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A REALLY BRIGHT LIGHT

25 Years of Trinity School at River Ridge
The letter I received was dated December 10, 1986. Louis Grams, the principal branch coordinator of Servant Branch, wrote: “On behalf of the branch coordinators of the Servant Branch of People of Praise, I would like to make a formal request that the Center for Christian Studies take the necessary steps to establish a Trinity School in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.”

Servant Branch members had been thinking about starting a school well before 1986 and well before they became a branch of the People of Praise in 1983. (Interestingly, starting a school had also been on the minds of the original covenanted members before they established the People of Praise in 1971, though it was 10 years until Trinity School at Greenlawn began.)

“Many parents were frustrated by what their kids were experiencing both in public and in private schools,” Louis told me. “There was a deep hunger to have a place where we could have more say in the way our children were being educated.”

Discussions about starting a school in the Twin Cities became more focused after members of Servants of the Lord community joined the People of Praise. I remember a number of trips to the Twin Cities where I was asked to explain and discuss what we were doing in our school in South Bend. A number of Servant Branch members were excited by the vision and fresh possibilities for a vital educational program, but many wondered, naturally, why Trinity was so different from their experience of most Christian schools.

Tom Finke (one of the founders of Trinity Schools) and I traveled to the Twin Cities several times, along with Trinity students and other faculty members, to talk with branch members, coordinators, parents and even potential students about our vision of education and its relationship to
the People of Praise’s approach to caring for our children. It was a very rich and fruitful conversation. Many of the ideas and concerns of those branch members helped deepen and expand the mission of Trinity Schools.

Louis recalls that the discussions among the coordinators gradually became more focused on how to make Trinity a reality in the life of the branch. “When we finally went to the branch for a consultation, the result was overwhelmingly positive,” he recalls. “People wanted to have a school and they wanted that school to be a Trinity School.”

To open another Trinity School in another city and in another branch of the People Praise was an exciting prospect. It meant locating a facility, gathering a faculty and working with parents and students who would be part of this new venture.

I particularly recall meeting with parents, interviewing potential students and potential faculty at the original Servant Branch community center close to Dinkytown in Minneapolis. March 8, 1987, stands out in my mind. That day I was trying to see if I could talk Kati Ritchie into joining our faculty. March 8 is also the birthday of our daughter Katherine, and I wanted to call to wish her a happy birthday. The trouble was, she was in France for her sophomore year of college and living with a French-speaking family. The family didn’t know any English, and I certainly didn’t know any French. I mentioned my dilemma to Kati, and she told me that she spoke fluent French and would call the family and get Katherine on the phone—which she did. I was very thankful! It was a great Trinity moment!

Trinity School opened on September 8, 1987, in the parish house of Gethsemane Episcopal Church in downtown Minneapolis (at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Ninth Street). Dan Ferris, a five-year veteran of Trinity School at Greenlawn in South Bend, served as the first head of school. He was assisted by Mary Frances (DeCelles) Loughran, also a Greenlawn veteran, and Servant Branch members Penny Arndt, Jim Bulger, Eileen (Sweeney) Horan and Kati Ritchie.

Starting a school right in the middle of a large city had advantages and disadvantages. Musical concerts and other cultural activities happened nearby. There was also a lot of crime in the area and we had to take precautions to keep everyone safe. Students remember discussing great works of literature while hearing young men calling out to their girl friends living in the homeless shelter next door. Of course, we wanted our contacts with the neighborhood to be mutually beneficial. In 1989, for example, Dennis Rayl played Santa Claus when Linda Porto and the students invited the mothers and children from the shelter to share some Christmas treats and see the first-ever drama performance by the junior class.

Louis told me recently that he would always count the establishment of Trinity School at River Ridge as one of the most important things he had ever been involved in.

“We had the consistent experience of seeing God work again and again—in us, with us, through us—to do something that he very much wanted to do. There are many things we worked very hard at, as we tried to help everyone become a member of the People of Praise. Other than the long slow process of pastoral care, I can think of nothing other than Trinity School that played such a major role in helping us to become the People of Praise. Trinity School at River Ridge is a living experience of the community and the worldview that we live in and act in.”

I think it’s remarkable how the People of Praise developed the educational vision and the intellectual backbone that has sustained Trinity Schools. Today, our schools have brought a new and vibrant education to students in South Bend, the Twin Cities and northern Virginia, not to mention the incredible success of the prize-winning Great Hearts charter schools in Arizona, as well as other schools who use the Trinity design and curriculum. It’s a work that has lasted now for 25 years in the Twin Cities! May Trinity Schools, inspired and fueled by a community with a serious educational mission, continue to grow in God’s good world for many years to come.

Bottom left: Trinity School began in the parish house of Gethsemane Episcopal Church in downtown Minneapolis. Center: faculty member Dennis Rayl in 1991. Right: Five junior girls from the same year.
Karen Coleman (2003, Servant Branch) teaches middle school students at Pope John Paul II Catholic school in Minneapolis. I teach at a low-income school in inner-city Minneapolis, working with the Latino population. Not a single day passes that I do not use my Trinity education. My liberal arts background from Trinity is probably the biggest reason why I can teach so many different subjects—eight different subjects every day. This year I was asked to teach geometry, which I haven’t taken since I was a 15-year-old at Trinity. I also teach prealgebra, religion, social studies and English classes. Last week I picked up *To Kill a Mockingbird* with my eighth-grade honors class, one of my favorite books from Trinity. Next on our reading list is *Hamlet*. I’ve been asked to start directing plays because they know that I have dramatic experience, and I also help out with the choir. I am able to do all of this because of the holistic approach that Trinity takes and the in-depth preparation Trinity gave me.

Michael Coughlin (2008) graduates from Carleton College in June with a double major in math and physics. Next fall, he will begin studying for a master’s degree in astronomy at Cambridge University as a Winston Churchill scholar. After his studies in England, he intends to pursue a Ph.D. in physics at Harvard University. My special passion for physics was ignited early on in my junior year. My classmates and I learned how to do MatLab programming, which allowed us to model physics experiments on the computer while simultaneously performing them in the lab. One day my instructor brought in a double pendulum, a device that exhibits chaotic behavior. Seeking to explore the nonlinear equations modeling this pendulum, my classmates and I struggled to imitate on our computer screens the motion that was unfolding before our eyes. This struggle deepened my desire to understand, and this desire continues today with problems yet to be solved. My Trinity background and my MatLab experience led to my securing a position as a physics research assistant within my first two weeks at Carleton College. It also gave me the foundation to explore incredibly complex physics-related systems while in college. Because of my Trinity experience I frequently return to the school, giving talks to students on concepts such as Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity and the quantum
mechanical nature of light. My hope is that this will encourage other Trinity students to pursue studies in math, science or engineering.

Mike Wacker (1999, Servant Branch) is the Servant Branch campus division coordinator and a member of the Brotherhood of the People of Praise. Growing up as the son of a headmaster [Bill Wacker], I had a lot of opportunities to serve at open houses for prospective parents—it comes with the territory. At one open house in particular, I was taking a mother and her daughter through the school. We got to one room and I said, “This is the science room.” It was only slightly bigger than the other rooms, but you could tell it was the science room because microscopes sat on the shelves in the back. We looked around, and I remember the mother saying, “Where are the eye-wash stations?” I thought to myself, Well, since all we do is use little pipettes on plastic sheets, it never gets very dangerous around here, but I decided to tell her very simply that we didn’t have any.

I want to thank the teachers in those days who were able to teach us so much on a shoestring budget, without many resources, and who prompted us to be filled with wonder at science with very little in the way of equipment or supplies. I’m really grateful for the new building and its wonderful facilities, but I’m also grateful to the teachers in the old days for all their creativity.

Julie Kadera Olson (1991, Servant Branch) was a member of the first graduating class of River Ridge. She and her husband Mark are members of Servant Branch and live in Burnsville, Minnesota. Their son, Christopher, is one of two students currently at River Ridge with a parent who attended the school. Over 25 years ago, I sat with my parents and listened to Kerry Koller and his son give a presentation on Trinity School. They were talking about the possibility of opening a school in Minnesota. We heard about high school students who were learning physics, trigonometry and scriptural anthropology, and reading literary writings from Plato, Aristotle and Dante. We also heard about a tight-knit group called “a community of learners.” I remember sitting there thinking that there’s no way I could ever go to this school. This is for smart people, but I’m just average.

I didn’t know then how much being a part of that school would change my life. At Gethsemane Episcopal Church in 1991 we had a class of six. We were evenly split—three girls and three boys. Five of the six families were members of the People of Praise. Trinity’s curriculum was difficult enough for the average student, but it was extremely difficult for someone with a learning disability. I was diagnosed with learning disabilities in second grade. I have difficulty with computational thinking, spatial concepts and organization. I have an above-average IQ, and research on the subject has shown that my disability, like many others, is not readily evident to most people. I excel in verbal communication, and I have a good mind for visualization. I learn best by hearing and by example, which Trinity is good for. Still, for me, the challenges of Trinity were many. I struggled, but I came to understand that
Trinity is much more than its curriculum. Even though my educators at the time had difficulty in finding ways to teach me, they persisted, and so did I, and so did my parents.

The education I received at Trinity has enabled me to have confidence in my life, to follow the Lord and to become the woman he has created me to be, and I am grateful. I was empowered to take the initiative in postsecondary school to follow my gifts and find ways to learn my chosen profession. I am a massage therapist, and have been quite successful in helping people in their plans for health.

When looking at options for our son for his education, we found ourselves, as parents, seeking the Lord for the right place for him, much as my parents did with me. Our son Christopher is now a junior at Trinity. He has grown in many ways because of this environment, and that delights our whole family.

David Salmon (2001, South Bend) is the president of One:Ten Communications, a web site development company of the People of Praise with 10 employees. I came to Trinity convinced that I would never create anything recognizable as art, but like many others I learned how to see and how to draw, and then miraculously started producing works I enjoyed and took pride in. The same is true of my experience with other disciplines, both those that I enjoyed naturally and those I did not. My teachers and the Trinity curriculum helped me discover how to understand things that struck me as difficult and confusing and how to mine those things I already understood for even more knowledge. So I find now that I not only take joy in learning but also believe that more is always possible in my life and in my work, because I can always learn more.

I thank the teachers and staff at River Ridge and the founders of Trinity for the environment they have created. Going to Trinity changed my life; it has also had a profound effect on my family. Even though the teachers deliberately refrained from trying to teach us how to live, I still learned a great deal about how to relate to friends and co-workers by watching how the teachers treated one another and us students. At Trinity, I learned to see Christ in my Christian brothers and sisters.

Beth Sturman (2010) is a sophomore at Massachusetts Institute of Technology studying mechanical engineering and linguistics. My time at Trinity was marked by our move to the new Eagan campus during my sophomore year. While the new building was wonderful, I was struck by how much had remained the same. To me, the core of Trinity was not fresh paint and state-of-the-art labs, but the selfless faculty, the excellent curriculum and my peers. When everyone’s primary focus is learning, amazing things happen. There were those moments around the

“We learned from experiencing the world, not from being told what it was like.” Annie Bulger

Above left: Steve Hendrickson’s 11th-grade calculus class. Middle: Philip Gaffney performs in A Midsummer Night’s Dream in the fall of 2007. Right: In 1999, Mary Beth Amundson directs an orchestra rehearsal. From left: Anne Gaylord, Kathryn (Barrett) Brown, Katharine Berg, Meghan (Cleary) Harvey, Abby Berg, Joe May, Maria (McRae) Dykstra, Tim Bode.
seminar table when everything just clicked, and we knew that together we had uncovered something incredibly profound.

My class experienced one of these moments near the end of Homer’s *Iliad*, when Priam visits Achilles. For the first time we saw them not as a king and a mighty warrior, but as two men for whom the cost of war was painfully high. One had just lost his son, and the other would probably never see his father again. We came to a new understanding of what it meant to be human.

Another incident that comes to mind happened during physics class, when we were learning about Bernoulli’s principle. To make this abstract concept more tangible, Dave Beskar built a launcher powered by compressed air. We used what we had learned about fluids to predict the projectile’s behavior. When we tested it outside, our calculations were spot on!

“There were those moments around the seminar table when everything just clicked, and we knew that together we had uncovered something incredibly profound.” Beth Sturman

Philip Gaffney (2009, Servant Branch) is a junior mechanical engineering major at the University of Minnesota. I want to highlight my relationship with the teachers at Trinity. You’re not going to find better student-to-teacher relationships anywhere else. At Trinity, personal challenges from teachers go beyond the classroom, extending even to extracurricular activities. One day Steve Hendrickson said, “We want to start a video club for taping the sports games. Does anybody want to do it?” I was in my senior year, and I said, “Sure, I’d be interested in doing that.” So it was put on our shoulders. We were the ones who were taking control of that, making it happen. Challenges also came in chess competitions. I remember my trepidation, having to go up against Dr. Lotti, because he was up there in chess, and I was down here in chess, and yet I was able to relate to him as a person. The teachers at Trinity really do challenge us, get to know us and help us to grow.

Clare Naughton (2007) was a 2011 graduate of the University of Saint Thomas, where she majored in international relations. In May, 2012, she moved to Nairobi, Kenya, to work as a caseworker at a US resettlement support center. The three things I thank Trinity at River Ridge the most for teaching me are: (1) how to have conversation and intellectual disagreements with authenticity and grace, (2) the importance of female friendships, and (3) the significance of an integrated life—one filled with intellectual mastery, faith, community, the arts and athletic pursuits. Corners cannot be cut when teaching these lessons. In my own life this commitment to fundamentals continues to provide fruit. I graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree in international studies, and for a year I interned at the Vatican’s mission to the United Nations, covering the Second Committee (Economic and Financial Committee). Trinity never taught me about contemporary politics or economics, but Trinity gave me the tools to pursue my interest in these topics as well as to cultivate good friendships and colleagues along the way.

Joe Gleason (2005, South Bend) is a video producer with the People of Praise communications department. Every morning at the boys’ morning prayer at River Ridge, a male faculty member or guest stood up and gave a five-minute sharing on a topic he chose. Those five-minute sharings effectively taught me how to be a man of God. They taught me how to read Scripture, how to ask for words from the Lord, how to pray out loud, how to take authority over demons. Mike Wacker fleshed out what Christian brotherhood looked like by describing what he admired about his friend and fellow faculty member Gregg Murray. Joel Kibler told us what it was like to smuggle Bibles into Communist Poland in the 1970s. Steve Hendrickson read excerpts from *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, and I remember thinking that anything seemed to become automatically more manly just by virtue of the fact that Mr. Hendrickson thought it was cool, even a book called *The Little Flowers*.

Those five-minute sharings—Pat Murphy’s stories about the missionary Bruce Olson, Jon Balsbaugh’s analysis of Bob Dylan’s lyrics—they were short, they were pithy, and they changed my life. Those men are the reason I joined the People of Praise.

Dawn LaValle (2001) is pursuing her Ph.D. in classics at Princeton University. She is writing her dissertation on Methodius of Olympus, a third-century writer of Christian philosophical dialogues.

Ten decisions shape your life
You’ll be aware of about five.
When I was asked to give some reflections of my experience at Trinity, these lyrics from the song “I’ll Try Anything Once” by The Strokes immediately came to mind. Walking into ninth-grade Humane Letters with Miss Arndt in 1997, I had no idea that attending Trinity would become one of those ten decisions, but there is no longer any doubt left in my mind. My four years at Trinity started a new trajectory for my life. How can I tell you how wonderful Trinity was for me? It was life after death. It was wideness where there had been narrowness. It was
purpose where there had been purposelessness. I was
blessed with tremendous teachers. I was blessed with tre-
mendous fellow students. I was blessed with tremendous
ideas to learn. Music to sing. Conversations to have.
Trinity was so expanding because it was thrillingly
holistic. Academic pursuits were wedded to a deep love of
God. Perhaps the greatest gift I have carried with me from
Trinity is a firm commitment to a sense of wonder at the
manifold glory of God which permeates all of life.

Annie Bulger (2006, South Bend) is a web site devel-
oper for One:Ten Communications. She graduated in
December from Saint Mary’s College with a degree
in math. After earning a perfect 4.0 grade point aver-
age, she was chosen as one of two valedictorians of her
graduating class. At Trinity, I learned to encounter the
Lord’s world with wonder and awe. This came, I believe,
because as students we were gently directed to uncover
the truth ourselves and thus to own it. Regularly we would
spend whole class periods at the nature preserve behind
the school—just observing. Trips to the bass ponds were
an integral part of seventh- and eighth-grade science. We
learned from experiencing the world, not from being told
what it was like. We studied philosophy in the same way.
My junior year, I remember poring over Plato’s Republic for
weeks. We grappled with logic and argumentation not by
being taught principles but by dissecting each argument
together. In mathematics, too, we were exposed to the bare
truth as we studied advanced topics like Cantor’s theory
and fractals. Our teachers led us into the details of creation,
into the depths of Plato’s Republic, and into the intrica-
cies of mathematical dimension. There they gave us the
freedom to explore the beauty and power that these things
hold. As a result, our delight at the Lord’s world unfolding
before us was genuine, because we had ourselves discov-
ered the truth we beheld.
At the community meeting on February 5, Jon Balsbaugh (Servant Branch), head of school at River Ridge, expressed his thanks to the members of Servant Branch as they celebrated a quarter-century of River Ridge education.

To Trinity parents, past or present: Thank you for every carpool you’ve driven, every Medieval Banquet costume you’ve sewn, every class party you’ve hosted, every gym floor you’ve swept and every encouragement you’ve given to your child when it seemed like he or she just wasn’t going to be able to push through that particular assignment that night. We are not Trinity School without your faithful support, your trust and your sacrifice. Thank you.

To our teachers and staff, past or present: Thank you for every lesson plan you’ve crafted, every two-page evaluation you’ve written for your students, every course you’ve had to learn and every stretching faculty seminar text you’ve had to wrestle with. You have been the lifeblood of what we’ve been doing for 25 years. Thank you.

To all Trinity students, both current and alumni: Thank you for every Latin verb you have conjugated, every essay you have labored over late into the night, every painting and drawing you have entered in the art show, every concert you have performed for us and every moment of wonder that you have allowed yourself to be captured by. You are the ones in whom this work will ultimately lodge, and we are very proud of you. Thank you.

At 25 years, Trinity School is a remarkable success story. We continue to enroll students of average and above average ability, not only the elite, the most gifted or the most talented, and we engage them for six years in one of the most amazing educations available in the world. Sometimes from the inside it’s difficult for us to realize how remarkable and extraordinary what we’re doing really is. We have the disadvantage of familiarity, and the little things that annoy us might steal focus from the wider view. But one of the most exciting aspects of my job is the opportunity I now have to hear people’s impressions from the outside. Let me tell you a few stories to illustrate what I mean. Everything I’ll mention here happened in the last two weeks.

At the Winter Classic a couple of weeks ago, a parent told me, “Now that we have experienced it, Trinity School is the only school we would
even consider sending our children to. Where else can my son be a starter on the baseball team, sing in a choir, put his artwork in an art show and be a part of a Bible study that some of his classmates organized? This place is amazing.”

Two weeks ago I was at a conference in Chicago. I was approached by the headmaster of a grammar school in another major city, a city with a lot of good schools. He cornered me and said, “I want to sit down with you over lunch, because I want to know what we would have to do to get a Trinity School in my town.”

Last week I met with a man from Korea who has been bringing us exchange students from his country. As soon as he got to know us, he chose us as the model for a school he wanted to start in Korea in order to reform their national education system.

Last week Pat Murphy received this email: “Dear Mr. Murphy, I’m the head of school for an international school in China. My daughter attended Trinity at River Ridge back in the mid- to late-1990s when we were living in the Twin Cities. I’ve been having a discussion with my secondary teachers about what academic excellence means. As I’ve struggled to get my point across, and as I look back at all the schools I’ve ever been associated with, Trinity stands out as the one school that has done things right.” He went on to ask a little advice about what he could do.

Those stories are just a few among many. We have 25 years to be very proud of.

Servant Branch, this is our school. It is shining brightly in the educational world. As a community, we believe in this kind of education. We sacrifice to provide it for our children, and we are offering it as a gift to the world.

As head of school, I want to say to the branch, thank you for all the blood, sweat and tears, for all your sacrifices and all your prayers. May the Lord continue to bless us, to bless this work and to bless the world through it.

A Legacy of Learning:
Harry and Jan Sweere

by Chris Meehan

Just before her death last June, Jan Sweere (Servant Branch) gave $3 million to Trinity School at River Ridge. The money will go to an endowment fund for scholarships: interest from the fund will bring financial aid to needy River Ridge students for many years to come. This gift was a fitting conclusion to a life marked by generosity, a characteristic that Jan shared with her husband Harry, who died in 2005. “Harry and Jan always had a heart for people in need and for youth who want education or training,” says Jan’s good friend and former women’s group member Judy Weiland. (See the tribute to Jan on page 18).

“This final gift of Jan’s for Trinity represents a legacy of support,” said Jon Balsbaugh (Servant Branch), head of school at River Ridge. “We are so grateful to the Lord for Jan’s life in the community, for her generosity and for the impact that this gift of hers will have in the lives of our students and families.”

The endowment gift was the second time Jan gave $3 million to River Ridge. The first gift came in 2007, during the capital campaign for the new campus in Eagan. That gift propelled the campaign halfway toward its goal. At the end of the campaign, Jan donated an additional $1 million dollars to help the campaign surpass its original goal of $6.2 million.

Early in 2011, when Jan was hospitalized for cancer, she and her lawyer finalized the structure of her estate plans. She chose to leave the bulk of her wealth to religious and charitable organizations, plus River Ridge and a chiropractic school in Minneapolis. Always a little ill at ease with the attention such gifts bring, Jan decided that the news of these last large gifts would not be disclosed until after her death.

Over the years, Harry and Jan’s gifts varied according to the need. One time Trinity School needed a large number of seminar tables for use throughout the school. Harry’s business, Ergotron, made the tables and donated them. By the time of Harry’s death, the Sweeres and Ergotron had given well over $200,000 toward scholarships, the endowment fund and operating expenses. “That still doesn’t take into account the expenses Harry incurred by providing internships for Trinity graduates, or the costs involved in the program he started to help provide orthodontic treatment to students who needed it,” notes Joel Kibler, principal branch coordinator for Servant Branch and a close friend of the Sweeres.

Kerry Koller (South Bend), president of Trinity Schools, offered his own reflections on the Sweeres’ joint legacy: “I first met Harry and Jan in the mid 1990s when I spent a lot of time in the Twin Cities visiting Servant Branch and Trinity School. I was immediately impressed by their intelligence, hard work and generosity. They were active then in giving young men and women opportunities to work in their business and thus to be trained for their adult lives. A number of those students owe their adult successes to the Sweeres. The Sweeres played a decisive role in the building of the new Trinity campus through their very generous lead gift to the campaign. With this new gift, Jan ensures that more young men and women can benefit from a Trinity education.”
Try a Little Kindness

Editor’s note: Many community members have benefited from praying and thinking about these words on kindness from the late Fr. Charles Harris, a founding member of the Corvallis branch and former member of the community’s board of governors. Part two of this article will appear in our next issue.

Today, as we appreciate the vastness of the universe, we experience our own smallness and our own weakness. A tiny mosquito can bear a deadly disease. An elephant can do things which baffle our strength. Yet there is one power which through the action of the Holy Spirit we can possess and these creatures do not. This is the power of making the world happy, or at least of diminishing the unhappiness and making the world quite different. The worst kinds of unhappiness as well as the greatest amount of it come from our conduct toward one another. Basically the world is unkind. In such a world kindness goes a long way. As Shakespeare puts it, “How far that little candle throws its beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world.”

Can you imagine the lessening of world tension if all world leaders were kind? Can you reckon the peace of a household in which only kind words were spoken and every action was animated by kindness? What, then, is this kindness that can do so much to transform lives and environments?

Kindness is an overflowing of ourselves upon others. We put others in our place and we treat them as we wish to be treated. In fact, it is the daily earthly fulfillment of Jesus’ second commandment: to love your neighbor as yourself. It is divine in its origin. The overflow of self in God resulted in creation; creation is divine kindness.

Kindness is coming to the rescue of others when they need it and we have the power to supply what they need. The people had been with Jesus all day and they were hungry, and the divine kindness multiplied loaves and fishes. She was a widow and alone and weeping as she followed the body of her only son to the cemetery, and the divine kindness drew near and said, “Young man, I say to you, arise,” and he restored him to his mother. Kindness is coming to the rescue of others when they need it.

Kindness is prodigal. It does the unnecessary, and when it is done it looks like the most necessary thing that could have been done. If it soothes the sorrow, it does more than that; if it relieves the want, it does more than that; and the extra is the choicest thing in the bargain. If it must be economical when it gives, it is never economical with the graciousness with which it gives. Kindness is a divine thing rather than a human one. In fact, it springs from the very depths of our humanness—at that point at which we are closest to the image of the God in which we were created.

Kindness makes life more endurable. The burdens of life often press very heavy, so heavy that life approaches the unbearable. Our feet are blistered by the way we have traveled, and every step of endurance is harshly painful. And then the kind word and the thoughtful action enable us to move on under our burden with a renewed heart.

Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence or learning, and these have never converted anyone unless they were kind as well. Almost all people have more goodness in them than has ever been discovered. In 60 or 70 years we can only give a sample of what we might be or of what we would be, but at the touch of kindness generosity springs out of meanness. Like the words of Jesus, “Lazarus, come forth,” kindness calls to life the goodness that had died. Kindness reveals a man to himself. Gently it arouses his self-respect and...
gives a person the courage once again to grow.

Kindness makes gloomy men smile and angry men grow meek. Sick men cease to groan. It lights hope in the eyes of the dying, sweetness in the heart of the bitter, turns men away from sin just when they are on the point of committing it. There are few gifts more precious than to lessen a person’s sins. We recall how Jesus passed along and saw Zaccheus up a tree and said kindly, “Zaccheus, come down, I’m coming over to your house for dinner this day.” We know the tremendous change that took place in Zaccheus as a result of these small kind words of the Lord.

Another work which kindness does is to encourage others in their efforts toward goodness. The habits of sin leave dirty footprints behind them and we grow tired of scrubbing the floor. There are few things which so resist the action of the Holy Spirit as discouragement, losing heart. God’s grace seems to run off the discouraged like rain off the roof. Whether discouragement takes the form of peevishness or lethargy or delusion, the mercy of God is needed to rouse it. All of us need encouragement. The path of virtue, even when it is not uphill, is stony and hard and each day’s journey is a little longer than our strength admits of, even though the day cannot be shortened. We may love God and love him truly, yet we can’t help being aware that we get tired of the struggle to be holy.

Because we are often busy with our own work and never look at that of others, or because we are jealous and look coldly and critically at the work of others, we have not come to rescue a brother or a sister about to stumble. Just a kindly tone of voice, an understanding smile, a loving glance of the eye—and this bit of human sunshine has renewed a drooping heart. That encouragement may be the first link of a new chain which when finished is called final perseverance.

I think at the judgment I shall more courageously face all my other sins than my lack of kindness.

Kindness is infectious. It is rare that an act of kindness stops with itself. By one kind action we commit ourselves to another. Moreover, that kindness makes others kind in turn. It’s like the cottony seeds of the dandelion, which a single breath of kindness blows in all directions.

The kindest people are generally those who have received the greatest amount of kindness. All of us know that selfishness is a deeply rooted problem in our lives and it seems to resist a frontal attack. Yet our acts of kindness lay mines in its path and when it tries to advance it is badly wounded.

Kindness seems to know some secret fountain of joy and opens it up to sending its waters dancing in our lives. An act of kindness makes our day lighten and, like the sun breaking through in a heavy winter, causes a certain amount of joy. People seem to grow kinder as they grow older. Perhaps we’ve all experienced that from our grandparents. Young people are not always kind. Kindness does not belong to the fervor of beginnings; it belongs to the solidity of growth. No one has ever sat under the kindly shade of a pumpkin, which grows in six months, but many have rested under the shade of a mature maple which offers refreshing coolness in the heat of the summer.

Kindness is the key to humility, that most difficult of all virtues. Kindness does so much for us; it helps us to unlearn our youthful habits of judgment and criticism. It makes us thoughtful and considerate. A kind person is one who’s never self-occupied. A kind person is gracious, sympathetic, of gentle humor, noble and strong. Kindness is absolutely indispensable in winning others to our Lord.

Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence or learning, and these have never converted anyone unless they were kind as well.
The 2012 Leaders’ Conference for Men offered a panoramic overview of the vast landscape of the Bible, the overarching story that runs from Genesis to Revelation.

Over three days, Craig Lent (South Bend), Joel Kibler (Servant Branch) and Kerry Koller (South Bend) retold that story in 17 manageable chunks. (Most of their talks were under 30 minutes.) They used artful narration, maps, historical background details and the text of Scripture to follow the long thread of the story, tying together Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, Jesus, Paul, the first Christians, and, as it turns out, us.

“This is our story,” Craig said. “We want to have in our minds our position in this great story, revealed by the word of God. We rarely have a chance to see the whole thing.”

For many of the attendees, this rare glimpse of “the whole thing” generated a new excitement to read or reread some of the smaller pieces of the story. “I will never open the Scriptures and look at them the same way,” said Chris Taylor (Corvallis). “I love God’s word. Now I love and understand God’s word much more."

Paying close attention to the Bible is not a new thing for the People of Praise, of course. “For many of us the baptism in the Holy Spirit produced a great hunger for reading the Scriptures,” Craig noted. “Scripture has always played a big role in our community life and it certainly plays a big role on our missionary frontier.”

Rather than summarizing all the talks or attempting to recapitulate the Biblical story, I’ll zoom in on only two talks, assuming that, as Craig pointed out, each individual moment in the story can open up a window onto the whole thing.

Following talks on Creation, Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David and the prophet Elijah, Craig gave a moving talk on the 8th-century B.C. prophet Hosea. He began by imaginatively retelling a remarkable moment from the prophet’s life:

“The bag of silver coins hung heavy from Hosea’s belt, and his poor donkeys labored under the burden of 10 bushels of barley, almost 480 pounds. The money and the grain represented half of the money he would earn that year. It was also the price of the slave he had set out to ransom. The thought of purchasing another human being repulsed him, but this was a rescue mission.”

Hosea trudges up a long hill to the site of a shrine where the Israelites offer sacrifices, not only to Yahweh but also to pagan idols. There he finds the slave he hopes to ransom, working as a shrine prostitute. He hands over his money, then brings her home to be purified and to live with him in peace. This slave is Hosea’s wife.
The humiliating experience of buying his own wife back from a life of prostitution gives Hosea a deep understanding of how God reacts to the wandering ways of the Jews. The eighth century B.C. is a dark time in their story, marked by idol worship and many other violations of the Commandments, even human sacrifice. Israel is divided into the northern and southern kingdoms and, in the north, bloody political turmoil threatens to unravel the nation. (Eventually, it does.)

Hosea comes to see that his marriage to a former prostitute mirrors God’s relationship to the Israel of his time. When Hosea speaks words of chastisement to a wayward nation, they come from a personal experience of shame and anger that he shares with the Almighty:

“How can I hand you over, O Israel?” (Ho. 11:8).

For centuries, Joel said, the Jews had been aware of God’s special presence among them. He had visited them in pillars of cloud and fire, in the burning bush and in the words and visions of the prophets. Most of all, though, God had lived in Solomon’s temple, “a place where heaven and earth met and overlapped,” as Joel put it.

Just before the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.), however, God abandoned his home in Solomon’s temple, in a mournful scene described in detail by the prophet Ezekiel (chapter 10). The Jews of Jesus’ time longed for the day when he would return, just as Isaiah and others had prophesied: “Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion” (Is. 52:8).

Of course, God did return to Zion, but not to live permanently in the temple, as the Jews expected. Instead, Jesus himself becomes God’s temple, his dwelling place. “Jesus behaved as if he were the temple in person, flesh and blood, living, breathing, walking, a place on earth where God lives,” Joel said. Jesus says and does things that only God can do. He forgives sins, heals the sick, rebukes the wind and the seas, refers to himself as the bridegroom, and says, “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

But this is only the beginning of the plan. God the Father desires to make many more places on earth where he dwells, many more temples, as many as there are human beings. This is what he begins to accomplish on Pentecost, when he comes to live in Jesus’ first followers through the Holy Spirit.

Looking back over the whole story with this plan in mind, we can grasp much about the character and personality of God. God is faithful to his original desire to live alongside his human creation, to walk with Adam in the garden, in the cool of the evening. His long record of faithfulness to Israel shows the inestimable value he places on human relationships, so much so that God himself becomes a human being and chooses to live among us.

“In the end,” Joel said, “The story of the Gospels is the story of a human being who is part of the Godhead.”

For those fortunate enough to listen and watch as the vast landscape of the biblical story came into view, the 2012 Leaders’ Conference for Men will likewise be remembered as a big event. “As I came to understand more about the person of Jesus through the talks, I realized how much God loves his people and me personally,” said Fred Dang (Vancouver-Portland). “The conference encouraged me to read Scripture more and to focus prayerfully on my role in God’s story as it continues to unfold.”

Or, as two of Jesus’ disciples put it just after their own experience of hearing the meaning of the Scriptures revealed, “Did not our hearts burn within us?” (Lk. 24:32).
Jeanette Krause, Servant Branch

by Meg Ferber

Christ’s public service began at a wedding in Cana, and ended with him washing the disciples’ feet. My friendship with Jeanette began when she served as wedding reception coordinator for Don and me. Thirty-eight years later, in the months just before she died, she took care of my feet. Jeanette had decided that my socks were too thin for our cold winter mornings in Minnesota. She made me sit down, retrieved some hospital footies from her large stash, knelt on the floor and lovingly put them on my feet.

Jeanette was born in Richmond, Minnesota, in 1946. She married John Krause on June 3, 1967, and they raised five daughters. They joined Servants of the Light in 1973 and made the People of Praise covenant on September 13, 1987.

Jeanette led a women’s group for many years. Her leadership was marked by being prepared to share what she was hearing from the Lord, wonderful singing and an ability to celebrate well. The beginning of Servant Camp was in her back yard, where small groups of children met daily for a week or so. The number of cards she sent to people must have numbered in the thousands.

We celebrated Jeanette’s life at her funeral on June 3, 2011, which was also John and Jeanette’s 44th wedding anniversary. John poignantly remarked, “I got to walk Jeanette down the aisle one last time.”

Dick Gaworski, Servant Branch

by Mary Jo Koplos

Richard “Dick” Gaworski was born in Fairmont, Minnesota, in 1931. He and Wynona were married in Oklahoma on June 15, 1957, and after a year in Tulsa the Gaworskis moved to Minnesota, where they welcomed four sons and a daughter.

He became vice-president of ITT Industrial Credit in 1976, but was let go in 1986 and replaced by a younger man. This led him to file one of the very first age-discrimination lawsuits in the United States. The case was litigated all the way to the United States Supreme Court, and eventually he prevailed. This decision is cited in age-discrimination cases to this day.

During those eight years, Wynona says, “He became stronger in his trust in God’s will. He was very faithful to his morning prayer time and always prayed for God’s will for the outcome of the trial and for all those involved in the trial. I was amazed that he never harbored resentment for those responsible for his firing.”

Dick remained a prayer warrior even as he was struck with Parkinson’s. Bill Madden remembers: “Whenever we as a men’s group would ask about praying for him, Dick would let us pray for him, but he would always mention someone else who also needed prayer—Wynona or another family member or someone else he knew.”

But then, that was Dick—always thinking of others.
Al Masterman, Servant Branch
by Mary Sue House

Al Masterman—maybe sometimes you might have wanted to call him the “quiet” Al Masterman—had a love of the Lord like few men. Second to that was his love for his wife Donna, and then his love for their seven children, all raised in the Twin Cities area.

As a member of that great generation of men and women called to sacrifice during World War II, he served his country on board a battleship in the South Pacific. His ship suffered direct hits several times, and many of Al’s Navy friends were injured or killed. One night Donna came home from one of the prayer meetings sponsored by Servants of the Lord community and told Al she wouldn’t go to any more unless he started coming too. Al said he didn’t want her to stop going to the prayer meetings, so he decided to start going with her. They joined Servants, and later made the covenant of the People of Praise on January 27, 1985. The two of them prayed together every morning.

Al was an avid reader, and getting books from the library was a major weekly event. He retired in his 80s, but continued working nights as a parking lot attendant.

During Al’s final days at home, with Donna and the children around him, his constant words were, “Come, Lord Jesus.” He died on June 28, 2011.

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Pat Harrington, Servant Branch
by Pat Flynn and Peggy Judge

Pat Harrington’s first response to a situation was to pray, and her first response to an invitation or a new idea was an enthusiastic “Yes!”

She was born in Minneapolis in 1931. Family mattered to her. As a young adult she lived with her mother in south Minneapolis, and she was also her mother’s caretaker and companion until she died in the early 1980s.

Dorothy Jordan (Servant Branch) and Pat were co-workers at Metropolitan Life Insurance. Both shared a hunger for the Lord, which led them to a prayer meeting sponsored by Servants of the Light. They were soon baptized in the Spirit, and Pat found a home in the community. She joined the People of Praise in 1983 and made the covenant January 27, 1985. Pat would always ask the Lord about his will in a situation, and then pray for it. One time she was praying for the job that the Lord wanted her to have, and also that he would confirm this by some sign. She was offered a job working for Hennepin County, and her new office was in “Harrington Hall.” This was her sign from God.

Pat taught others to “pray first.” Whenever people mentioned that they had a need, or were sick, or had a problem of any kind, she would grab their hand and pray with them on the spot.
George Henneberger was a man who quietly impacted the lives of a vast number of people while never seeking the spotlight for himself. He died on July 21, 2011, in his residence at St. Catherine’s Village in Madison, Mississippi.

George graduated from medical school, then achieved the rank of major during a career in the U.S. Air Force. George and Lucy were founding covenanted members of the Community of God’s People in early 1979. In 1984, they were members of the group who joined the People of Praise as the Biloxi mission branch, and made the covenant on January 20, 1990.

He worked long doctor’s hours without complaint throughout his professional career, brought healing to an unknown number of people, and blessed the lives of over 7,000 families who received his help in bringing new life into the world. He had a policy of not charging any patients whom he considered to have public service jobs, e.g., police, firefighters, teachers and ministers. For many years he and Lucy gave money anonymously to large lower-income families. Also, they made sure that one particular needy family had gifts at Christmas, without anyone other than the Henneberger children knowing where the gifts came from.

George was a remarkable, humble friend and brother in the Lord who is remembered and well thought of by many.

Jan Sweere, Servant Branch
by Bill Wacker

Jan’s women’s group always thought of her as their “extra-touch sister.” Often, when they met, she would surprise them with unexpected sweets, music CDs or Christian teaching CDs.

She and Harry were married in 1960 and raised five children. They got involved in prayer meetings in the Twin Cities about 32 years ago, joined the community, and made the covenant on April 14, 1985. Harry’s innovative and inventive spirit led him and Jan to start a business called Ergotron in their basement to manufacture ergonomically correct computer workstations.

Jan was always very supportive of Harry and Ergotron, but it was a great challenge when he passed away in 2005 and she became chair of the large company. “Prayer has been at the foundation of the company’s success all along,” she said many times.

Without Jan’s generosity, the spacious new building in Servant Branch that houses both our People of Praise offices and Trinity School at River Ridge would not be what it is. Jan made the lead monetary donation in our capital campaign for the building—a single gift of three million dollars which amounted to half of our entire goal! She didn’t consider her gift as anything special. For her, it was simply a matter of “to whom much is given, much is expected.”

She died on June 9, 2011.

George Henneberger, Biloxi
by Phil Ehemann

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George was a remarkable, humble friend and brother in the Lord who is remembered and well thought of by many.
“You have put into my heart a greater joy than they have from abundance of corn and new wine” (Ps. 4:7).