Appleton Strikes Deal for New Center
Tonight I’d like to talk about something that will become very familiar to us all, our new home. I call it College World.

College World is separate from the rest of society, so separate that most of us don’t know what’s going on outside of it until we catch a glimpse of a three-day-old *New York Times* in a trash can. It’s a whole city whose citizens are between the ages of 18 and 23 years old, with roads, buildings, buses and security police. College World is home for four years of life that are like no others, an odd hiatus that is supposed to usher you into adulthood—maybe.

Colleges have been selling this world to you since their glossy information packets arrived in your mailbox junior year of high school. Remember all the pictures of diverse groups of students studying on grassy lawns or displaying their school spirit at football games? “Come to College World,” they said. Hey, it sounded pretty good. You were sold.

When you enter College World, you can try everything. Finally, there are no parents telling you when you need to come home or when you can watch TV. You’re the boss. Along with your new freedom, there are decisions to make—your major, the clubs you’ll join. These decisions will impact not only your time in College World, but the rest of your life, too.

Basically, there are two ways you can make these decisions. You can make them yourself, or you can forfeit your freedom and let College World make them for you. You may have heard the phrase, “If you don’t school school, school will school you.” If you are not conscious of the decisions you are making, someone will make them for you and you’ll get schooled.

Of course, there’s more to College World than can be seen in all the promo photographs. In the real College World you can hardly miss the ads for “Girls Gone Wild!” and similar X-rated spring break videos. You hear guys whispering about which girl is hot, guys with the popular black and white poster of two women kissing hanging on their walls. Many College World women profess *Cosmo* as their Bible, reading each edition religiously, front to back, making sure to get the best sex tips and figuring out how to win Mr. “Right for Now.”

So what is College World all about? What does it say about women? Does it say we are willing to be bought for a price? That we’re obsessed with sex? Maybe.

I’d like to tell you some stories about some College World women I know:

- Last year during orientation, I heard a freshman proudly profess that within a month she would no longer be a virgin. Her word held true. Within the first month of school, she was no longer a virgin.
- My freshman year I walked in on a sort of celebration. Some of the girls in my dorm were reading *Cosmo*, giggling and celebrating one of the girls “becoming a woman.” She had given her virginity away to some guy she had recently met.
- I had a friend named Beatrice during my first year. Like most freshmen, she went to a few parties during her orientation weekend. When other partygoers offered her a drink she’d say, “No, thanks. I don’t drink.” By the end of her first weekend, though, she was drinking like everyone else. She exchanged her “No, thanks” for “Who’s up for a game of beer pong?”
- Another girl told me she’d slept with a guy who was having a competition to see how many girls he could sleep with. She said it with pride and accomplishment, but all I could think was how little she meant to him. He didn’t care about her major, her family, whether or not she was happy. He was playing a game.

I bet that, a year or so ago, if you had given any of these women a video of the things they would do during college, they’d have been appalled.

Don’t get schooled.

**College World, Women and the Kingdom of God**

*Editor’s Note: This talk, given on August 29, was aimed at freshmen women who had just arrived on campus at the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary’s College.*

*By Mary Timler*
The Lord offers freedom, freedom to be yourself, not what someone else wants you to be. Freedom to praise God. Freedom from College World.

and said, “Never!” Many of them never partied in high school, never got drunk.

Something happened. They surrendered their beliefs and erased their morals. They gave up their ambitions and dreams to become like everyone else. They got schooled. Why?

Last year, I walked into a residence hall and saw a girl being wheeled out on a stretcher. She looked pale and lifeless. We found out later that her roommate thought she had overdosed. But when they got to the hospital the doctors couldn’t find anything in her stomach. She hadn’t overdosed and she wasn’t sick. Misery was her problem, and that trip to the hospital was nothing more than a desperate cry for help.

Lots of women are getting schooled. They think those around them are happy, that everyone is having fun, that College World is it. I heard a valedictory last spring where all the valedictorian talked about was fun, friends, football games and shopping trips. I was ashamed to hear it. She had the chance to say something that could impact the rest of her class and she passed it by.

So what do College World women have to show for their time? A diploma? Probably. And along with it perhaps a few friends, some stories and photos of football games and drinking bloopers and plenty of isolation, slavery, hate, sorrow, mediocrity, purposelessness, disrespect, depression and selfish ambition. Isn’t there more than this at college?

Yes. There is more.

In opposition to College World, the Lord offers new life, real love, respect, joy, purpose and freedom. The Lord wants us to do college in a whole new way:

- He offers good relationships, with people who love us and will give everything for us. He offers friendships based on service, not on mutual gain, like the self-serving friendships where each person is thinking, What am I going to get from this?
- He offers respect, from women who won’t stab you in the back over a love interest, but who will love you as a sister and a daughter of God.

- The Lord offers freedom, freedom to be yourself, not what someone else wants you to be. Freedom to praise God. Freedom from College World.

There are thousands of men and women who think there are no alternatives to College World. They don’t know that they can live in the kingdom of God now. They need freedom. Our peers in college need us to spread what we know. It’s not the most popular message, but sometimes people need a wake-up call. Jesus said unpopular things and faced opposition, but that didn’t scare him or keep him from speaking the truth.

The Lord loves each of us and wants to reveal his love. He invites each of us to join him in his work, to do something that will change the world forever. He longs for the day when we will all be one with him, just as Jesus prayed: “May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you” (Jn. 17:21). He calls us so that we can be a force on this campus. He calls us to pray with confidence and authority, knowing that if the Lord is with us it doesn’t matter who is against us.

The kingdom of God is breaking out. There is work to be done. Don’t get schooled.
Collin Anderson: a newly underway sophomore at the University of Minnesota (U. of M.) who intends to major in computer science.

Mary Gaffney: a U. of M. junior with a major combining elements of nursing, health and business. Mary grew up in the South Bend branch.

Ben Reinhardt: a freshman at the U. of M. who intends to major in either mechanical engineering or computer science.

The Servant Branch Campus Division: Thirty-two brothers and sisters based in three houses, all within a few blocks of the main campus of the U. of M. in Minneapolis. The division is comprised of four households, two for men and two for women. Mike Wacker is the division coordinator.

1027: A three-story rooming house (plus basement), where two of the households live, a women’s household of 10 on the second floor and a men’s household of seven on the third floor.

The Parsonage: A beautiful home and former Lutheran parsonage, just across the street from 1027. The parsonage is home to a women’s household of seven.

The Annex: An apartment building where seven men live. The Annex is just one block down 11th Avenue from 1027 and the Parsonage.

5:30 a.m.

BEN: The alarm. I fight with the urge to roll over and fall back asleep. After a struggle, I kick myself out of bed. Matt Brickweg in the bunk below me does the same. We dress in silence for P.T. (physical training) and jog from the Annex over to 1027. Joined by the rest of the men in the campus division, we take off running, traveling a little over a mile to a grassy area on campus. Today is abs day, so we lie on our backs for a serious, stomach-burning workout.

6:00 a.m.

COLLIN: Today is my day to cook breakfast for the Annex men’s household. I open the fridge and find three hardboiled eggs left over from yesterday, so I find a pot and get a few more eggs boiling. Then I set the table for seven: bowls, glasses, spoons, napkins, cereal, (cornflakes cost just eight cents an ounce!), bananas, oranges and orange juice. Breakfast on a $1-per-person budget is ready. I turn off the stove, put on my jacket and walk one block from the Annex to 1027 for morning prayer with the other campus division men.

6:24 a.m.

MARY: The ten women in the 1027 women’s household gather for a breakfast of homemade granola (made by the men in the division) and honey whole-wheat bread (made by the women in exchange for the granola). Before prayer, we talk about how to save money on utilities so we can use that money for our work. After we sing “Cause To Celebrate,” Hannah Brummer, the head of our household, talks about what we’ve been doing in Servant School. Then we bring our cares and concerns before the Lord: Liz Pease has a job interview at 10 a.m.; Amy DeCelles, a graduate student who teaches a math class, is giving an exam today; Colleen Murray gives thanks for success on a recent chemistry exam; I have a microbiology exam later in the day.

6:30 a.m.

COLLIN: About 10 men are standing around waiting for morning prayer to begin. “It’s time to start the revolution!” Mike Wacker says. John Bowar picks up a guitar and we sing “The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases.” We hear a word from the
Lord to trust in him today, especially in our conversations with people outside the People of Praise. We pray for Allendale and the new River Ridge building. John is sick, so we lay our hands on him and end prayer by singing “Come, Let Us Sing.”

7:00 a.m.
MARY: I scurry to scan my e-mail for important letters. Rus Lyons has e-mailed me about Lord’s Day next weekend, when he will be the head cook for more than 30 people. I am the division’s “Grand Dinner Planner,” so it falls to me to coach the cooks as they plan their meals. I orchestrate the influx of guests, too. This Saturday we’re going to have a full house!

7:45 a.m.
COLLIN: I grab my backpack, unlock my bike and head off to my on-campus job in a computer cluster. I bike from the Annex past the Parsonage and 1027 down 11th Avenue. I cross to the other side of University Avenue, turn left and I’m on a bridge over the Mississippi River, and it’s cold out. I continue until I get to the plaza area, where I notice that I’ve been biking 20 seconds behind Rachel Osterhouse, a music major who lives in the Parsonage. I park my bike just outside Blegen Hall, a building where I work and have a class. I have about an hour to study before I start work.

7:50 a.m.
MARY: As I swim at the University of Minnesota Rec Center, I remember my Vine & Branches photography assignment—taking pictures of Dinkytown for this article. I start brainstorming about how to be creative, and plan a time later in the day to start shooting. I think about the song we sang at morning prayer, “Cause To Celebrate,” and reflect on the day so far. I recall all my causes to celebrate, and this day has just begun.

8:45 a.m.
MARY: The sun is shining, but as I bike toward the bus stop I feel a splat in my eye. A SNOWFLAKE? On a sunny day? I reach to scratch my head. My hair is frozen! I get to the bike racks and there is actually a spot for me today. No sign yet of the bus . . . still none . . . class starts in five minutes . . . FINALLY! Three buses pull up together. It is a fast, jerky ride to the U. of M. campus located in St. Paul. The professor digs into the lecture soon after I arrive.

9:00 a.m.
COLLIN: I walk into the computer cluster where I work and begin to install software on 25 laptops. I wave to Colleen Murray, a civil engineering major in the division, who is walking down the hallway. We work just down the hall from each other on Thursdays.

10:10 a.m.
BEN: Immediately after math class, I rush to physics lab. Today’s lab requires quite a bit of experimenting. I have to vary the settings frequently and compare data from previous experiments. Tedium.

12:00 p.m.
MARY: My American Studies class ended early, so I hop back on the bus, eating my lunch as I go. I am looking forward to the end of my microbiology exam, when I will meet up with Angie Hass and ride home with her.

12:30 p.m.
BEN: I get home from class for lunch, which is leftovers, but I love it because it is the really good beef stroganoff we had last night. After lunch I finish some studying for more math and physics later today.

1:00 p.m.
MARY: The microbiology exam is difficult and takes me every second of the available time to finish, but I do. I’ve been working on studying less
6:00 p.m.
MARY: On Thursdays, the two households based in 1027 eat supper together. My table talks about the open-source software movement, and how we can put modern technology to work for the People of Praise. Collin Anderson is teaching computer programming to some of us who are interested.

BEN: The Annex and Parsonage households eat together every Thursday. Tonight we talk about the Tacoma Narrows Bridge near Seattle and why it collapsed in 1940. We also consider the high costs of admission at some Minnesota private schools (someone said you could buy 18 cars for the price of kindergarten), and how much better Trinity School is for just a fraction of the cost. Chores follow dinner.

7:00 p.m.
MARY: With 32 mouths to feed, weekly shopping is an ordeal, but we take a highly organized approach. Every Thursday night, each household sends two shoppers to the grocery store. Each household has a separate list, but we all shop together because it’s more fun that way. Tonight, Kathleen Mehaffey and I are representing the 1027 women’s household. We set a goal of two hours for our shopping trip and make it home with time to spare.

The campus division gathers for Servant School teachings.

9:00 p.m.
MARY: Our household eats ice cream, laughing as we enjoy some down time together and discuss Friday night’s household activity: a discussion on art and culture in People of Praise cities.

10:15 p.m.
MARY: I have a meeting with Cara Dal Pra to finalize the menu for this Saturday’s Lord’s Day meal.

11:30 p.m.
BEN: I head back to the Annex. Just as I’m about to turn in for the night, Rus asks if I have time to help pray with a guy to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. We spend an hour praying with this brother, and then celebrate. We have just roundhouse-kicked Satan! Glory to God—that was the highlight of my day. Finally, I turn in for a few precious hours of sleep, then, repeat.

1:15 a.m.
MARY: Kathleen Mehaffey arrives home from the airport with her sister Emily, who is visiting us from New Orleans. Tomorrow will begin early, since Kathleen needs to leave for work at 6:30. Off to bed I go.
Brothers and Sisters,

We’re very grateful to everyone who responded so generously to last month’s appeal for donations to *Vine & Branches*. We know that without you there would be no branches of the community and certainly no *Vine & Branches*! This month’s request is our last for a year, so if you haven’t had the chance to donate I’d like to invite you to do so this Christmas season.

Giving *Vine & Branches* to your loved ones is a terrific way to show them what God is doing in the community and to help this magazine grow, too. Please see the envelope in the middle of the magazine if you would like to send gift subscriptions to the top people on your Christmas list or would prefer simply to make a donation.

Thanks for generating so much good news and keeping us hopping to put it all in print.

In Christ,
Sean Connolly
Our Newly Covenanted Brothers and Sisters

Interviews by Trish Brewer

Editor’s note: Vine & Branches interviewed each of the 14 brothers and sisters who made the covenant in October. Look for interviews with those who made the covenant in November in next month’s issue.

Jon Balsbaugh, Servant Branch, 33, Humane Letters Seminar teacher, Trinity School at River Ridge

What first attracted you to the People of Praise? As a new teacher at Trinity School, one of the first things that struck me was the strong family life I saw. I liked the way couples raised their kids, the way they respected one another, the way families seemed to get along. I was also really attracted to the kind of ecumenism I saw. It was real ecumenism, not watered down, and it had a high intellectual caliber.

Why did you choose to make the covenant? I found everything I was looking for in a community in the People of Praise. It was the best example I had ever encountered of a way to live common life—ordinary on the one hand and extraordinary on the other.

What’s your greatest blessing in the community? I really wanted the chance to live out ecumenism. I had been invested in ecumenism for a long time but had only been able to live it out in an intellectual way.

Jen Balsbaugh, Servant Branch, 33, homemaker and home-school teacher

What first attracted you to the community? I was curious about it when Jon first started teaching at Trinity School, because the conversations I had with faculty members were so rich. I felt like I could talk to them and be real about my life. Four years ago, at the end of the school year, Jon said, “What would you think about looking into the People of Praise?” Well, we had seen families that were examples of what we wanted our own family to look like, and they were all in the People of Praise.

Why did you choose to make the covenant? The process felt very natural. The way that the community structures itself matched the way we wanted our life to be. Every step along the way confirmed that we were headed in the right direction. I was also struck by the way we talk about the complementary roles of men and women—the beauty of that.

Liz Brewer, South Bend, assigned to Allendale, 25, pediatric nurse

Sharing Excerpt: Growing up in the community, I was handed a full platter of the goodness of life in Christ. I didn’t always feel that way, but I remember a turning point after my senior year of high school, at the time when Thad Finke and Aaron Day died. They were sons of community families and had just graduated from Trinity School at Greenlawn. It was a horrible tragedy and the People of Praise just gave, like it always does. Everybody was over at the Finkes’ and the Days’ houses, bringing meals and praying with people. Despite the sorrow, the Lord was still the Lord of the People of Praise, and I wanted that. I wanted a house built on a rock, a body that loves as Christ does. All of a sudden I was able to see what had always been there.

Jon and Jen Balsbaugh

Nathan Barrett, South Bend, assigned to Allendale, 28, project manager for the People of Praise in Allendale

What first attracted you to the community? In high school I realized that all the men I admired and respected the most were in the People of Praise, and they all said that their relationships with God were the reason they were worth anything. I didn’t buy that at the time, but it really stuck with me. During college I spent a lot of time deciding what I didn’t want to do and who I didn’t want to be like. I would meet people, see what they were doing and decide whether or not I wanted to have anything to do with them, based on the men in the group. I played rugby for a while, decided I didn’t want to be like those guys, and stopped playing. Eventually I realized that I do want to be like the men in the People of Praise. I admired the way they work hard, both at their normal jobs and in serving the community, and how they treat women with honor and respect. If men like that were in the People of Praise, there had to be something to it.
Anastasia Evans, Servant Branch, 63, psychologist, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Counseling Center

What first attracted you to the People of Praise? I heard of the People of Praise from Beth Bulger. After church one day someone was admiring my earrings and I mentioned that I’d bought them in Canada. Beth heard me talking and said, “I’m from Canada,” so that helped us get to know each other. When my granddaughter died and I shared that with Beth, she was very supportive. She came to a mass for my granddaughter and invited me over afterward. In 1998, I started going to public meetings and noticed how different it was that this group of people were committed to one another. I was living alone at that time and wanted to expand my relationships.

What’s the greatest blessing you’ve experienced in community life? Relationships are the biggest blessing. Before joining the community I was praying for friendships and for guidance. I knew friendships with good people would help me be closer to God.

Dan Ficker, Servant Branch, 24, web developer, August Ash, Inc.

What’s your greatest blessing in the community? Definitely the best part is the many and loving members of the People of Praise. In no other place can you have hundreds of friends of all ages, sometimes across the country. It’s also great to drop in on another branch and find people who feel like family even though you’ve never met them.

Can you tell us a funny story from your time in the community? One of the funnier things happened when Bill and Carolyn Reinhardt were getting married. I was telling friends how I was going to Indiana for “the wedding of my roommate to my sister’s roommate’s sister”! Oh yeah, and to make it more confusing, they met and live in New Orleans even though they are from Minneapolis and Indiana, respectively. How’s that for a confusing story that can only happen in the People of Praise?
Jon Grams, Colorado Springs, 33, self-employed arborist

Why did you choose to make the covenant? I made the covenant because I had invested so much of my life in community relationships and because no one else has the commitment and the common life we have.

How has the community changed you? In 1993, I spent a year with the Brotherhood, in their study program. That year was huge, in terms of forming the way I have lived the rest of my life. We had a hard-core life in common and I had to do without the possessions that I normally had. I was called on to be more patient, less judging, and my whole attitude toward possessions changed. I found out I was able to live with a lot less. Music, conversation and dinners together were very important. I continue to apply a lot of that in my life today. For example, I do a possessions review on my own every year to see what I really need and what I can live without.

Cathy Grill, South Bend, assigned to Allendale, 23, pediatric nurse

Sharing Excerpt: When I was praying about making the covenant, the Lord kept showing me that he is forming a people to build the kingdom of God on earth. I prayed for a Scripture passage and got Luke 1:54-55: “He has shown mercy to our fathers and remembered his holy covenant, the oath he spoke to Abraham our father, to deliver us from the enemy, that we might serve him fearlessly as holy and righteous people all the days of our lives.” The last part about living fearlessly as a holy and righteous people made me think of all of you in the People of Praise. It’s because of you that I’ve been able to serve the Lord and return the love he’s shown us in his covenant.

What’s something you want to do in the People of Praise in the next few decades? I want to start a People of Praise medical clinic in Allendale.

Mark Mullen, northern Virginia, 40, student, learning to teach English to speakers of other languages

What first attracted you to the community? I had friends in the community: Nick and Polly Jayjack, Russ Adams, Michele Beier, Tracy Scriba. It all kind of clicked and I knew this was something fulfilling that would have a very positive and dramatic effect on my life.

How have you changed since joining the People of Praise? My prayer life has gotten more serious. Also, my devotion to building God’s kingdom has grown through prayer, service, being connected to all the people in the world, and doing God’s work.

How did you decide to make the covenant? It was a gradual revelation from the Lord. I had been considering it and asking him for a while, and whenever I asked him if I should make the covenant, it didn’t take long for him to tell me “yes.” Once I decided to give my life to the People of Praise, it was clear that my life would be more blessed, more fulfilling, more rewarding, downright easier and more fun.
**Jen Torma, Servant Branch, 26, physical therapist, Institute for Athletic Medicine**

Sharing excerpt: I’ve been thinking a lot about the life of Jesus lately, how his heart was always moved by the people he encountered. I can really say that my heart has been moved by all of you during the time I have been underway. I have lived in four different branches, and in each branch I have experienced great love, rich friendship and plenty of wisdom on how to live life together in common. My brothers and sisters in the campus division in Dinkytown have also moved my heart. Their fierce love for the Lord and desire to put all their gifts and talents and time into building a rich common life impelled me to give my all to make the covenant.

**David Salmon, South Bend, 23, president of One:Ten Communications**

Has there been a particular community teaching series that’s been life-giving or freeing for you? Servant School. I remember going to the branch center on Saturdays to reupholster chairs. It was a great opportunity to work together, and it showed me how central service is to our life. That really came out again when I started working for the LaSalle Company last year. I saw how much the employees served their customers and one another.

**Hugh Springer, Jr., Servant Branch, 25, software consultant, Accenture**

What first attracted you to the People of Praise? My first contact with the community was through Trinity School at River Ridge, which I began attending in eighth grade. I was involved with the community’s youth group and got involved with public meetings in Servant Branch. I also started talking to Joel Kibler.

**What first attracted you to the People of Praise?**

I grew up in the community and came underway just after graduating from high school. One summer I took a vacation in the Canadian Rockies with a big group of community members from Servant Branch. We stopped at the Saskatoon branch. Seeing people spend their vacations together and share a lot with one another gave me a new perspective on what community life was like. That’s what I wanted when I came underway.

**Did the Lord say anything in particular to you about making the covenant?**

This summer I was watching one of the live broadcasts from Allendale. I remember hearing about how we need to do something big for God. We need to act boldly and make sacrifices in order to accomplish what the Lord wants us to do. I thought about all the People of Praise members who had made huge sacrifices for me throughout my life. That was really reason enough for me. That’s what I want to do!

**David Zimmel, South Bend, assigned to Allendale, 23, manager of Windows, Doors and More Outlet**

What first attracted you to the People of Praise? The quality of the men. A lot of my peers were in the community, so that was obviously a factor. But the biggest reason was that all the older guys who were in the People of Praise were just terrific. They were who I wanted to be like.

**What is your all-time best moment in the community?**

Last fall I drove down to New Orleans from Shreveport to help after Hurricane Katrina. Three brothers had driven down from northern Virginia and the four of us were staying at the Slatterys’ house along with the Reinhardts and the Chettas. We were all on the same page and the only question we had to answer was, “What time are we going to do morning prayer?” We didn’t have to worry about anything else!
Meet Ralph Whittenburg

By Jill A. Boughton

Ralph is an inexhaustible worker,” says Paul DeCelles (South Bend), referring to the head controller of the People of Praise. “He is very good at project- ing and planning. He’s enabled us to pass every official audit with flying colors. As his work head, I sometimes ask him about an expenditure that doesn’t appear on the budget sheet. Within 30 seconds, he can retrieve the answer from his files.”

Ralph Whittenburg didn’t set out to be an accountant. He grew up in a small town near South Bend and graduated from Purdue University with degrees in industrial management and psychology, hoping to work in human resources. His first job was in sales, but he says he soon “stumbled into” the fact that he loved accounting.

Ralph worked in Purdue’s Memorial Union one summer, where one of the perks was chatting with the girls behind the candy counter. After sharing a Coke with Sarah, Ralph offered to drive her home after work. When she said yes, he had to scramble to borrow a car. They spent time together every day for the rest of that summer and married in 1963. They are the parents of two pioneering Trinity School students, Mark and Marci, and have five grandchildren.

When Ralph was working in Louisville, Kentucky, the Louisville Council on Religion and Race asked him and Sarah to organize seminars in the white suburbs on the topic of race relations, in the aftermath of local riots. That brought this quiet man to the attention of the FBI, and eventually cost him his job at a housing components company. It also introduced him to a college student who invited the Whittenburgs to prayer meetings at a monastery. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1969.

They moved to South Bend and bought a house on the west side, where they hosted the St. James Prayer Group, whose members included Paul and Peggy Go (South Bend). Hungering for Christian community, the Whittenburgs also attended charismatic prayer meetings at Notre Dame.

In 1972 they heard a talk by Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, about an elderly couple in southern Alabama advocating for integration and facing opposition from the Ku Klux Klan. Sensing the Lord’s call, the Whittenburgs and another South Bend family sold their homes and moved to Alabama to support the couple. The two families wound up buying a house and living there together, but found household living a challenge. “We wanted community, but we didn’t know how to live in one,” admits Ralph. “Amazingly, we parted as friends.”

After a year in Alabama, the Whittenburgs joined Reba Place Fellowship, a Christian community in Chicago. They loved living in com-

“God owns the world. If we’re doing the Lord’s work, he’s going to fund us. He just picks strange ways to do it sometimes.”

mon, on a stipend set at the level of federal Welfare recipients, but they missed the worship styles of both the Lutheran Church and charismatic prayer meetings. After nine months, Ralph contacted Paul DeCelles about moving to South Bend to join the People of Praise. The Whittenburgs went on a Community Weekend in February of 1974 and moved back to South Bend later that month.

In his first three months in South Bend, Ralph had many second interviews but no job offers. Clem Walters kept saying, “I think you should come work for Charismatic Renewal Services.” Ralph was hesitant at first but eventually he saw that the Lord wanted him to take the job. He never looked back, working at CRS for 10 years, then working full-time for the People of Praise. He now serves as controller for the People of Praise, Trinity Schools and Partners in Service (the nonprofit organization responsible for Allendale construction).

Sarah also works in the accounting department in the office next door to Ralph’s at Greenlawn. Although

Faith has cash value.
Members in Appleton celebrated a huge milestone in their common life on November 4, when the purchase agreement was signed for their first branch center, a 3,200-square-foot building. They’ve already begun extensive renovations to the former dental clinic and Pizza Hut to create more useable space, and everybody is more than eager to move into the building permanently.

This major step has been a long time coming. For 17 years, Michael and Nancy Madden generously provided space in their basement for a branch of office and for leaders’ meetings. Over the past 10 years, the branch has been on the lookout for a building to buy as a community center. Last September, when the Maddens made plans to move, a team began scouting the area in earnest for a new place. David Sklorenko (South Bend), the coordinator for Appleton, remembers, “We looked at buildings ranging in price from $200,000 to $1,300,000. This building is just the right size and had the best location. The other buildings were all far from residences, among warehouses in commercial zones. This one is the closest to where the branch had been meeting, and is more in line with where our members live.” The branch was able to purchase the building for just $163,500, thanks to a generous donation from the dentist and previous owner, Dr. Daniel Johanek.

The new center sits in the heart of a residential neighborhood, but is part of a small commercial area—a shopping center with a credit union, a locally owned hardware store, a day-care center and a storefront church. This new location in a small-business area in the heart of a neighborhood “offers us a natural way to raise the flag of the People of Praise,” David says.

David Lee is a business associate of Dr. Johanek, so he was appointed to oversee the purchase. David Sklorenko says, “David did an excellent job in setting up the purchase and working out legal and financial details on behalf of the People of Praise.”

The whole branch has begun enthusiastically crafting the building into their new home. They’ve torn down walls, removed ceiling tiles and installed new wiring, salvaging cabinets, two-by-fours and electrical parts along the way. Norm Hippert is spearheading the effort. When the dust settles, there will be offices, a library, a large meeting room, a few small meeting rooms and a kitchen. Ruth Schmelzer says, “We’re excited about having our own home, but we know it means putting our hands, arms, paint brushes and gardening tools to work!” The gardening tools are needed since the building occupies a ¾-acre lot with overgrown landscaping.

Appleton is in a hubbub these days. Says Ruth, “Bring on the grills, the brats and the burgers!” Not to mention the meetings, retreats and other branch activities. The new building will amplify the already vibrant life of the People of Praise.

Ralph has been a member of the People of Praise board of governors since 1997.

her degree is in secondary education with a major in history and minors in English and home economics. (“She still corrects my grammar,” Ralph says.) Sarah took an accounting course so she could better support her husband. They have visited almost every branch as financial consultants.

Over the years, the Whittenburgs have built and maintained a friendship with Millard Fuller. In 1977, when Habitat for Humanity was just beginning its mission to build houses for needy families, Ralph traveled to Americus, Georgia, to help set up the organization’s first set of books. “Obviously, they’ve expanded quite a bit since then,” he says. Habitat for Humanity has built more than 200,000 houses around the world since its inception.

As the community’s controller, Ralph prepares budgets and watches over our cash flow. He knows the value of a dollar, and he also sees plenty of cash value in faith. “God owns the world,” he said at the Leaders’ Conference for Men in 2002. “If we’re doing the Lord’s work, he’s going to fund us. He just picks strange ways to do it sometimes. At times I’m not sure how he’s going to do it, but he always comes through. Money is just a way and a means to accomplish what we’re doing. It’s not the guiding factor. The guiding factor is, what does the Lord want us to do and how are we going to go about doing it?”

From left: David Sklorenko, Sr., (South Bend), Dr. Daniel Johanek, David Lee (Appleton). Dr. Johanek made a generous donation to help with the purchase of the building.
John Childers was born in Powhattan, a tiny town in northwest Louisiana, about an hour south of Shreveport. He grew up on a farm—his father was the overseer—drinking water from a hand pump or a cistern, eating food cooked on a wood-burning stove, and using an outhouse supplied with paper from a Sears, Roebuck catalog. John always remembered the first time he saw an electric wall switch—he was 14. Though he didn’t grow up with electricity, his family always had plenty to eat, even during the worst of the Depression.

After World War II, John’s father could no longer provide for the family by farming, so the Childerses moved farther north to Shreveport. John played football at Shreveport’s Byrd High School, earning four varsity letters and a nickname, “Smasher.”

He loved football and followed the game closely the rest of his life. He knew the names of Heisman Trophy winners dating back to the 1940s, collegiate national championship coaches, and players from his former high-school squad. John never missed a football-related Trivial Pursuit question, and one of his favorite activities was watching a game with his men’s group.

After high school, John got a job at a bank in the mortgage and investment department, where he learned about real-estate law. He began buying rental houses, hiring retired bricklayers and carpenters to refurbish them, and using his banking background to do all the legal registration work himself. He offered owner-financing to people who couldn’t afford down payments. Many people in Shreveport own their own homes today because of his help. John spent the rest of his life buying, renovating and managing properties around Shreveport.

Except for a stint in the Marines and a brief time in Texas, John lived with his mother until he was 50. He and one brother paid off his mother’s mortgage for her, and John helped another brother raise his eight children, paying their dental bills, taking them on trips to Washington, DC, and taking them waterskiing. When John began courting Mary Helen Pistorius, Mary noticed the tender way he treated his mother and his younger relatives. John captured her heart—the two were married in 1979. They had two sons, one of whom died at birth. The other son, John Francis, is now 25.

John had an unforgettable mischievous streak. One time at a Christmas party, the branch was playing a game where each person secretly chooses a famous character’s name, writes it down and puts it in a basket. All the names are read aloud and then people try to guess who picked which names, except that no one could remember a name that would match John. We tried for five minutes before he let us know that he just hadn’t put a name in the basket at all! Another example: John told Mary that he wanted his tombstone to bear the inscription, “I told y’all I was sick!”

John loved our work in Allendale. He stopped by Yale Avenue frequently, checking on the progress of construction, encouraging the workers and occasionally treating them to a soul-food lunch or inviting them over for some of Mary’s gumbo. He always wanted to know the latest news.

Bud Rose (South Bend) travels frequently to Allendale to manage construction work and was surprised to find out that John knew the neighborhood backwards and forwards. “I saw John in a new light, as a city-builder, a man who was loved by the people he did business with in Allendale.”

—Bud Rose

John Childers was married to Mary Pistorius Childers for 27 years. They had two sons, one of whom died at birth. The other son, John Francis, is now 25. John died of kidney failure, following a long period of declining health. He is missed by the Shreveport branch, and by the people whom he helped in Allendale and other parts of Shreveport. Mary remembers her husband with a Scripture passage, Isaiah 61:3, “They will be called oaks of justice, planted by the Lord to show his glory.”
LifeNotes

**River Ridge Construction Update**

Last month we reported that the auditorium, two-station gym and auxiliary gym for the new River Ridge building would be constructed as unfinished shells, unless enough money could be raised to complete them in the first stage of construction. Since then, the committee charged with overseeing the construction (Sam Claassen, Paul DeCelles and Clem Walters) has approved new and final plans. These plans call for the auditorium (with a heightened, 30-foot ceiling) and two-station gym to be fully finished in the first stage of construction. The auxiliary gym has been taken out of the plans and is not being built.

**Jeff and Tia Hewitt** (Mishawaka, IN) are happy to announce God’s gift of **Mason John**, born October 25.

**Corey and Shalimar Masters** (Colorado Springs) are joyfully announcing the birth of **Anthony Louis Benedict**, born on November 15.

**Trinity School at Greenlawn** has announced that five of the 36 members of the class of 2007 have been named National Merit Semifinalists, based on their performances on the PSAT test in 2005. Of the approximately 1.4 million high-school students who take the test, only 16,000 or about 1.1% are named semifinalists.

**From the Executive Office**

**Congratulations to the following members of the Oahu branch, who made the covenant of the People of Praise on November 12, 2006:**

- Lori Gress
- Julie Klein
- Maile Murphy

**South Bend:**

Kathy Rawlins was released from the covenant of the People of Praise on November 7, 2006.
“Oh how good, how pleasant it is when brethren dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1).