HOLY SPIRIT SIGHTINGS

By V&B Staff Writers

HEALED OF MS

Five years ago, an MRI and a spinal tap confirmed that Mike Altendorf (Servant Branch) had multiple sclerosis (MS), a chronic disease of the central nervous system. His body would sometimes tingle and go numb from the waist down, like an arm that has fallen asleep. Weekly doses of MS medicine left him with a barrage of flu-like symptoms to boot.

When the news that this 35-year-old father of three had MS was announced at a Servant Branch meeting, an audible gasp echoed through the room.

Immediately, brothers and sisters began praying for Mike. Every week for years, his men’s group sat him down in a chair in Ed Schwab’s basement and prayed for his healing.

About two years ago, during a routine MRI, Mike’s doctors noticed that the lesions on his brain had shrunk considerably, and no new ones had appeared. Good news. His next MRI, in August of 2007, showed that all the lesions were gone, leaving only scars. Mike’s symptoms—the tingling and the numbness—had also disappeared. His doctors asked him to stop taking his medicine.

When Mike announced his healing at a recent Servant Branch meeting, he reminded them about their earlier sigh of dismay, and asked for an equally dramatic shout of rejoicing. They responded with a hearty round of applause, hooting and hol-lering for the Lord.

Mike’s next MRI is scheduled in August of 2009, but it will be cancelled unless his conditions change.

None of the doctors and none of the drug reps Mike has spoken to have ever heard of medicine reversing the course of MS.

CANCER-FREE

Two different doctors offered a potentially lethal verdict—ovarian cancer—for Debbie Kimes, a 46-year-old mother of two and member of the Rockford branch. After a CAT scan revealed a watermelon-sized tumor, Debbie’s primary doctor scheduled emergency surgery to remove the tumor and prevent the potentially life-threatening cancer from spreading.

Three days before the operation, Debbie went to a branch all-women’s meeting at the Rockford community center, where her sisters laid their hands on her. (The Rockford branch leaders were also on hand for a meeting so they joined in.) “As they prayed, a noticeable peace came over me,” she says. “I sensed the Lord was healing me. Just having peace was miraculous, but I was also convinced I was healed.”

Three days later, Debbie arrived at the University of Wisconsin hospital for the three-and-a-half-hour procedure, accompanied by her mother, her sister Cindy Bontjes (Rockford), and branch members Leonard and Betty Cerrentano. Her surgeon successfully removed the tumor, convinced when he saw it that it was cancerous. However, examinations of the tumor over the next few days confirmed that there was no sign of cancer whatsoever. Debbie says her doctor was shocked.

Filled with confidence from the Lord, Debbie was not shocked, and she gives all the credit to him.

MEDICAL ALERT

Last year Jean Monaco (Corvallis) started stopping by on Wednesdays to check on Peg Hahn, a homebound woman in her 80s who lived a few blocks from the Monacos. Jean had
SPEAK TO KELSEY

Nineteen-year-old Abby Earhart (Servant Branch), a member of the Dinkytown campus division, planned to spend a few hours talking to students on campus at the University of Minnesota last October. She began with a prayer time and got a very specific word from the Lord, “Talk to someone named Kelsey.”

Unsure how to respond, Abby and Amy DeCelles went to campus and started talking. The third person they met was a young woman typing on a laptop. She said she knew the Lord already, and had been searching for Christian community for a long time without any success. Just two weeks earlier she had given up in frustration, resigning herself to the idea that she might always be lonely. Her name was Kelsey.

“When she mentioned her name, my stomach flipped over,” says Abby. “I was speechless for five or six seconds.” Abby wondered whether the story about her word was too weird to mention, but she finally decided to.

“Did you say your name was Kelsey?”

“Yes.”

“We prayed earlier today and the Lord told me to talk to someone named Kelsey.”

“Are you serious? That’s cool!”

Abby, Amy and Kelsey spoke for a few minutes, until Kelsey had to leave for class. Since then, Kelsey has visited Abby and other members of the campus division several times, and Abby got the chance to pray with her for baptism in the Holy Spirit.

“I’m so grateful God uses us in such specific ways,” says Abby.
They have bare feet, thick calluses, swollen toes, scarred faces, bloodshot eyes, festering gashes, unkempt curls, tight dreadlocks and frames gone gaunt from gnawing hunger. They sleep in arched entranceways, on piles of flattened cardboard boxes, on a wire cage, behind razor wire, near trash piles, unblanketed on sidewalks, in plain sight on the streets. On the fourth Sunday of each month, some 200 of Jamaica’s homeless men and women find a hot meal, and along with it a hug, a healing prayer, a blessing, an encouragement to pray, or simply, “I love you.”

For more than 10 years, brothers and sisters in the Kingston branch have been shopping, cooking and delivering hot meals to street-bound men and women, steadily increasing their output from 150 meals per month to 200, and soon they hope to reach 250. They’ve served around 20,000 meals but their strategy is more personal than programmed.

“We try to avoid making people line up,” says branch leader Vince Keaveny. “We go to them. We give the food to them directly,” and so branch members confront hunger, sickness and homelessness the same way Jesus dealt with basic human difficulties, person to person and one person at a time.

Over the course of weeks and years, branch members have gotten to know many street residents personally.

“There are quite a few people we see every month,” notes Kevin Rodriguez. “Sometimes we seek them out if they’re not in their usual spots—and their smiles are broader when they know us. One man stays near a gas station. He has created a shelter in a hedge, using a tarpaulin and some cardboard to stay dry. It’s difficult to see him in there because it’s dark. You have to bend down and call him. He has a wonderful smile, and he always blesses us.”

There are others they recognize—a former co-worker of Sam Davis from 10 years ago, a longtime homeless man named Galant who used to drop by the Keavenys’ house for a supper and some cake that Dawn would provide, and sometimes he’d sleep in their front yard.

“It’s very moving sometimes,” Vince says. “Some people are just very hungry and grab as much as they can. Others ask for food for their friends who are unable to get up and walk, and we watch them go over
and give it to them.”

To make the feeding program work over the long haul, the branch has turned shopping, food preparation and packing into an efficient art. Kevin explains the tricks of their trade: “We buy food on Saturday, the day before distribution, about 40 pounds of ground beef and an assortment of canned mixed vegetables and rice, along with garlic, salt and ketchup, scallions and onions. Locksley Robinson bought butter beans accidentally one time, and we realized that adding beans to the beef gives the meals a special flavor.” After the shopping, the groceries are divided for preparation. “We distribute the rice to about four branch families, and the meat and seasonings to two more families.”

Ingrid Robinson normally helps prepare 20 pounds of ground beef for the monthly distribution, but for this year’s increased December delivery she needed to cook up 55 pounds of spicy Jamaican chicken. At first she panicked, wondering how she could get all the work done and still have time to prepare for Christmas. Then two of her co-workers volunteered to cut up the chickens for her. Ingrid

Left to right, top to bottom: Michelle Williams, Janice Shirley, Heather Brown, Ingrid Robinson, Locksley Robinson, Gladstone Brown, David Sklorenko, Sharon Sklorenko, Dana Oldfield-Williams, Francis Mutidjo, Michael Rodriguez, Christine Rodriguez, Helen Grant, Frank Grant, Vince Keaveny, Marie Davis, Sam Davis, Tony Lewis, Joseph Mutidjo, Kevin Rodriguez, Anna-Lisa Rodriguez, Noel Shirley.
started cooking at 7:00 p.m. and had everything cooked and ready to go by midnight. “The Lord always helps things turn out beautifully when you serve him with a free heart,” she says.

On Sunday afternoons, branch members bring the cooked food to Sam and Marie Davis’s home, where ingredients are mixed and packed into foam containers.

“It doesn’t seem like a chore when we’re working together,” says Dana Oldfield-Williams, one of the longest-serving volunteers. “Even the kids help, by putting in forks.”

Normally it takes a little over an hour for six or seven people to dish out the food, then a few more brothers and sisters arrive on the scene, adding muscle for the distribution.

“Three cars go out, including a jeep and a station wagon,” Kevin explains. “Each car has a team of four people. One car gets two boxes of 44 meals, and goes to a specific location in downtown Kingston where we know there are a lot of homeless people. Typically 88 lunches are not enough there. We always find people who are in need.”

After passing out meals, the crew join the rest of the branch at their branch meeting and make their reports.

The challenge of feeding Jamaica’s homeless is daunting. Even though this modest effort, one meal on one day each month, costs volunteers precious hours of weekend time, the Kingston branch is very happy to have the chance to serve. “This effort has become such a part of our
In the past some community households from other branches have used the season of Lent to trim their food budgets and send the money they save to help with the Kingston branch’s feeding program. Vince says these donations have made a big difference. If your household would like to make a donation for the feeding program, just send it to Caribbean Relief Fund, 107 South Greenlawn Avenue, South Bend, IN 46617, adding “Jamaica Feeding Program” to the memo line.

An Idea for Lent

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Property Purchase Boosts Portland City-Building

By Chris Meehan

The Vancouver/Portland branch’s city-building plans leaped forward in December with the purchase of a 2.4-acre, three-building parcel at the heart of their target area in north Portland. (For background on city-building efforts in north Portland, where 38 adults and 25 children currently live within 1.5 miles of the newly purchased parcel, see the May/June, 2006, and September/October, 2007, issues of Vine & Branches.) Branch members had donated funds toward this type of purchase over the course of two decades, and the board of governors approved the plan at their meeting last May.

“I’m excited about this chance for the Vancouver/Portland branch to further their city-building efforts,” notes overall coordinator Craig Lent. “They’ve been brainstorming and planning for more than two years, and some of their families and singles have already taken the plunge and moved into their north Portland target area. With this purchase, they’re laying the groundwork for expansion and cementing their commitment to city-building. I applaud their enthusiasm.”

The Archdiocese of Portland previously owned the property, the former site of Queen of Peace Parish. It includes a school building, a church, a rectory and 70 parking spaces, spread across 19 city lots.

Four of those lots are undeveloped and three have the potential for future redevelopment, an important selling point for the branch. “Adjacent lots are scarce as hen’s teeth in Portland,” Charlie Fraga says. Our hope is that these seven lots can be developed into contiguous housing, places where branch members can live next door to one another.”

Tenants are currently leasing two of the existing buildings, generating income for the Vancouver/Portland branch and for the community. The branch plans to move its meetings out of their community center in Vancouver, enabling them to lease out that building and generate additional revenue.

“Branch leaders were convinced from the beginning that the property was a home-run from a city-building perspective,” notes Paul Kane, who reviewed the deal as the community’s chief financial officer. “As we looked at this from a real estate point of view, it became clear that it would be a strong financial investment as well.”

The largest building is the former church, designed in the International Style and constructed on two 10,000 square-foot levels. The main floor has a large assembly hall, and the basement features a kitchen and seating for 200. The branch hopes to hold its community meetings in the basement, after some needed renovations.

The school building has eight classrooms and several offices, totaling 12,769 square feet. The Portland Village Charter School currently leases it, and Charlie says it will continue as a tenant for the near future, perhaps leasing additional space as their school expands. He adds that the branch’s dream is to house a campus of Trinity School in the building, though they don’t currently have enough children in the branch to form a solid enrollment base.

Members of the Christian Brothers Catholic religious order lease the smallest building, the former parish rectory. This two-story residence has

From left: Abigail Orthmann, Naomi Shreves and Levi Martinez (with his sister Alina on his shoulders) stand on undeveloped land that the branch hopes will be turned into homesites for branch members. Middle: Branch members gather for a tour under the covered walkway that connects the school and church buildings. Right: Stained glass windows in the church.
a basement and three-car attached garage totaling about 5,000 square feet.

Historical People of Praise connections within the Archdiocese of Portland and the Catholic Church in Oregon helped pave the way for the deal. Fr. David Gutmann, who managed the property for the archdiocese, was a friend of the late Fr. Charlie Harris, a long-time member of the People of Praise and former member of the community’s board of governors. Fr. Gutmann’s brother (also a priest) lived with Father Harris on S.W. Nash Avenue in Corvallis, in the same building that today serves as the Corvallis branch’s meeting place. “It is entirely due to Father Dave’s efforts that this great opportunity came our way,” notes Charlie. “He took the initiative and kept us informed at every stage. We owe a great debt to him.

“The whole process of buying this property was surprisingly smooth, confirming the direction we’re headed in, and bringing the added bonus of benefiting the community financially. The Lord’s plans certainly include surprises and are bigger and better when we work and plan together with him!”

Left: The church building features a 10,000-square-foot first floor. Right: The new 2.4 acre property has three buildings, a rectory (left), school (middle distance) and church (farther back).
Fifty-six community leaders gathered in South Bend from December 6 to 8 for the 2007 Teaching Review Seminar. Overall coordinator Craig Lent led the meetings, delivering a workshop on the pastoral care of marriages. Several seminar sessions were devoted to the community’s Pastoral Guidelines, a 29-page document that advises leaders on community approaches to topics ranging from church membership and designating branch dinner hours to the protection of children. Kevin Ranaghan led a review of the document, which the board of governors recently updated.

Leaders also updated one another on local growth and city-building efforts. Lek Kadeli reported that about 30 new members had joined the northern Virginia branch since 2005, when the community began talking about growth. Mike Coney (New Orleans) and John Zwerneman (South Bend) described the start of city-building discussions in their branches. Bob Armstrong shared how open-invitation soup lunches held at the Appleton branch’s community center had helped them forge connections with neighbors. Many leaders noted a widespread interest in microcommunity, in shared meals, moving closer together, and in intense common life and work.

Another session featured briefs on the community’s work in Action, Mission and communications. Action program coordinator Mike Zusi reported on a new resource book for Action leaders, a compilation of teachings leaders can use to train their division members. Nick Holovaty introduced a series of live video updates from missionaries in Allendale and Indianapolis. Sean Connolly spoke about how the Internet has emerged as a vehicle for video distribution, and he introduced the first video from the community’s new video production team. (To view this video, go to www.youtube.com and type “Rejoice South Side” into the search field.)

Paul DeCelles delivered a talk on love, a follow-up to his talk on the cross at the 2007 Pastoral Training Institute. He began by quoting Mark 6:34, a passage that leads the outreach section in our Spirit and Purpose: “Jesus’ heart was touched with pity for them because they seemed to
him like sheep without a shepherd.” Paul pointed out that God’s love for us is highly personal and exists irrespective of what we do for him. He observed, however, that many people relate to God from a distance, appreciating him only for the good things he does, rather than for who he really is. Paul encouraged the men to learn to love God in the same personal way, as his friends.

Craig summed up: “I was heartened by the progress we’re making in growth and city-building. In addition to all the updates and good news, this year’s TRS was a chance for leaders to discuss some important areas of our life, including pastoral care and the ordinary life patterns that help make us one community in so many different places.”

LifeNotes

- **Stephen and Teresa Ambrose** (Roscoe, IL) are thanking God for his gift of Isabella Therese, born January 3.

- **Chris and Mari Dausman** (Rockford) are rejoicing in the arrival of Peter Benedict, born on January 4.

- **Peter and Sarah Hammer** (Buffalo) have opened their hearts and home to Abigail Hope, born on July 5.

- **Eric and April Boughton** (Portland, OR) are telling everyone the good news of the December 7 birth of their son Sean Thomas.

- **Mark Mullen** (Chincha Alta, Peru) and his wife Carmen are happily announcing the birth of David James on Christmas Day, December 25.

- **Larry and Janice Lamanna**, who were members of the South Bend branch on assignment in Georgia, have been transferred to the northern Virginia branch, effective January 7, 2008.

- **Hilary Bollman**, a member of the South Bend branch, died on January 4 at the age of 32. Please pray for her mother and the other members of her family, and for all her brothers and sisters in the branch.

- We recall with affection our sister Jo Geissler (Granger, IN), who died at home on December 9. Please pray for her husband Gene and for all the members of her large family at this time of loss.

- Congratulations to Kevin McShane, son of Kevin and Katy McShane (South Bend), and Joe Timler, son of Mark and Ginny Timler (South Bend), who were awarded the rank of Eagle Scout at a court of honor on December 30.

From the Executive Office

Ray and Robin Gonzalez have been transferred from the Indianapolis branch to the Mission division.

**Buffalo:**
Dave Grzybowski has been appointed to a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective December 18, 2007.

**Muncie:**
Mike Oxley has been appointed to a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective February 2, 2008.

Tom Schmitt has been appointed to a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective February 2, 2008.

Larry Spangler has been appointed to fill out the remainder of a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective December 18, 2007, and ending March 1, 2010.

**Saskatoon:**
Congratulations to Phil Rooke and Suzanne Rooke, who made the covenant of the People of Praise in Saskatoon on December 2, 2007.

**Servant Branch:**
Jon Balsbaugh has been appointed to a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective January 26, 2008.

Larry Bartek has been appointed to a second three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective January 26, 2008.

Bob Brickweg, who previously served two consecutive terms as area coordinator, has been appointed to a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective January 26, 2008.

Tom Caneff has been appointed to a third three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective January 26, 2008. Tom was also granted tenure as a coordinator on December 10, 2007.

Ed Varevice has been appointed to a three-year term of office as area coordinator, effective January 26, 2008.

**South Bend:**
Helen Kaley was released from the covenant of the People of Praise on December 7, 2007.

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“Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits” (SS. 4:16).