

Raising faith in

The Backyard

with a passion for generous stewardship

April 2009



Generosity

I was sitting at our kitchen table the other day, reading an article from Leadership magazine about developing and growing generosity in congregations. It was a good article, thoughtful and helpful in many ways, giving concrete examples that were not complicated but down to earth and grounded in Scripture.

So I'm sitting there, having some quiet moments of reflection after finishing the article, when tears

began to form in my eyes. I let them flow because I had begun to think about my Mom. Her face was before me and I almost said out loud, "Hi Mom, good to see you!" As I let the tears release the emotions that were overwhelming me, my thoughts began to focus and I realized something. Her image was before me once again because she

played a major role in modeling generosity throughout my life. My mind and my heart were not playing tricks on me; they were leading me to one of the primary sources for how I have come to define "generosity."

I began to think back over the years of the ways she would quietly go about loving us, the things she would do and say and, though at the time I didn't realize the tremendous sacrifices her and my father were making, now I am coming to realize the enormity of their generosity. We didn't have much, but what we did have was due to her giving up things so we would have what we needed. And she did it in her "stealth-like way," so that only after the years passed by was I able to realize it. She had a big heart and her needs were always secondary to others' needs.

That core value was based on her love for God; I always knew that. She taught me about God's

And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. ☞ Acts 2:44-47

love all along the way but I caught that love through the countless sacrificial choices she made on my behalf throughout the years. Her generosity was contagious and, as I was sitting there at the kitchen table thinking about all this, I couldn't help but be captivated by a deep feeling of gratitude and a longing to model the same generosity in my

life, in all things, for the sake of Jesus. And my tears turned into several moments of joy.

- Pastor John

Noisy Offering

April 19

Habitat for Humanity Northwest Harris County was established in 1989 by 12 area churches as an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, a non-profit 501-c-3, faith based, volunteer-driven organization, dedicated to eliminating sub-standard housing. HNWHC is one of eight Habitat affiliates in metropolitan Houston.



Since its inception HNWHC has built more than 140 homes providing housing for more than 568 individuals. However, their focus goes beyond just building houses; they are building communities that stress the well-being and future of the families who live in Habitat homes. They are committed to doing what they can to help these families be successful in their new neighborhoods. Their most recent steps in this direction are developing community Home Owner Associations and building community centers (the Robert Strudler Community Center at Cherie Cove, a joint partnership with Cypress Creek YMCA, and the Community Center to be built at Hamill Ranch, a joint partnership with Heart House).

Habitat NWHC does not give homes away; they partner with families looking for a 'hand-up' and help them build their new home. A typical Habitat home is 1120 square feet with 3 bedrooms and 1 ½ baths. They have probably constructed more duplexes than any other Habitat affiliate in the country. However with the construction of its two new communities (Lancaster and Hamill Ranch), they have be-

gun building single family homes on individual slabs.

In 2004 Habitat NWHC opened its building supply resale store, the ReStore. It has two main goals: generate a profit that can be used to build additional Habitat homes and help the environment by recycling used items that would otherwise go to local landfills. The store handles building materials, construction products, appliances and furniture.

On Sunday, April 19 we are asking you to dig into your pockets and purses and pull out any loose change you may be carrying. Deposit it in the buckets the ushers will be passing during the Noisy Offering. Thank you.

Did you know

? ...that Habitat for Humanity Northwest Harris County selected long-time Hosanna members Neil and Lynne Coles as **Volunteers of the Month** for February

2009. This is the highest honor Habitat Northwest can give to a volunteer and is in recognition of their dedication and commitment to helping build safe, decent, affordable homes and communities for families in need.



Glimpses of Grace 2009

World Hunger	\$200.00
African Initiative	\$12,275.00
Mission of the Month	\$1,626.54
Mulkey Fund Income	\$75.00
Benevolence (through Feb. 09)	\$3,339.01
Northwest Assistance Ministries	\$100.00
Abby Grace Fund	\$1,171.00
Buffalo Hot Wings Fundraiser	\$750.00
Equal Exchange Coffee Project	\$490.00
Art for the Hungry	\$721.00

Mission of the Month Gifts:

January—Lutheran Campus Ministry	\$512.84
February—Interfaith Hospitality Network	\$703.50
March—Lutherhill Campership Fund	\$412.20

Helping Hands Fund

January: Two families received money for rent assistance and Wal-Mart gift cards.

February: One family received rental assistance.

One individual received food pantry items and gift card.

March: Two families received rental assistance and food.

Balance on hand: \$429.12

The wonderful people of Hosanna have contributed so much to the **Equal Exchange Coffee Project** in connection with Lutheran World Relief. All monies go directly to small farmers in Africa, Asia, Latin America and even here in the United States. Since November 2008 an amazing total of \$694.50 has been contributed by our loving Hosanna family.

Sweet!

Did you know



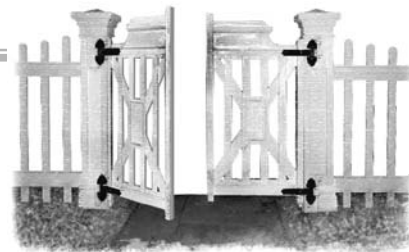
...that the CREW, Hosanna's high school-age youth group, took part in the Northwest Assistance Ministries "Art for the Hungry" contest, creating and displaying their rendition of "Rapunzel's Tower," created with over 1200 food items? They helped to raise over 5000 food items for NAM's community food pantry and, with the "votes" of quarters cast at the Willowbrook Mall, helped raise over \$3000!!!

PLUS...

These funds will be matched by the Feinsein Grant. Way to go, CREW!!!

A parting thought

Through the Back Gate



Easter... Hope for Today

This edition of The Backyard is being handed out on Easter Sunday, so I thought it might be fitting to share a few words about what Easter means for us. Of course, there are many words one could share about the meaning of Easter for our lives today, but I thought I would offer this closing article as “Back Gate” food for thought on this Easter Sunday, 2009.

John Ortberg, in an article titled, “Holding Out Hope” which he offered for the Fall edition of Leadership magazine, writes this:

“Ultimately, I don’t hope for some thing at all, but for some One. I hope for the One who rose on the Third Day. The Third Day is God’s day. The Third Day is the day when prisoners of Pharaoh get set free. The Third Day is the day the mountains shake and rivers are parted and people go into the Promised Land. The Third Day is the day a harem girl like Esther faces down a powerful king. The Third Day is the day prophets like Jonah are dropped off at seaside ports by giant fish. The Third Day is the day stones are rolled away. The Third Day is the day a crucified carpenter came back to life.

You never know what God is going to do, because God is ‘God of the Third Day.’ You never know what might happen on the Third Day. I cling to that. I put all my hope in a Third Day God.”

Ortberg writes some pearls of wisdom for us as disciples of Jesus. He talks about an act of discipline that he has established for himself, which is to “hope in the Lord.” He does this by finding quiet time with God and during that time he focuses on reading scripture passages that speak of God’s love for us, or writing down twenty blessings that he is grateful to God for, or thinking

about what will matter a million years from now. As he does these types of things, he feels his burdens getting lighter. He sleeps better. He listens to God better. And here is the most important point as he does these things: His focus is shifted from what he is hoping *for* to who he is hoping *in*.

A wonderful quote he shares is from one of his friends, Lew Smedes, who used to say, “One day every circumstance, every situation we’re hoping *for* is going to wear out, give out, fall apart, melt down, or go away. When that happens, the question is about your deeper hope ... about your foundational hope ... it’s about your fallback hope when all your other hopes are disappointed.”

Easter reveals to us such a hope, grounded in our Third Day God. Because of Easter, as disciples of Jesus we wake up every morning with that hope greeting us for the new day. We walk in that hope, for we are grounded in the One who has granted it to us as pure gift. May Hope abound in you and yours this Easter and every single day from here on out. May such a Hope abound in us as a congregation in the days ahead.

- Pastor John

Words of Hope

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

✧ Melody Beattie