BEFORE & AFTER IN ALLENDALE
When God called the entire New Orleans branch back to the city after Hurricane Katrina, he also opened the work of rebuilding to the entire People of Praise, so we could provide brothers and sisters, pastoral wisdom, jobs and cash to accomplish a huge task in the suffering city. Some New Orleans branch members spent months living in trailers, dealing with insurance companies and gathering up their lives after the devastation. Today, with just over half of the New Orleans population back home, the branch is bigger than ever, and members are finding creative ways to increase common life, with an eye to opportunities for city-building.

“Our branch is poised to grow,” says principal branch coordinator Mike Coney. “We are in a unique position to begin city-building because of Katrina. There is an easy availability of properties in close proximity to each other. Our experiences with Katrina have taught us to be detached from our houses and possessions, making us more willing to move to new neighborhoods to build common life.”

Building has to happen anyway. The hurricane damaged 14 members’ homes, six of them in a major way. The Barnitz and Chetta families lived in FEMA trailers for more than a year before returning to their houses this spring. Tom and Diane Evans moved back into their home this summer, after extensive renovations. Bill and Tucky Argus, who lost their home, their daughter’s home and a family home in Mississippi, are renting a place near two of their children until they build a new home.

The community’s Katrina Fund made much of this progress possible. Members donated nearly $40,000, and all but about $3,000 of that has been spent for food, an emergency generator, a shop vac for pumping water out of houses, refrigerators, tree removal, assistance with inflated rents and mortgages, supplements for lost income and insurance, a rental car so a displaced member could commute to work, and travel expenses for people who came from other branches to help with renovations.

“Brothers and sisters who may not know us personally have sacrificed some of their hard-earned money to ease the impact of Katrina on us,” Tom Evans says. Some of the money was used to fly branch children to Buffalo’s summer camp because Delta camp was destroyed.

In addition to short-term work accomplished by brothers and sisters visiting from other branches, some community members heard God call them to relocate to New Orleans.
Sally Spahn, who moved from New Orleans to South Bend to teach at Trinity School at Greenlawn nine years ago, heard the Lord calling her back, and she moved this summer. Mike and Angela Pingel also moved from South Bend, relocating Mike’s Finer Point Renovations business into the city, where trusted contractors were in demand. “Mike was available, qualified and wonderful,” John Barnitz says. In addition to doing work for branch members, his reputation won jobs with their friends and relatives.

“Mike has been a real blessing to the branch,” adds Tom. “He has repaired our homes, making them more beautiful than ever, and he and Angela are a great addition to our life.”

Our covenant to support one another in all needs, spiritual, material and financial, has borne fruit among branch members. Marlena Doherty found the Arguses a home to rent. A branch member gave the Murrays $4,000 for a new car after vandals destroyed theirs. John Barnitz got advice from his men’s group and other men that helped him renegotiate with his insurance company and win money for previously denied claims. The Coneyes and Valerios were able to return quickly to their houses in Metairie, where damage was minimal, opening their homes to families whose houses didn’t have roofs or were covered with mold.

Some effects of the hurricane are still vivid in the city, including the hard-hit Lakeview neighborhood. On her way to Mt. Carmel Academy, 16-year-old Ceile Valerio sees piles of wreckage and spray-painted notices where bodies were found. The destruction of businesses means Tucky Argus has to drive 15 minutes to a drugstore instead of having three within walking distance. The electrical power plant where Brian Weber works is struggling to hire workers because high costs of living have created a labor shortage.

But some things are returning to normal for branch members. Steve Doherty lost his job when the hospital where he worked closed, but he now has a job at another hospital. Bill Argus’s architecture firm has enough work for him to expand, including a job for his son. John Barnitz, a University of New Orleans professor, taught classes online for a semester while living in Shreveport. He’s back teaching on the University of New Orleans campus again, although he also teaches one online course for evacuated students. Karen Murray lost her teaching job when her school was flooded and spent a year as a substitute teacher, teacher’s assistant and tutor, but now she has a full-time teaching job again.

But “normal” means something new in the branch, as members work to maintain an intense shared life and make it more visible. The Pingels, who lived with the Evanses for five months when they moved down, still have weekly dinners with the family, alternating houses. Bill and Carolyn Reinhardt bought a house next door to the Pingels and share meals several times a week. Carmen Glaeser has wine and hors d’oeuvres on her patio once a week for whoever wants to stop by. This year’s Pentecost celebration was held on the Mehaffey and Slattery front lawns, so that any passers-by could see the festivities and prayers. A single women’s household will start this fall.

“I can’t think of a more opportune place for city-building,” Brian Weber says. “If not here, then where?”

Nick and Elaine Chetta’s house flooded when the West Esplanade Canal jumped its banks after Katrina. They spent 16 months in a FEMA trailer and are still unpacking and sleeping on a sofa after returning to their home. Here they’re sitting on the floor of their still unfinished dining room.
Thinking Together

Aging and Our Common Life

By Joel Kibler

Note: This article on the various situations of older members in the community comes from some reflections Craig Lent asked me to share during the last Pastoral Training Institute. It isn’t a teaching or a proposal, but a set of my personal observations, stemming from some discussions within Servant Branch, where I serve as principal branch coordinator. Basically, I want to stimulate our analysis and our action as a community—and I emphasize the need for action.

At this moment in our history, many young people are joining the community, and yet, at the very same time, the percentage of elderly community members is also increasing, and this percentage will likely continue to increase over the next decade.

The 2006 statistics for the People of Praise show that we are 1,818 covenant and underway members. Fifty-four percent of us, 977 people, are what I’m calling “older members,” that is, members who are 51 or over. This 977 breaks down as follows:

- 549 are aged 51 to 60.
- 166 are aged 61 to 65.
- 262 are over the age of 65.

I’d like to consider three distinct age groupings and corresponding life situations.

Many of us aged 51-65 are singles and empty-nesters who want meaningful roles in the community, now that we are not so involved with our children’s school lives. We need to do long-term financial and health planning for our retirement and elderly years. We are often caring for our own elderly parents.

Many of us aged 65 to 75 are fully retired and have more choices about the use of our time. We also want meaningful roles in the community and we often volunteer in our churches, because we see work we can do. We receive fixed incomes and we are often thinking about downsizing to smaller homes. Many of us are busy with issues related to our adult children. We like spending time with our grandchildren, too.

Many of us who are aged 75 and up are still going strong, praise God! Some of us in this age group, however, are facing or will face serious and sometimes fearful health issues. Some of us have transportation needs or need help with housecleaning and repairs. Some of us are examining end-of-life care options, perhaps moving in with family, moving to assisted living, common living or nursing homes. Some of us may be home-bound, due to sight and mobility problems. Some of us have hearing difficulties. Some of us feel useless.

As a community, we need to think hard and creatively about at least four fundamental needs of our older members: meaningful roles, housing, health and finance.

Meaningful roles is a concern because, as we get older, isolation often increases. We are often less able to get to meetings and we lack the personal contacts that come with having children in school. We want to use our time well, but there may be no community outreach into which we can channel our energies. Community involvement could boil down to just two points of contact a week:

Clockwise, from upper left: Dale and Pat Scott (Oahu); Bob McDonough (l) and Bob Cramer (South Bend); Jim Kaiser instructs Dan Couch (South Bend); Adela Waymouth (South Bend).
As a community, we need to think hard and creatively about at least four fundamental needs of our older members: meaningful roles, housing, health and finance.
Finances:
- Hold a periodic retirement and financial-planning seminar.
- Provide information on durable power of attorney and health-decision power.
- Some members are financial advisors, and they’ve worked with other members with regard to wills, including bequeathing money to the community.

Health:
- Again, we already provide a tremendous amount of care in a wide variety of ways. Other ideas?
- Boosting the sound at community meetings for people with hearing problems.
- A periodic medical clinic at the branch office to check blood pressure, ask questions, get simple advice from a nurse.

Besides these “thinking out loud” brainstorming ideas, I’d like to add several general comments, based on my research and conversations with professionals. Of course, the comments of all the brothers and sisters who have had experience in caring for family and community members in declining health will be very helpful in our future discussions.

The top two causes of depression among elderly people generally are lack of meaningful roles and loneliness. Many elderly people do not die directly from diseases but from the effects of lack of human contact.

Nursing homes use a hospital model. They provide diagnosis, treatment, rehab and medicines but not a complete life. A person lives in a nursing home 24 hours a day, but staff contact with residents is less than three hours a day. Residents could spend 21 hours a day alone.

Residents in independent and assisted living can also experience lack of meaningful roles and loneliness. Staff may spend less time with those who have less need for medical care.

Should we conclude, then, that caregiving by family at home and through foster care is better than institutional care? Not necessarily. Health care for the elderly can become very complicated. Most noninstitutional models fail, due to caregiver burnout and lack of proper medical training.

Elderly people do best when there are opportunities for frequent contact with other people who can do things with them. Some of the most effective models feature many social events and interactions, including interactions with children.

By the way, in case you’re thinking about it, a large People of Praise nursing home would be extremely difficult to pull off, both financially and in terms of staffing. However, there are some new smaller-scale models for nursing care: 10 to 12 residents and a small staff. They focus on spiritual and social needs as well as medical needs, and they involve a lot of contact between residents and staff and neighbors.

I hope that these few thoughts will prompt all of us to do our own thinking and praying and discussing about how we, as a covenant community of brothers and sisters, can love one another more effectively.
Capturing Our Life: A Vine & Branches Photography Contest

ELIGIBLE PHOTOGRAPHS:
This contest has just one requirement: photographs must capture some aspect of our life in the People of Praise. The photograph that, in the opinion of the judges, best combines a meaningful portrayal of community life with artistic expression and technical excellence will win.

Both high-resolution digital files and prints are acceptable, though we prefer digital files. We encourage multiple submissions, but please send no more than five per entrant. Vine & Branches will announce the winners in a future issue.

PRIZES:
Vine & Branches will award $50 to the first-place winner and print his or her photograph on the cover of an upcoming issue. Three finalists will receive gift subscriptions to Vine & Branches. Winning photographs will appear in an upcoming Vine & Branches.

JUDGING:
Photographs will be measured against two criteria: 1. Their portrayal of life in the People of Praise. 2. Their artistic expression and technical excellence, including the following components: a clear and visible focal point, composition, contrast, color, the element of surprise and storytelling. A panel of four will judge the submissions: photographers Bob Badham (Oahu) and Bob Cunningham (Servant Branch), and Jennifer Kenning and Mary Frances Sparrow (both representing Vine & Branches).

YOUTH:
We especially encourage photographers under age 18 to submit photos. A young photographers’ prize will be awarded if there are enough entries in this category to warrant it.

DEADLINE:
All entries must be postmarked (or e-mailed) no later than September 21. We will not accept late entries. Mail submissions to: V&B Photo Contest, c/o Trish Brewer, 107 S. Greenlawn, South Bend, IN 46617, or e-mail them to pbrewer@peopleofpraise.org with the subject line: V&B Photo Contest.

CAPTION INFORMATION:
Please include the photographer’s name and the name of all the subjects in the photo (when appropriate), as well as a brief description of the event. The caption will not be part of the judging process.

OTHER IMPORTANT DETAILS:
Do not send us your only copy of a photograph. We will not return entries.

All entrants grant Vine & Branches the right to reproduce their photos in future issues of the magazine. Some winning entries may also appear in other publications of the People of Praise or Partners in Service.

All entries must be original works and the property of the entrant.
SUMMER LIFE IN ALLENDALE

1. One of our neighbors, Miss Alma, (right) often leads everyone in singing and dancing before our biweekly summer barbecues. Photo: Cathy Grill

2. No work shoes are allowed inside 1442 Yale Avenue! Photo: Gretchen Rolland

3. Summer team members like to gather outside our houses on Yale Avenue after evening talk and discussion sessions. Photo: Gretchen Rolland

4. Nathan Barrett delivers a talk to this summer’s largest work team—41 members. Photo: Gretchen Rolland

5. Below: Terry Dunman, Matt Brickweg (Servant Branch) and Luke Glover (Vancouver/Portland) heft a new 100-pound window for one of our neighbors. Top, from left: Justin Loughran (South Bend), Larry (Allendale) and Andy Bowar (Servant Branch). Photo: Gretchen Rolland

6. John Thomas and fix-it project leader Laura Brummer (Servant Branch) admire the new paint in John’s front room. Tony and Celeste Dal Pra (Rockford) are pictured in the mirror. This photo was snapped just after John and his wife Mae invited Laura over for a ceremonial ribbon-cutting to inaugurate their newly decorated room. Photo: Rachel Limberg

7. This summer’s two-week-long day camp was our biggest and best yet, with more than 30 children participating on a typical day. Photo: Matt Brickweg
Entrepreneur, Engineer, Evangelist
Harry Sweere
By William C. Wacker

In 1998 Harry took me on a tour of Ergotron, the company he founded 16 years earlier in his basement, when he came up with the idea of a tilt/swivel stand for computer monitors. Today, Ergotron is a $130-million-a-year business, represented in 67 countries, the largest company of its kind. It employs 290 people in the US and 935 at its joint venture in China, designing and marketing computer mounting hardware.

I wanted to visit Harry’s company with him, because for years he had been supporting Trinity School at River Ridge. As head of school, I was in a unique position to witness his generosity.

Ergotron has given well over $200,000 to River Ridge for scholarships, the Endowment Fund and operating expenses.

Harry had his company design and build, to our specifications, the beautiful tables we use in our classrooms. Then he personally donated most of the money to pay for them.

He provided internships for our graduates who were studying engineering and gave talks to our students about engineering and entrepreneurship. He would bring in some of his inventions (he held around 40 patents), demonstrate them and then describe the physics or engineering principles that made them work. (One time he brought in a huge box of springs. I wish I’d been in the classroom to see what interesting things he did with them.)

Harry was on our original Board of Fellows at River Ridge. He started a program to provide orthodontics for students who needed them but couldn’t afford them. In one of our last conversations, he talked about the importance of dental health as a child builds confidence in facing life.

Harry was a self-taught engineer who was always happiest when working with his hands and creating jobs with his ideas. At Ergotron he established a loving and respectful work environment as a way to bring the light of Jesus Christ to others. He was always thinking and creating, first at Sperry Univac, then at Northwest Airlines.

My oldest son, Mark, was one of those Trinity School graduate interns at Ergotron. Here is part of an e-mail he sent near the end of Harry’s six-year struggle with cancer. “You have been one of my greatest supporters; you are the most generous, loving and ingenious man I’ve ever met. You paid for my high-school education, my college education and gave me an internship. You’ve helped me and my friends out of many hard times. Your generosity is humbling. You are the kind of man that I want to be, strive to be, and hope to be someday.”

Another, Alan Nicklaus, spoke at our branch’s wake. “I’ve had the privilege of working at Ergotron with Harry for nearly 20 years. But more importantly I’ve had the privilege of being his friend for more than 25 years. Harry was my second men’s group leader, when I was 15 or so; and he knew what was important in a young man’s life—fun! Our friendship grew deeper as we water-skied, went for long boat rides, and met for men’s group discussions—all intermingled with prayer. I learned from Harry to look at situations in life with a ‘How could I make this happen?’ perspective.”

Harry befriended young men—hundreds of them—and told them how he came to the Lord. He was also a great supporter of other evangelists. He paid part-time salaries to several young men so they could evangelize on university campuses.

Jack Weiland remembers, “From the moment he attended his first charismatic prayer meeting, he was a changed man, a living dynamo for the Lord. For some 30 years he kept his focus on Jesus.”

When Harry had to decide between taking a job at a major corporation or starting Ergotron, he enlisted the prayers of the seven couples in his branch cluster. With their help and discernment, Harry started his company, and several of them even bought stock, as much out of love for Harry as because they thought it was a wise investment. Harry promised all the couples an expense-paid trip to Hawaii when the company
reached a certain goal in sales. Ergotron achieved that goal, so in 1994 they all went to Hawaii together. Then the couples lightheartedly asked, ‘So what do we pray for now?’ Harry named a new (much higher) goal, and when Ergotron reached that goal in 2006 his wife Jan was able to take six of the seven couples back to Hawaii, with Harry there in spirit. Jan says, “Prayer has been at the foundation of the company’s success all along.”

“Harry was a mover and a shaker,” adds Hugh Springer. “The expression, ‘We can’t do that,’ was not in his vocabulary. Harry was extremely proud of his wife and family, his company, Trinity School, and our life and relationships in the People of Praise. He had strong opinions about many subjects, especially patriotism and what the world economy ought to be like. He was an advocate of hard work and discipline. I met an elderly woman at Harry’s wake who told me, ‘I hardly knew him, but he offered to pray with me one time after our church service, because he saw that I was sick. He was quite a man, wasn’t he?’”

Indeed, the more Harry opened his heart to the love of God, the more sustained was his capacity for friendship, loyalty, generosity and mutual appreciation, for knowing and being known, for growth in wisdom and insight.

Harry and his wife Jan, whom he delighted in, were married for 45 years, with four children and seven grandchildren. He was a member of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church, and made the covenant of the People of Praise on March 14, 1985. He passed away peacefully at home in Minneapolis on April 8, 2005. Many times in those final days, he would cast a glance at Jan and simply smile. Their mutual love was a sure sign of the mercy of God in both their lives.

Jan now chairs Ergotron and is a wonderful and generous sister to all here in Servant Branch. Like Harry, she has been extraordinarily generous to Trinity School, and made a $3 million pledge to begin our building campaign for the new River Ridge campus.

Glory to God for the life of Harry Sweere!
Hyoim Chang: Christ in Korea

By Elizabeth Grams

Hyoim Chang was riding the bus to class at Holy Cross College when the Lord took her by surprise. Academic ambitions, specifically in English literature, had brought this 19-year-old from South Korea to South Bend in 2002. But her broken English and immersion in a strange new culture had led to difficulties in school and frustration in friendship. “I felt isolated. I was lonely,” she remembers.

She was coming from the fiercely competitive educational system in her home country. Class and study hall lasted from 7 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. or midnight, and memorizing was the measure of success. Like nearly half of all South Koreans, her family wasn’t religious. Instead, academic achievement motivated her. At Holy Cross, Hyoim (pronounced Hue-im) used time as a lever against her English language weaknesses, spending three times as long as her peers on homework. But time and discipline couldn’t make friends.

That day on the bus, she met fellow Holy Cross student Catherine Stante (South Bend). “I was surprised by Catherine’s openness and kindness,” Hyoim remembers. “She was always willing to listen with patience.” When Hyoim needed a new place to live, Catherine spoke to her household members Bud and Sharon Rose. Despite their already full house, the Roses took Hyoim in.

She never missed morning prayer, even though she usually stayed up late studying and the whole concept of Christian prayer was new. Eventually she grew curious about her new household’s faith. “I had been to churches and I didn’t care for them,” she says. “But after awhile with Bud and Sharon, I saw them living in joy by serving God and interacting with other Christian people, and I came to think, just having academic success is not really what I want. I think my loneliness made me want to go to God.”

She found him at public meetings. “The first time, I felt very welcomed by everyone, and I thought, I could start my relationships here. I also want to have friends who love God.”

Sharon’s mother Elsie also lived with the Roses during Hyoim’s stay. Her health was failing and Hyoim was quick to serve. “All I needed to do was call her name, and she would come running down the stairs,” Sharon says. Hyoim was ready to help move Elsie around or to keep her company in her room. “She was a precious gift from the Lord to us.”

Sharon sponsored Hyoim’s baptism in the Catholic Church in 2005. She was baptized in the Holy Spirit and joined the community that year, too. After her sophomore year at Holy Cross, Saint Mary’s College accepted her so she moved out of the Roses’ household and into a campus apartment. Denise Hurley, then Hyoim’s head, says she didn’t have much furniture or many possessions. “She trusted that her Father would take care of her.”

In May, 2007, Hyoim received her degree in English literature, winning honors for her English thesis paper. “Her parents had to work really hard to get her to the US,” Denise observes, “so she honored her parents by working very hard in college.”

She returned to South Korea earlier this year to share the Lord with her family and to pursue a master’s degree in English education. After that, she may come back to the US for her doctorate or she may teach English in Korea. “I don’t have great academic desires anymore,” she says. “Now I want to do something for God.” Her friends have noticed this change. “You’re different—you’re so peaceful now!,” one former schoolmate remarked.

She and her friend Mia Jun, a Korean student Hyoim introduced to the People of Praise, are also talking about building Christian community in South Korea. “I think that’s the mission God gave to me. I can tell others how my life has been changed after knowing Christ.”
Awkward Prayer

Pat and Patricia Ficker (Servant Branch) laid hands on Pat’s cousin Rose, ignoring the crowd in the hospital lobby in Hastings, MN, and prayed for the healing of her right leg, which had required a cast since foot surgery a year earlier. “I’d just love to put on my tennis shoes for once and go for a walk,” she told them.

“It was an incredibly awkward prayer,” Pat recalls. “Everyone was staring at us. I remember walking away thinking it was the worst prayer I had ever said in my life.”

Two days later, Pat saw Rose in the grocery store—wearing tennis shoes. Minutes after the prayer, the pain was gone, the swelling had subsided and her doctor could find nothing wrong. “Your prayer worked immediately,” she told Pat.

Remote Prayer

Egide Nimubona of Appleton injured his hands and knees so bad when he fell 10 feet from a ladder while hanging drywall that he couldn’t sleep, hold a glass or change his clothes.

He stayed home while his wife Revocate went to the community meeting and asked the branch to pray for his quick and complete recovery. By the time she came home, the swelling and pain were much less intense, and he could move his fingers.

“The power of prayer was there,” Egide says. “My wife couldn’t believe it. On Saturday night, I thought I would have to stay home all week from work, but thanks to the prayer I was back at work on Monday.”

Intercontinental Men’s Group

Mark Mullen, a member of the northern Virginia branch, moved to Peru last February when his wife Carmen couldn’t get the visa she needed to relocate to the U.S.

Moved by the Spirit, and with an assist from modern communications technology, Tom McNichol, Bob Pawlosky, Alex Eng, Greg Majesky, Ron Smith and Bruce Brand—Mark’s men’s group—decided to do all they could to make their brotherhood intercontinental. The men now correspond with Mark frequently by e-mail. They also call him during their men’s group meetings a couple of times each month, using a speaker phone and an inexpensive calling card.

Of course, words and phone calls are not enough—they must become flesh. From July 19 to 26 that happened when Bruce made the first of what they believe will be many trips to support Mark. Tom hopes to go this fall. In these ways, members of Mark’s men’s group are spending their time and their greenbacks to carry more of the Lord and more of the community to the town of Chinchu Alta, 90 miles south of Lima.

Heel Healing

On the south side of Indianapolis, Missionary Company members Naomi Caneff and Brian Couch were sitting in a dark, dusty living room with their 78-year-old wheelchair-bound neighbor Verna, surrounded by her 17 cats. Verna had had a wound on her heel for the past eight years which medications and surgery had been unable to cure.

Naomi and Brian had prayed over her for healing (and for baptism in the Spirit) once before, and she had managed a few small steps, saying the pain had decreased. This time, they prayed with her again, and she told them that the pain in her heel was completely gone.

“She stood up and started striding confidently around the room through the cats, barely holding Brian’s fingertips,” Naomi says. “It was the first time she had walked without her walker in years. Her face really lit up.”

Verna was so awed by what she’d just experienced that, during the missionaries’ next visit, she asked them to baptize her husband Ray in the Holy Spirit. She held her husband’s hand and joined in with the prayer.

Double Healing

After a fall, Craig Lent’s (South Bend) elderly Aunt Koreen in Colorado was suffering from a fractured vertebra and a wound to her elbow’s fragile skin that for six months prevented doctors from performing the surgery she needed.

Craig and Louis Grams (Colorado Springs) stopped by to visit her after giving a retreat for the Colorado Springs men. They prayed for the healing of her skin and vertebra.

The next day, Koreen was well enough to walk the stairs unaided. Within a week, the elbow was healed with healthy skin, and X-rays showed that the vertebra was repaired so that it no longer needed surgery. She was even able to stop using the medications that had caused the skin condition.
Meet Board of Governors Member Mike Zusi
Man of Action
By Catherine Bulger and Sean Connolly

Mike Zusi, a dusty-red-haired Notre Dame freshman, leaned across a stair rail and hollered into a swarm of students, “Hey, Katy, where’s the next prayer meeting?” The next Thursday, he was standing in the mezzanine of the LaSalle Building with a different swarm of students at an open meeting of the People of Praise. About a month later, he was a member of that swarm—the People of Praise-sponsored Notre Dame and Saint Mary’s student swarm that coalesced and swelled in the late 1970s and early ‘80s, a swarm that in many ways Mike never left. (See box below.)

He came from Clarence, NY, a small town near Buffalo. (Incidentally, tiny Clarence made another sizeable contribution to the community when the Buffalo branch was started there in 1986. It began as a prayer group housed at the same church Mike attended as a youth.)

Near Clarence, 15-year-old Mike met a couple of 20-something men on the basketball court with rough and tumble pasts. “Joe and Chris were bad basketball players,” he recalls, “but they talked about Jesus all the time.” Chris told Mike that Jesus had died so that he could have a personal relationship with him. Later, Mike caught a ride with Joe in a Cadillac (purchased with drug money from his former life) to a prayer meeting at a nondenominational church. Mike was baptized in the Spirit there, sparking the search that eventually took him to Notre Dame and the LaSalle Building.

He graduated from Notre Dame in 1981 and moved straight into household life with Paul and Jeanne DeCelles. After a summer-long job search, math major Mike took an $8,000-a-year job working for the Action program office of the People of Praise. Just two weeks after he started, Bendix Corporation offered him $18,000 to join their computer department. Mike balked at the offer at first. “I thought the Lord was testing my loyalty to the community,” he remembers, but his head, Paul, and his boss, Dan DeCelles, urged him to pray about the new job. He did, eventually making an employment decision that has stood for the last 26 years—or all but one.

In 1984, Mike took a year’s leave from Bendix to join Chuck Wood, Jim Ganther and Greg Brombach in the first wave of community volunteers in Grenada. He lived in a single men’s household with Dominic Jeremiah, taught religion courses at local schools, and spent his nights at the prayer meetings that were popping up all over the island following the collapse of the Communist government. The volunteers went to nine prayer meetings every week, put on youth meetings and baptized many in the Holy Spirit, paving the way for future waves of volunteers, and, eventually, for the Grenada branch.

He was back at Bendix in 1985 and back in the household from 1985 until 1994. Chris Meehan shared a room with him for six of those years. “Mike often traveled back and forth to North Carolina in a single day, waking up early and coming home late. He was also leading music ministry, heading a men’s group and spearheading many singles events,” Chris recalls. “I’d often ask, ‘Don’t you need to get some sleep or take a day off?’ Usually he’d smile and say that he really wanted to use himself up, to literally exhaust himself serving the Lord.’”

Rich DeClercq began working with Mike at Bendix (now Honeywell) in the early 1980s, and he gives Mike the credit for leading him into the community, with a quiet witness and friendly introductions to fellow community members over the years. “At work, Mike is always cheerful,” Rich says, “and he always has a way to smooth over conflicts.” Mike’s current position involves overseeing production and delivery of equipment to service jet engines. Customers include Delta Airlines, the Korean Air Force and his projects include many in the Pacific Rim. He makes lots of continued on next page
international phone calls.

He has served as an area coordinator for six years, and as South Bend’s Action division coordinator for three years. Currently, he is the program coordinator for Action, managing travel logistics and costs for summer Allendale trips and overseeing the pastoral care and training of division members. He was elected to the board of governors in 2002.

Mike and fellow Grenada volunteer Nora Lyon married in 1994 and have five children, ages four through 10. They live in a cluster with eight community families and are always looking for new ways to put their lives in common—from open invitation Sunday brunches to weekend camping trips to summer parties. “Mike is at the forefront of our discussions about common life,” confirms neighbor Pat Pingel.

Mike credits his brothers and sisters with teaching him to love our life. “We’re coming to understand ourselves as participants in building the kingdom of God,” he says, quickly adding, “I think that’s the most fantastic idea I’ve ever heard.” He counts it a miracle that Christ, in the person of two young and eager and seemingly unlikely evangelists, found him on a basketball court at age 15. “There’s no telling how many more 15-year-olds are out there waiting for a life-changing conversation about Jesus.”

LifeNotes

Tony and Nadia Fraga (Falls Church, VA) happily welcomed their son Anthony Peter on June 20.

Harold Coulter (Saint Paul) received the James A. Dodge Founder’s Award as the volunteer of the year from AccountAbility Minnesota, which provides income-tax preparation assistance for low-income taxpayers. Harold has volunteered at AAM for 10 years.

Mark Lambrecht (Burnsville, MN) has a new job at Owens Companies in Bloomington, MN, a heating and air-conditioning contractor.

Mae Cheung has been reassigned from the South Bend branch to the northern Virginia branch.

Sally Spahn has been reassigned from the South Bend branch to the New Orleans branch.

The Communication Center, a division of the LaSalle Company (South Bend) that sells religious education materials to Catholic schools, has a new web site, www.comcenter.com. Community business OneTen Communications spent more than a year developing the e-commerce site, which includes a database of over 4,000 products. Julie Bruber (Servant Branch) and her company Bank Card Services Worldwide provided consulting and merchant account services for the project.

Congratulations to Gloria Murphy (Elkhart, IN), who recently retired after 44 years of teaching English—eight years in Catholic elementary schools and 36 years in the South Bend school system, both elementary and high school.

Tom Noe’s (South Bend) book Into the Lions’ Den is back in print. Tom narrates the story of how God called Andrew Plodowski, a member of the South Bend branch who died in 1995, to travel behind the Iron Curtain spreading charismatic renewal and building Christian communities in his native Poland. The book is available through lulu.com.

From the Executive Office

Servant Branch:
Dan and Joyce Driessen were released from the covenant of the People of Praise on June 25, 2007.

Shreveport:
Jeff Fournier was released from the covenant of the People of Praise on June 27, 2007.

South Bend:
Sarah Whittenburg was released from the covenant of the People of Praise on June 29, 2007.

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“So will it be: the last will be first and the first will be last” (Mt. 20:16).

This year’s Buffalo camp, held June 24-29, featured a herd of campers from many different branches: Buffalo, Grenada, Indianapolis, New Orleans, Saskatoon, Shreveport, South Bend, Tampa and Vancouver/Portland. Pictured here are the camp’s third- and fourth-grade girls.