

Community of Christ

The Peacekeepers



Association for Ministry to Military Newsletter

June, 2006

Curt's Column

Spring has sprung all around us. We have been having cooler weather this year than normal (Whatever that is). In any event the leaves are out and the flowers are doing their thing. The grass is growing like weeds (Which it probably is in my yard). I've had to mow five times since we got back to Independence.

On a sad note: Tim Kunzweiler's, our vice-president, father died within the last 30 days from this writing. We all want to wish Tim our condolences and our prayers are with him and his family. We all can understand the feelings that arise when we lose someone close to us in our family.

In as much as we are into summer now, my thoughts have turned to next year as our meeting at conference will be upon us almost before we know it. I have been able to arrange for the same caterer that we have had at our previous banquets. Don and his wife Mary have furnished us with meals ever since we have been in existence. They have begun to cut back on their catering business and are doing only the ones that they enjoy doing. I'm glad we fit into that category.

Next March at our meeting, which corresponds with conference, we will be electing a president and secretary. Their terms will run for four years. The vice-president and treasurer were extended until 2009 because of the conference held in 2005. In as much as I have been president since the inception of our organization I will no longer be a candidate for reelection. It is my suggestion that we elect Tim Kunzweiler president as he has served as vice-president for the past few years.

All of you need to be thinking about next year and begin to get suggestions to put on the agenda for the body to act on. If any of you would like to have your name for either president or secretary or vice-president if



Tim is not elected, we need to get the information out to all concerned so that all can be aware and act accordingly.

If you can make plans to come to conference in March 2007 we can use your help. Joyce and I have manned our booth at conference each time. We would like to have the opportunity to actually attend some of the sessions but cannot because of our obligations to the booth. Think about it.

We would still like to have some articles from you who are on active duty. Tell us about what you are doing and what is going on in your life. We are interested in all of your activities.

I may have caused a problem with my niece at Ft Jackson. It seems that she was injured in basic training and is having problems being put in rehab so the injury can heal. I wrote to her commanding officer and she was called in and put on the carpet for going out of channels. I never heard of advising a relative of conditions surrounding their situation as going out of channels. In this case it just so happens that her uncle is a retired Lt. Colonel and does not like to hear of abuse in any of our military establishments. We're going to continue to monitor the situation and see if we can't get some satisfaction.

Our prayers are with you daily and hope that all of you have Christ with you wherever you go and that he keeps each one of you safe and out of harms way.



The Community of Christ Association for Ministry to Military Personnel is dedicated to bringing ministry to military members on active duty throughout the world.

Staying Alert to God's Presence

By David R. Brock

I heard a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye a while back in which she told the story of a man who gave his wife two skunks for Valentine's Day*. He thought they were beautiful. She cried ... and he couldn't figure out why: "I thought they had such beautiful eyes!" he explained.



Nye went on to proclaim that great poems can be found everywhere—in the garage, in a shadow drifting across our ceiling, among the socks in a dresser drawer, and, yes, even in the eyes of skunks. We just have to look for them. We have to *live* in a way that lets us find them ... or maybe lets them find us!

A number of years ago, when working in Africa, I would occasionally find a cast-off coin lying in the dust or on a street curb. I was surprised to find money underfoot in a place of such poverty until I was told that, with rapid inflation, the coins were worthless. It was still difficult not to bend over and pick up those little treasures. The world seemed to invite me to participate in a scavenger hunt, free of charge, with the prospect of some big prize at the end.

Virginia Stem Owens, borrowing a line from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, says that her role is to go through life as a spy, with enough discipline and patience and practiced skill to discover all the mystery that most of us miss, most of the time. Whether it is a slight shift in the inflection of a loved one's voice, the almost imperceptible lift of an eyebrow, or a heretofore unseen movement at the end of microscope or telescope, spying is the best of all vocations. You can do it anywhere: over coffee at the local café, sitting at a stoplight, or walking around your own backyard.

There is nothing new about all this for Christians. After all, we follow one who found the kingdom of heaven in a mustard seed, the nature of a personal God in a lost sheep or lost coin that was found, and the graciousness of the Creator in wildflowers on a mountainside, here but a brief time but clothed in glory. So much about the wisdom, vision, grace, and hope of Jesus seems to be linked to his patient and studied observation of nature and people.



I wonder if the essence of our ministry and discipleship is uncovering mystery and the sacred in cast-off moments, abandoned people, and the mundane. I wonder if discipleship is more about learning than teaching, more about asking than telling. Maybe it is even more about receiving than giving!

One of the greatest privileges of full-time church service these past twenty-eight years has been the opportunity to live and work in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. There is nothing better for learning one's own culture, one's own strengths (and weaknesses) than living in an environment where everything is different. From morning bathing routines to the flavor of coffee and the texture of bread; from the lilt of a new language to means of travel to the location of the stars in the night sky, the world is different—at first fascinating, then frustrating, then just "the way things are."

One of the best ways to experience new dimensions of the nature of God is to understand how others see God through eyes and insights shaped by "foreign" geography, economy, and culture. I understood the good news of the gospel more deeply and subtly as I encountered it in surroundings far from home.

It seems sort of antithetical to mission and witness, but I think I've been best at "apostling" when I've asked a lot of questions, looked carefully, then expressed thanks by articulating as best I can what I've learned from the people I've been with. I must share how God has encountered me—how God has found me in that new culture and with new acquaintances.

Some of you who read this today may not have the luxury of "spying" on the world to discover that you are, indeed we all are, standing on holy ground and living in a sacred moment right here, right now. There is enough pain, enough injustice, and enough ugliness to mask all of that. It's tough to wax poetic, to see a common bush aflame with Divine Presence, when you are a weary mother trying desperately to save her children from hunger and rebels in Darfur, or when you are in a Humvee trying to stay alive traversing the roadways in and around Baghdad.

Faith and hope waver at times, but I take my stand on the belief that if I pay attention, if I'm stealthy, and if I spy well enough, God's presence just might be manifest in the next conversation, the next face, the next sound I hear out my window. I might be surprised by Love as I'm brushing my teeth tomorrow morning. I might understand more about my calling and the church's calling when I read the next online editorial in the *Times* or the *Post*. Maybe, if I stay alert, I'll see the sacred hiding in the eyes of skunks!

Courage and blessings to each of you.

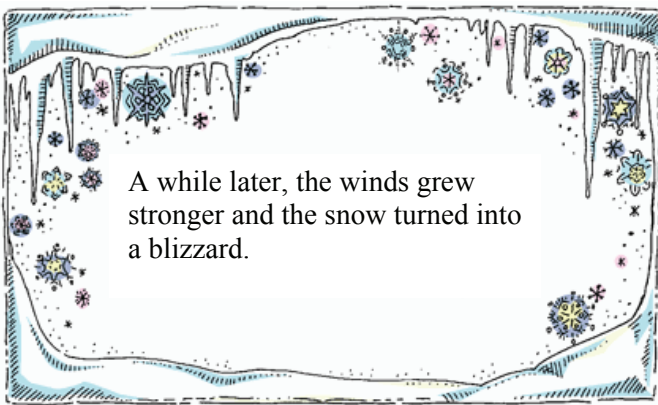
* "Valentine for Ernest Mann," by Naomi Shihab Nye

GOD and Geese

There was once a man who didn't believe in God, and he didn't hesitate to let others know how he felt about religion and religious holidays.

His wife, however, did believe, and she raised their children to also have faith in God and Jesus, despite his disparaging comments.

One snowy day Eve, his wife was taking their children to service in the farm community in which they lived. They were to talk about Jesus' birth. She asked him to come, but he refused. "That story is nonsense!" he said. "Why would God lower Himself to come to Earth as a man? That's ridiculous!" So she and the children left, and he stayed home.



As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening. Then he heard a loud thump. Something had hit the window. He looked out, but couldn't see more than a few feet.

When the snow let up a little, he ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window. In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese.

Apparently they had been flying south for the winter when they got caught in the snowstorm and couldn't go on. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. A couple of them had flown into his window, it seemed.

The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. The barn would be a great place for them to stay, he thought. It's warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm. So he walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and waited, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. But the geese just fluttered around aimlessly and didn't seem to notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them. The man tried to get their attention, but that just seemed to

scare them, and they moved further away. He went into the house and came with some bread, broke it up, and made a bread crumb trail leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on.

Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn.

Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be warm and safe. "Why don't they follow me?" he exclaimed. "Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?" He thought for a moment and realized that they just wouldn't follow a human. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," he said out loud.

Then he had an idea. He went into the barn, got one of his own geese, and carried it in his arms as he circled around behind the flock of wild geese. He then released it. His goose flew through the flock and straight into the barn — and one-by-one, the other geese followed it to safety.

He stood silently for a moment as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: "If only I were a goose, then I could save them!"

Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier. "Why would God want to be like us? That's ridiculous!"

Suddenly it all made sense. That is what God had done. We were like the geese — blind, lost, perishing. God had His Son become like us so He could show us the way and save us.

As the winds and blinding snow died down, his soul became quiet and pondered this wonderful thought.

Suddenly he understood why Christ had come.

Years of doubt and disbelief vanished with the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow, and prayed! His first prayer: "Thank You, God, for coming in human form to get me out of the storm!"



Sorry we have been so long getting in touch. Doug and I both appreciate the Peacekeepers newsletter as we are often living far from an active congregation.

Our current address is:

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Doug is currently the Battle Group Commander for the Kittyhawk Battle Group based in Yokosuka, Japan (CTF-70).

He was just selected for his second star; we are waiting for him to put it on!

His bio can be found at: <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/bios/navybio.asp?bioID=208> if you are interested. If there are any church members in our area that need a contact, please give them our email address.

Thank you for your continued ministry to all of us.

Doni McClain

To receive a second star, I believe, makes Doug a Vice-Admiral. We don't have too many of them running around and any people we have in the Japan area might be interested in his e-mail address. —Curt

Born of the Spirit by Andrew Shields

There are a lot of ways to enumerate a person: government identification numbers, multiple phone numbers, addresses, account numbers, loan numbers, confirmation numbers, frequent flyer profiles, age, even clothing measurements. Friends can be counted, so can income and expenses. A dollar amount can be assigned to one's working hours.

Getting to know individuals takes time and can be difficult. It's easier to use the shorthand of assigning categories and sifting those we meet into them. Ethnic groups, generations, job classifications, and hobbies provide a way to quickly understand aspects of a person.

Being born of the Spirit means looking past the numbers, past the daily interaction of one individual meshed with social and economic systems. A close walk with God requires the worth of persons to become vital in the life of disciples. Beyond the labels, beyond the categories, beyond the culture layered on each individual, there lives the holy print of God's work.

Seeing the investment of a splinter of God's light in every human being is seeing the kingdom of God. God loves every human being in the world beyond comprehension. Understanding that, being able to *see* it, requires a disciple of Jesus Christ to surrender the right to harbor hate toward others.

Being born of the Spirit means transcending the bindings of cultural codes, seeing beyond expectations of who is worthy of attention and who is invisible. Catching a glimpse of what God sees in each soul brings disciples closer to the abiding peace of Jesus Christ.



Available in an E-mail and a "snail mail" edition. Active-duty military members who join the association can receive either edition for free. Non-active-duty members receive either edition with a paid membership, **\$10.00, due in April**. The newsletter is also available on our Web site: <http://www.cofchristpeacekeepers.org/>

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