself. Tina survived, but severe injuries to her leg caused a near amputation and three subsequent knee surgeries. Three years after the accident, she was unable to dance or hold a hairdressing job due to her injuries. Tina was just coming off the prescription painkillers she’d been given for her leg when she went to a party where she saw a friend sniffing cocaine. “It gave me this extra energy. It filled in a gap. And that was the first time I did any type of hard drug,” she recalls.

Throughout her twenties, Tina struggled with cocaine addiction. She moved back and forth across the country, but would periodically return to live in Buffalo. She shed 35 pounds and looked thin, pale and sickly. Aware that her life needed to change, she spent the next several years in and out of various types of drug rehab programs, but often she would come back to Black Rock, see her former acquaintances and dealers and fall back into drug abuse.

She said a turning point came in 2014, when she went on the Buffalo branch’s women’s retreat. When she arrived, she hadn’t slept for three days due to her cocaine use. “I felt really great being in this holy spot,” she recalls, before adding, “I was nervous. I was shaky. You couldn’t tell that I was shaking but my veins were shaking inside me.” Tina hit it off with Arlene Meyerhofer, who took her to the kitchen and fed her strawberries and chocolate.

On Saturday night, after Tina had gotten a good night’s sleep and an afternoon nap, all the women on the retreat gathered to pray with her to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Tina remembers, “They prayed for me to be healed, and it was just powerful. . . . I knew I was going to be okay. I was going to be safe. . . . Really, where the change began is when they invited me to go on that retreat.”

Marilyn Northway recalls seeing Tina the next morning. “She looked different. She said that when she looked in the mirror that morning she hardly recognized the face: big smile and bright, bright eyes. She didn’t have the look of the drug addict from the night before.”

Over the next two years or so, Tina still struggled with her drug use and moved in and out of Buffalo, but something had changed. Marilyn remembers, “She’d have periods of being clean, and then she’d fall back. But the women in the branch would call her, and she’d call them and ask for prayers, and she would occasionally come to the women’s group. The periods when she was clean kept increasing in length.”

Tina says, “I always stayed in touch with Arlene when I was on my journeys, and I would talk with her so much. And I would talk to Bud often.

“The women gave me support. I had sisters. I had a mother when
I needed a mother. I had friendships when I had to reach out and have a friend. I can call them up and be like, ‘I don’t know what’s going on with me,’ and they would just pray. In the sweetest voice, ‘Okay, we’ll just pray.’ They knew I had a purpose, and they were going to support me, no matter what.”

Tina’s been clean for over a year now, her longest period of freedom since she first tried cocaine. She’s found new purpose in selling skin care products online.

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Sayed first met the People of Praise in the person of Bruce Wansart while drinking coffee in a Wegmans grocery store in Black Rock on a Thursday afternoon. Earlier that same week, Sayed, a young man, had arrived with his family as a new immigrant to the United States from Afghanistan, after waiting for years in Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan as a refugee. Bruce had stopped in the store on the way to the Thursday night prayer meeting, and he invited Sayed to come.

At the prayer meeting, Sayed came up to be prayed with by John Gehl and George Meyerhofer. George remembers, “He said, ‘This church building really jumped out at me because I had a dream or a vision about six months ago and saw this church. And so, I want what you guys have.’” When we realized he was from Afghanistan, we asked, ‘Are you Christian?’ He said, ‘No, I’m Muslim.’ So, John and I just glanced at each other and tried not to miss a beat. John had the wisdom—it was the Holy Spirit—to pray to the God of Abraham, knowing at least fundamentally that we have that in common.”

Over the next few years, John befriended Sayed and his parents and siblings, driving 45 minutes from his home to visit them two or three times a week. Their house had a view of the twin church steeples Sayed spoke about from his dream. John noticed that they had very little furniture, so he found them a few things, including a couch and a table. When it started to get cold in the fall, John took the whole family out to the store for winter coats, hats and gloves.

Sayed recalls, “Mr. John was always there to take me to the doctor, to make the appointments, to take me to driving school, to come to my home. When he was coming back down to the city, he always came to my home for lunch or for tea, and he solved all the problems we had at that time. It’s unbelievable that someone is doing that just for you.”

When the branch held a seder before Easter in 2016, John asked Sayed’s mother to bake the bread. “She made 10 loaves and wouldn’t take any money. She made it for us Christians. She’s a Muslim, and that is just typical of their family.”

Sayed’s family moved to the West Coast in 2016 to live near his sister’s new husband, but John has kept in touch. John arranged for him to stay with the Brotherhood in Portland for a week when Sayed was looking for work, and also put Sayed up in Buffalo when he considered moving back. They continue to keep in touch.

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This fall, the Buffalo outreach team put the Thursday night prayer meetings on hold so they could run a six-week Life in the Spirit Seminar for the regulars. On the final night of the seminar, they prayed with 14 people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The following week, some of those prayed over shared their stories. A young man who lives in a group home received the gift of tongues that night. He shared that he now feels comfortable going out and walking around the Black Rock neighborhood. “You may think this is just a small thing, but it’s really big for me,” he explained. Another young woman from the group home spoke of the “best day of my life”—the day she was prayed with. (“Most of us, when we heard her say that, our eyes just welled up,” Bud recalls.) One man shared that he had a joy-filled week with a renewed energy to do things. And one woman stood up and said, “I am a recovering alcoholic.” She’d been in recovery for six and half years, but was still tormented by nightly dreams about drinking. The whole week after she was prayed with, she said that she hadn’t dreamt about alcohol once.

Says Bud, “Now, everyone who comes with any regularity to the Black Rock prayer meeting has been prayed with to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. That’s pretty exciting.”
Thirsting for Unity

Joint Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the conclusion of the year of the common commemoration of the Reformation, 31st October 2017

On October 31, 2017, the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued this statement. We thought you would find it encouraging to read about the progress that is being made toward unity among Christian denominations. (It is also interesting to note that this progress coincides with fifty years of ecumenical, charismatic prayer meetings!)

On 31st of October 2017, the final day of the year of the common ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation, we are very thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, a commemoration that we have shared together and with our ecumenical partners globally. Likewise, we begged forgiveness for our failures and for the ways in which Christians have wounded the Body of the Lord and offended each other during the five hundred years since the beginning of the Reformation until today.

We, Lutherans and Catholics, are profoundly grateful for the ecumenical journey that we have travelled together during the last fifty years. This pilgrimage, sustained by our common prayer, worship and ecumenical dialogue, has resulted in the removal of prejudices, the increase of mutual understanding and the identification of decisive theological agreements. In the face of so many blessings along the way, we raise our hearts in praise of the Triune God for the mercy we receive.

On this day we look back on a year of remarkable ecumenical events, beginning on 31st October 2016 with the joint Lutheran-Catholic common prayer in Lund, Sweden, in the presence of our ecumenical partners. While leading that service, Pope Francis and Bishop Munib A. Younan, then President of the Lutheran World Federation, signed a joint statement with the commitment to continue the ecumenical journey together towards the unity that Christ prayed for (cf. Jn 17:21). On the same day, our joint service to those in need of our help and solidarity has also been strengthened by a letter of intent between Caritas Internationalis and the Lutheran World Federation World Service.

Pope Francis and President Younan stated together: “Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God’s redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.”

Among the blessings of this year of Commemoration is the fact that for the first time Lutherans and Catholics have seen the Reformation from an ecumenical perspective. This has allowed new insight into the events of the sixteenth century which led to our separation. We recognize that while the past cannot be changed, its influence upon us today can be transformed to become a stimulus for growing communion, and a sign of hope for the world to overcome division and fragmentation. Again, it has become clear that what we have in common is far more than that which still divides us.

We rejoice that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, solemnly signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, has also been signed by the World Methodist Council in 2006 and, during this Commemoration Year of the Reformation, by the World Communion of Reformed Churches. On this very day it is being welcomed and received by the Anglican Communion at a solemn ceremony in Westminster Abbey. On this basis our Christian communities can build an ever closer bond of spiritual consensus and common witness in the service of the Gospel.

We acknowledge with appreciation the many events of common prayer and worship that Lutherans and Catholics have held together with their ecumenical partners in different parts of the world, as well as the theological encounters and the significant publications that have given substance to this year of Commemoration.

Looking forward, we commit ourselves to continue our journey together, guided by God’s Spirit, towards the greater unity according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. With God’s help we intend to discern in a prayerful manner our understanding on Church, Eucharist and Ministry, seeking a substantial consensus so as to overcome remaining differences between us. With deep joy and gratitude we trust “that He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Ph 1:6).

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Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, then president of the Lutheran World Federation, embraced during a common worship service at Lund Cathedral in Sweden on October 31, 2016.
Ms. Dorothy Anderson is an African-American woman in her mid-seventies and a longtime resident of Shreveport, Louisiana. Recently, she found herself deeply moved at a neighborhood barbecue hosted by the People of Praise community.

“In almost all of his speeches, Martin Luther King spoke about blacks and whites living together in unity,” Ms. Anderson said. “I didn’t think I’d live long enough to see it, but I saw it last Thursday night at the barbecue.”

Her words resonated, particularly since residents of her neighborhood had long suffered under the scourge of racism, and Dr. King himself had spoken twice at Galilee Baptist Church just a few blocks away.

For the People of Praise, Ms. Anderson’s words strike an even deeper chord.

In recent times and throughout our 46-year history, our community has been subject to scrutiny in the press and on the Internet, to reports that contained both inaccuracies and misunderstandings. In explaining ourselves, we would not want our own words to fall short of the high standard Jesus sets forth in the Sermon on the Mount. We forgive those who have wronged us and we pray for them.

We also take the long view. Testimonies like Ms. Anderson’s matter more to us and resonate far more deeply than even positive reports in the media. We know from Scripture that on the day when Christ is all in all stories like Ms. Anderson’s will weigh heavily on the scales.

Who Are the People of Praise?
We are an ecumenical, charismatic, covenant community. Our model and inspiration is the first Christian community, a small band of disciples who “were of one heart and soul” and “held all things in common” (Acts 4:32, 2:44). We can be difficult for the public and the press to understand. In truth, we are a community that defies categories.

Take our ecumenism. A majority of People of Praise members are Catholic, yet the People of Praise is not a Catholic group. We aim to be a witness to the unity Jesus desires for all his followers. Our membership includes not only Catholics
but Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Pentecostals and nondenominational Christians. What we share is a common baptism, a commitment to love one another, and our teachings, which we hold in common.

Defying categories is not necessarily a disadvantage. Our members include teachers, carpenters and cooks, security guards and judges, laity and ordained clergy, singles and married couples. We are a community for the rich and we are a community for the poor. We strive to be one of those rare places in 21st-century life where men and women with a wide variety of political and religious views can live together in harmony.

A Broad Outreach
In recent years, the People of Praise is perhaps best known as the founder of Trinity Schools, three junior high/high schools, which among them have won eight Blue Ribbon awards from the U.S. Department of Education. For more than 35 years our schools have had a reputation for encouraging students to ask questions, engage in spirited dialogue and draw their own reasoned conclusions. “I know of no better school in these United States,” the late political philosopher Russell Kirk said of our flagship school in South Bend, IN.

Then there is our missionary work. Over the past 15 years the People of Praise has sent more than 100 people to live in some of America’s forgotten corners—places like Ms. Anderson’s Shreveport neighborhood, where the per capita income is under $14,000. There, we and our neighbors have built and renovated homes, run summer camps for thousands and started an elementary school for our neighborhood, Praise Academy at Lakeside.

In Evansville, Indiana, a group of People of Praise missionaries moved into two houses at a notorious intersection, a place locals called “the devil’s corner” because of all the fights and drug deals. We didn’t arrive with any program or magic formula, but hoped to encounter neighbors in a spirit of Christian friendship. Since then, our neighbors have told us that crime has dropped off because of the community we and they are building.

“Every night there would be something bad going on and the police would have to park and just watch everybody,” one longtime Evansville resident said. “It’s just remarkable how things have changed.”

On another front, our community life provides a natural support for marriages and families, and this has led us to develop Marriage in Christ, a five-week seminar that equips couples to pray together and build crucial habits of conversation. More than 1,000 couples have completed the program.

Our Roots
The People of Praise has some of its roots in the Pentecostal revival that grew from a group of poor African Americans in Los Angeles, beginning in 1906. Those humble believers experienced a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a renewal of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues. They were ridiculed in the press, called “fanatics” and mocked for their lively worship, but the revival went on to inspire half a billion people, including millions of Roman Catholics.

The People of Praise also has roots in the Cursillo, an evangelistic movement founded in Spain by Catholic laymen in the 1940s, which spread to Mexico and the United States, influencing some of our founding members. In 1971, after nearly seven years spent praying and studying the Bible and the teachings of the Church Fathers, 29 people made a covenant commitment to put their lives and their futures in common. The People of Praise was born.

Two of our founding members, Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, have played a pivotal role spreading the Pentecostal revival among Catholics, where it became known as “charismatic renewal.” The People of Praise ran many large conferences, including the 1977 conference in Kansas City’s Arrowhead Stadium that was perhaps the largest ecumenical gathering in modern times. Cardinal Leo Suenens, one of the Second Vatican Council’s leading voices, spoke to the crowd of 50,000, as did Bishop Ithiel Clemmons of the Church of God in Christ. This grassroots ecumenism has continued under Pope Francis, who in the summer of 2017 invited all charismatics to Rome, where he joined them in prayer and song to celebrate with Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals the 50th anniversary of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church.

Another Francis, the late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, helped the Brotherhood of the People of Praise, a group of men who live lives of dedicated celibacy, to obtain official status as a Catholic private association of the faithful. For years some of the men in the Brotherhood had felt a call to become Catholic priests, creating a complicated situation, given that some of their brothers might be Lutheran or Pentecostal. Cardinal George championed their cause.

“In my acquaintance with the People of Praise,” the cardinal wrote, “I have found men and women dedicated to God and eager to seek and do His divine will. They are shaped by love of Holy Scripture, prayer and community; and the Church’s mission is richer for their presence.”

Lay Leadership
After a long period of prayer and discernment, many People of Praise members choose to make a lifelong commitment called a covenant. The covenant of the People of Praise is a promise of love and service to fellow community members and to God. This covenant is not an oath or a vow. We have understood that God can always call a person to another way of life, in which case he or she would be released from the covenant.

People of Praise members agree to accept practical advice and spiritual direction from other qualified community members, a practice which has puzzled some Catholic observers, since the vast majority of our members are not ordained clergy. Pope Francis addressed this issue in 2015, stating, “Spiritual direction is not an exclusive charism of the presbyters: it is a charism of the laity!” He cited a long tradition of lay spiritual direction going back to the early monastic era. In keeping with this tradition, the People of Praise uses the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as a basis for counsel and discernment. Two of our members recently published a book on the Spiritual Exercises called Burning with Love for God.

Freedom of conscience is a key to our diversity. People of Praise members are always free to follow their consciences, as formed by the light of reason, experience and the teachings of their churches.

We may not always be easy to understand, but that’s OK with us. We would never want to trade our birthright for positive attention or to compromise the very qualities which are our only God-given advantage. Imperfect words will eventually fade, but we remain happy and proud to be the category-defying community God has called us to be, his People of Praise.
Three Missionary Stories

BY CHRIS MEEHAN

Blessed Are the Sorrowful

The blonde-haired woman who answered the door was in her 50s. Patty was quick to say she was a Christian, and she spent the next 30 minutes pouring out her sorrows to three Evansville missionaries: John Earhart, Joe Maguire and Mary Timler.

Two of her children had wrecked three different cars, and her third child was in prison. Her water and electricity had been shut off. “To top it all off, three weeks ago the hearing in my left ear started to go bad.”

Standing on her front porch, the missionaries laid hands on Patty and prayed, concluding with a powerful “Amen!” (Their “Amen” was immediately echoed by a woman across the street.)

Mary asked Patty if she could hear better.

“Yes, somewhat,” she replied. She explained that before the prayer human voices had sounded muffled, like people were mumbling. Her hearing had improved to about 70% of what it had been before the hearing problem started, she said.

They prayed again, and this time Patty said with a smile, “It’s 90, no—it’s at 100%. Wow! Thank you, Jesus!”

Two weeks later Mary and Joe returned with Evan Lent. Patty said her ear was still fine and her water was back on. That day her niece Allison was visiting with two of her sons. “We’ve known Allison for years, but we didn’t know she was related to Patty,” Evan explained.

A single mom, Allison said she was “really going through it.” Her brother had died, all in a matter of a few weeks. “All the men in my family are gone,” she said. “I have to be the man now.”

Her water had also been cut off. “I feel like I’ve failed,” she said, her eyes welling up with tears.

Evan suggested they stop and pray for a few minutes and listen to the Lord.

“All in a Day’s Work

John Crimmins and David Katcher smelled marijuana as they approached a group of five men standing in an Evansville yard. One of the men held a joint.

“We’re Christians. We were praying and God told us to tell people that he wants us to stop sinning,” David said. “What do you think of that?”

David couldn’t quite tell what they thought, since the men all hid their eyes. Three of them exited the yard, got in a car and drove off.

“This is crazy!” the fourth man said before going inside a house. The fifth man walked away.

Later that afternoon, after a few more tough conversations, David battled feelings of failure. He and John were both new missionaries, with only a few months in the field. Thoughts such as, God isn’t really against us personally, so we took on the challenge of sticking to our ground, as if he was testing us,” John said. They told another story about a healing of a knee that turned out to involve two people Ted knew and respected. He began to soften.

“I’ve had a grudge against God for over 10 years and I’m just barely starting to get over it,” he admitted. His newborn son had died, and afterward Ted had raged against God. “I deserved to have that baby, but God took him away!”

As he told the story, he paced back and forth. He complained that God didn’t hear prayers, that prayers always fell on deaf ears.

“Ted, it’s clear that you don’t realize how much God loves you,” David said, his heart welling up with love. “Open your eyes. His love is flowing through me to you, and now I love you!”

Ted smiled a little.

All this while, the two boys had been waiting for someone to pick them up, so the missionaries offered to pray that the driver would show up soon. They were surprised when Ted agreed to join them for the prayer.

He drew closer to the missionaries, stopping just a few feet away from them, and David and John prayed aloud for the boys and that Ted would come to know God’s love. After the prayer, they asked Ted if they could come back and see him again.

“Sure,” he said, smiling again.

“As we walked away, we shook our hands and then walked away. That was the last time we saw Ted.”
heads in disbelief,” said David. “There were little changes in his demeanor, as we talked, that kept us persisting. We were challenging without being aggressive, and that’s what it took to make the difference.”

A few weeks later, they returned, approaching Ted with big smiles on their faces.

“I’ve never had people so excited to see me,” he said.

Ted’s grandmother came out of the house and Ted introduced the missionaries to her. “I just met these guys and I feel like I’ve known them for 10 years. I didn’t get what they were saying at first, but now I get it. It’s true that God loves us.”

He turned to the two missionaries. “That night after we spoke I got on my knees and asked God to help me. I’ve been praying ever since. I pray for you guys too.”

**Dogged Determination**

I think it’s a bad idea for you to come today.”

Donna was brusque with the two missionaries who knocked on the door of her well-kept home late last summer. Before she could shut the door, though, her little dog ran out, tore through the yard and onto the busy avenue.

David chased the dog, dodging traffic, and brought him back safely to Donna’s house.

About a week later, he was staffing the missionaries’ produce stand outside their urban farm when Donna dropped by for the first time, but neither David nor Donna recognized each other. It was only afterward, when David knocked on Donna’s door a second time, that they put two and two together.

Eventually more missionaries got to know Donna, and her initial brusqueness faded. She would greet them with a smile, though she told them with sadness that her dog had died after being run over by a car. Donna lived alone, and told them how upset she was about losing the dog, who was her primary companion.

On a Wednesday in November, David and Ellen Reed went to visit Donna again. David and two other missionaries had independently gotten words about offering Donna the baptism in the Holy Spirit, so they were hoping to offer to pray with her for it. When they got there they learned that Donna was having a hard week. She had pneumonia and didn’t invite them in. Her back hurt, and she was bracing her body against the doorframe while they talked. David suggested they pray with her.

After the prayer, “Her back immediately was better,” David says. “Her whole demeanor changed.”

For the remainder of their conversation, Donna kept moving her back around, remarking joyfully, “Wow, God is with me.”

Ellen mentioned that her back also hurt from standing in one spot for so long, so the group prayed with Ellen. She too felt instantly better.

“We all rejoiced together,” David said. Figuring the moment was ripe to bring up the Holy Spirit, David spoke to Donna about Pentecost, and the two missionaries shared their testimonies.

“Would you like this?” David asked.

“Come on in!” Donna said.

After some more explanation and a few more questions for Donna, the missionaries prayed with her to receive the Holy Spirit.

Afterward, David warned her that the devil might try to convince her that nothing had happened during the prayer.

“No problem there,” Donna replied. “I know something happened!”
Beth Bulger (Servant Branch) hails from a region of Canada with a strong French influence. These roots run deep in her family’s cooking tradition. Her tourtière is a beloved part of the Bulger family Christmas celebration.
What is this that the Lord has done?
What man could imagine such love?
Our God has done the unspeakable;
He has made himself as we.
The King who reigns in glory and splendor
Is now born in lowliness, even as we.
You who reside in power and honor
Have made yourself helpless, even as we.
The Word who conceived and named all
creation
Must now acquire knowledge, even as we.
You who are the strength of your people
Now travel in weakness, even as we.
Jesus, you come with nothing but humility:
A giving heart, and desire to save.
We stand in awe at the depth of your love,
In wonder and homage our hearts bend low.

In 1983 Mary Ann Grauvogel (South Bend) wrote this song in response to a call from branch music ministry leader Joe Heintzelman for Christmas celebration music. It can be found in the 2008 Sing Out Your Praise songbook. As a reflection on the Incarnation, it is often sung at Christmas. We hope you will find it fruitful to meditate on it this Christmas season.

TOURTIÈRE
MAKES 2 PIES (EACH PIE SERVES 5-6)

Pie Crust Ingredients
MAKES 2 DOUBLE CRUSTS
5 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 ½ teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 pound lard, plus ¼ cup butter or margarine
1 large egg
1 tablespoon vinegar, plus a scant ¾ cup ice water

Filling Ingredients
1 large onion, chopped very finely
3 stalks celery, chopped very finely
2 pounds ground beef
1 pound ground pork (unseasoned)
2 cups water
1 cup oatmeal (any kind)
2 teaspoons worcestershire sauce
2 teaspoons nutmeg
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon allspice
1 tablespoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

Directions
1. Combine dry crust ingredients and cut in lard and butter until crumbly.
2. In a one-cup glass measure, slightly beat one egg. Add vinegar. Add ice water to the one-cup mark. (Vinegar makes it possible to roll and handle dough without it getting tough.) Add this liquid to the dry ingredients and mix with a fork or fingers until dough just comes together. Chill for at least 30 minutes before rolling out.
3. In large saucepan or stockpot, lightly brown meat, onions and celery, just enough to get the pink off. Drain all but a little grease. Mixture should be shiny and not dry or crumbly.
4. Add water and oatmeal and stir to combine. Mixture should be shiny and not dry or crumbly.
5. Roll out bottom crusts and place in pie dish. Fill pies with filling. Top with top crusts. Cut slits in the center to let steam release.
6. Bake pies at 375 degrees for 1-¼ to 1-½ hours, or until crust is golden brown and pies are bubbly. If edges begin to brown before the middle is done, cover edges with foil and continue baking. Let rest for 5 minutes before serving.

This hearty meat pie is traditionally served in French Canadian homes after late-night Christmas Eve church services. Beth’s family recipe makes showings at Lord’s Day or other celebratory meals prepared by her or her four daughters, Catherine and Annie (both South Bend), Theresa and Margaret (both Servant Branch).

Carolin Faytle also makes a simple tourtière for senior lunches in Servant Branch. Suzanne Rooke (Saskatoon), like other Canadian brothers and sisters of French or French Canadian descent, grew up with her family’s own variation of tourtière and spends a day every December baking 10 tourtière pies at once. She uses cooked mashed-up potatoes instead of oatmeal to thicken her meat mixture. Instead of Worcestershire sauce, she adds other spices by eye and taste, including at least cinnamon, garlic powder, sage and poultry seasoning. Her family tops the meat pie with either maple syrup or Thai sauce.

The Bulgers serve tourtière with ketchup, along with potatoes and coleslaw. They often make batches of the filling, the crust or whole pies in advance and freeze them. If you are baking whole pies from frozen, allow at least 2 hours baking time after letting the pies thaw for 30 minutes. When making crusts ahead, separate pie dough into single-crust sizes and roll into balls. Wrap each ball in wax paper or parchment paper followed by plastic wrap. If freezing the dough, remove from the freezer 12 to 24 hours before use and thaw in the refrigerator. Keep refrigerated until you are ready to roll it out.

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You can listen to a recording of the South Bend Music Ministry playing “Even As We” on the File Library. Go to https://peopleofpraise.org/file-library/116/ and log in. For assistance logging in, email directory@peopleofpraise.org.
HELEN DESMARAI S
By Cathy Rice

Helen made people feel they were special by the way she greeted them—with her twinkling blue eyes and a wide smile that spread across her whole face. Even in her declining years, she always greeted you with that huge smile.

Faith in God was very important to Helen. She and Albert took time every morning for a time of devotions together. They were both committed and involved in their church through the Catholic Women’s League and Knights of Columbus. Through the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit Helen was changed, and she became fully immersed in our life. She took great joy in her women’s group. She was also very hospitable, and Janice Ackerman recalls how potlucks at Helen’s were abundant. She didn’t shy away from hosting a family of nine for supper in her small home. Iris McAleese remembers that Albert and Helen took in a woman after a public meeting and let her stay with them.

She was a loving and devoted mother and grandmother for her family of three children, eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. She never truly retired or slowed down, because she was always busy: camping, fishing and canoeing with Albert, getting together with friends to play cards, researching genealogy and family history, caring for her mom and later for Albert, and just spending time with family and acquaintances. Helen had a creative passion for arts and crafts, and she expressed her fondest memories by painting the northern beauty that she discovered on many family canoe trips.

Our sister Helen’s love for God, family and friends was always evident.

HELEN BITTNER
• Helen Bittner was born April 6, 1937, on a farm in Leipzig, Saskatchewan. She died peacefully on August 10, 2017, in Saskatoon.
• She and Albert Desmarais were married in 1958 and raised three children. Albert died in 2009 at the age of 82.
• Helen received nursing aide training and then got her first job at a doctor’s office in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, where she met Albert. In the 1960s they moved to Saskatoon.
• Albert and Helen came to the People of Praise through the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit and made the covenant April 20, 2003.

RITA BIONDO
By Arlene Meyerhofer

Always known for her bright smile, Rita was the hub of activity for her five children, 12 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. Family members gathered around her every Sunday, even after she moved into assisted living. Her tradition of the children’s annual Christmas staircase photo has created a treasured family history which her son is proud to continue.

Rita got things done! After raising five children, she began working for New York Telephone Company as an operator in 1960. She joined the Communications Workers of America union, quickly advanced to union steward and then was secretary for nearly 10 years. She went on to serve as treasurer for the Western New York Council. In addition to full-time work and numerous union activities, Rita was also very involved in the Ladies of Charity at her parish. After retirement she joined the union’s Retirees Club, and in 1990 became president. CWA honored her in 1998 for her service to the Retired Members Council.

Community brothers and sisters knew Rita best for her generosity. She maintained a backyard pool where she always welcomed not only her own family but branch families as well. When the weather wasn’t suitable outside, she graciously invited people inside to use the pool table. She hosted countless events, always serving wonderful refreshments and sharing her faith.

One of her most cherished possessions was a picture of Jesus which hung in her kitchen. That picture went with her to the assisted-living facility, and the face of Jesus brought her great comfort. In her final hours, her gaze was intently upon the face of her beloved Savior.

RITA J. PANEK
• Rita J. Panek was born October 23, 1924, in Buffalo and died at the age of 92 on October 2, 2017, in Cheektowaga, NY.
• In 1991, she received the Erie County Clerk’s Office Community Service Award for her many years of contributions to working men and women in the county.
• She made the covenant of the People of Praise April 2, 1990.

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LIFENOTES

Births
Welcome to our newest sisters:
Sophia Catherine, born November 15 to Chris and Shauna Mianecki (South Bend).
Lucy Jane, born November 19 to Becca (northern Virginia) and Billy Brophy.

Anniversaries
Congratulations to these brothers and sisters, who recently celebrated major anniversaries:
Francis and Barbara Potts (Corvallis), 35 years, August 7.
Bill and Ann Kinkley (Corvallis), 40 years, August 20.
Wil and Shirley Juare (Servant Branch), 25 years, November 28.

Weddings
Best wishes to Greg Larmore (Colorado Springs) and Cara Hubl, who were married on October 8 at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Colorado Springs.
Congratulations to Bryan Huntingon and Marya Waletzko (both Servant Branch), who were married December 2 at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Minneapolis.

Work and Achievements
Beth Weber (New Orleans) retired last May after 40 years of service in the field of nursing at various hospitals, with the last 17 years as nursing supervisor at Tulane Lakeside Hospital for Women and Children.
Michael Busk (South Bend) started a new position as cofounder at Next Step Learning Centers, a personalized tutoring service for students of all ages.

Therese Fossen (Servant Branch) started a new job in September teaching art and math at Holy Trinity Elementary School in South Saint Paul.
Alan Nicklaus (Servant Branch) was ordained as a permanent deacon in the Roman Catholic Church for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis on December 9. This was the culmination of seven years of preparation: two years studying catechism and five years in deacon formation. His first assignment will be at All Saints Church in Lakeville, MN.
Luke Glover (Vancouver-Portland) has a new position as business analyst at Country Malt Group, a distribution company serving the brewery, distillery and cider industry with brewing supplies and equipment.
Elena Radtke (Servant Branch) started working as an officer at Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in October.

Deaths
We’ve received word that three members of the community have died. We pray for their families and friends in this time of loss.
Fr. John Reuther (Buffalo) died November 1, 2017.
Marylyn Barrett (South Bend) died November 3, 2017.
Michael O’Brien (Buffalo) died December 6, 2017.

Executive Office Announcements
Vancouver-Portland:
Pat Clark has been appointed to a three-year term of office as an area coordinator, effective December 1, 2017.

Corvallis:
John Carey was granted tenure as a coordinator of the People of Praise December 7, 2017.
“Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Lk. 12:28).