



an  
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Community

May/June 2005

# *The Word of God* **NEWSLETTER**

Ecumenical, Charismatic, Missionary, Christian COMMUNITY

## **Hardwired for Community**

By Jack Flanagan

### **INSIDE**

**God's Provision—  
Community**

**Prayer Changes  
Families**

**MissionChrist  
Retreat**

**Joint Prayer with  
Word of Life**

**And More ...**

“And they devoted themselves to...the fellowship.” (Acts 2.42) Many of us take fellowship and our community life as a fundamental, after all, we’ve been at it for some time now. It derives from the Trinity who is the ultimate community and family! We view it as an essential support; it is one of the spokes in the wheel diagram, all the way back to the Life in the Spirit Seminars! Perhaps this is why I found it remarkable that an article, written by a commission consisting of social scientists and child health experts, stressed the need for communities in raising youth.

### **The secular case for Christian Community**

The article appeared in the American Family Association Journal, January 2005. It is titled *Hardwired for religion*. Its basic premise is that Christianity has the truth about community, so necessary for our youth and their need to grow in wholesome environments. I would like to highlight portions of this article and then comment how our community life addresses our significant need, not just for young people, but for all of us, who are always young in the Lord!

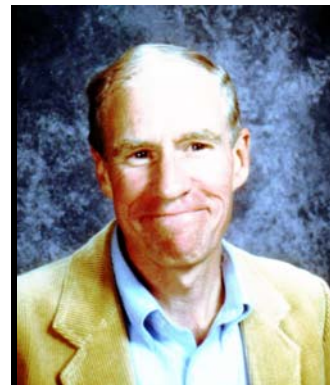
The article opened with a series of provocative questions aimed at our youth: what if we could find something that would make teenagers less likely

to become involved in crime, drugs and alcohol abuse? And what if this little miracle “something” would turn adolescents into safer drivers, make them more likely to participate in extracurricular activities like sports or student government, and give them a higher sense of self esteem? (Having served in a variety of jail and prison settings, these questions could as easily be asked of adults!)

The article goes on to state definitively that Christianity has the key – more specifically, Christian communities that are able to transmit the beliefs, values and morals that help give young people a sense of the transcendent, an ordered universe and their own place in it.

Surprisingly, the source of this conclusion is secular, the Commission on Children at Risk that described

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Jack Flanagan and his family have lived the benefits of community life for over 30 years, yet he as surprised to see a panel of secular experts confirm the great value of Christian community for kids!*

Seems to me ...

## The Power of the imperfect

Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind!  
Blow upon my garden  
that its fragrance may be wafted abroad.  
Let my beloved come to his garden,  
and eat its choicest fruits.

Song of Solomon 4:16

The miniature yellow rose was a prized possession. It stood near the front door welcoming guests with almost continuous joyful blooms, delighting both them and the gardener, my wife, Barb. During the remodeling of our home most of the plants near the house were moved to the safety of the vegetable garden, but not this one. Consequently some worker focused on his task stomped on it and broke it off down to the ground. It looked dead.

But the gardener loved that plant and wasn't ready to give up on it. She watched it, cared for it, was patient with it. Finally this spring it formed little green buds, then sent out small branches and leaves, and soon will again have flowers to welcome visitors to the house. It is not as large as it used to be, but still as beautiful in the eyes of the gardener, and full of promise.

&



In the Song of Solomon we read how the Bride, having passed through a time of testing and loss has a revelation of the Bridegroom's love for her. The result is the prayer above. A statement of complete trust in whatever the Lord will bring — so long as her beloved can enjoy His garden, and its aroma can be wafted abroad that others may know of him.

Like that miniature rose, it seems to me that we are seeing the fresh budding of life in the community these days. We see it in the life being experienced in the fellowship groups. We experience it in worship at the prayer meetings. And it is beginning to open up and waft His fragrance abroad. The recent New Way of Living course had 16 guests and there is interest in having another soon!

I believe there is a clear connection between the time we have spent looking at the revelation of Jesus' love for us in Song of Song, our prayer for growth in intimacy and in mission, and the fruit we are beginning to witness.

After a season of loss, under the loving care of the Gardener, we are beginning to again express His life, spread His aroma and welcome others into His garden.

ecumenical, charismatic, missionary, Christian COMMUNITY

'Isn't it striking to see... experts on

itself as an independent jointly sponsored initiative of the Dartmouth Medical School, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Institute for American Values. The 33 members consisted of a group of children's doctors, research scientists and mental health and youth service professionals. Their report is titled *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritarian Communities*.

### The Need

This commission considered the following: "In the midst of unprecedented material affluence, large and growing numbers of US children and adolescents are failing to flourish." It cited a number of troubling indicators: increasing mental and emotional difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, conduct disorders and suicidal thoughts, as well as a series of physical ailments rooted in emotional disorders, including heart disease and ulcers. Related to this are high rates of behavioral problems, such as substance abuse, school dropout, interpersonal violence, premature sexual intercourse and teenage pregnancy.

It commented on the long-term ramifications to these disorders and breakdowns. "Large numbers of children, even including those who could be considered privileged, are no longer developing the empathy, moral commitment and ability to love necessary to maintain our society at the level that has always been our dream."

### So what's the problem?

The commission observed the "crisis" is due to teens' "lack of connectedness...to other people, and the lack of deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning." It states from our earliest years we are essentially "hardwired" to form close attachments to other people, beginning with parents, and then expanding this to include a wide group of people. The authors note that parenting trends of the last 30 years promote "the development of unattached, uncommunicative, learning impaired and uncontrollable children." These trends have compromised children's "opportunity for the connections and rituals and nurturing that are so necessary to children's healthy development." Consequently, they grow up in a moral vacuum, one eventually filled with media values and a consumerist culture.

What a deadly concoction: home and family breakdown, with pop culture and MTV media values filling in the gap! As a consequence, the church continues to lose ground in our culture, and lose its

## children's health... acknowledge the positive role of religion in culture'

youth to the world.

The solution... What was surprising to me is that the commission actually stressed the need for moral values and religion in community settings! It acknowledged that "we are hardwired for meaning, born with a built in capacity and drive to search for purpose and reflect on life's ultimate goal. The need for young people to connect to ultimate meaning and to the transcendent is not merely the result of social conditioning, but is instead an intrinsic aspect of the human experience." And these religious beliefs strengthen young people, putting them on a more positive path. Such youth are actually safer drivers, more likely to wear seatbelts, and less likely to become juvenile delinquents or adults criminals. They are less prone to substance abuse or to engage in other high-risk behaviors. They are more likely to participate in sports, student government, volunteer in the community and take on more positive attitudes about life. "If America continues to secularize the environments in which children are raised, *Hardwired* insisted that teens will pay the price."

### And what's the solution?

The commission went on to speak of "authoritative communities" as key to the solution! They define these as "groups of people who are committed to one another over time, and model and pass on what it means to be a good person and to live a good life. It is warm and nurturing, establishing clear limits and expectations; is multigenerational, with a long-term focus. It encourages spiritual and religious development and is philosophically oriented to the

equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor." **Wow! Sounds a lot like...Christian community,** expressed in sociological terms.

Such communities lend support and strengthen values that teens are also hopefully getting at home. We need, then, healthy homes and families, as well as wider, nurturing communities of faith to reverse these eroding cultural trends. **And they believe this is our "best strategy" for addressing this crisis and improving the lives of U.S. children and adolescents.**

*'community'... is the best strategy for addressing this crisis and improving the lives of US children and adolescents.*

### Reflections

Isn't it striking to see a scientific body and experts on children's health make such a clear call for a change in public policy and acknowledge the positive role of religion in culture? By extension, I think many of these above statements apply to adults as well. We, too, need some form of vital, faith-imparting Christian community to thrive. I have a number of thoughts:

God's word is true: yes, I know that we all know this. But when I see the culture affirming fundamental scriptural realities, I am struck! How essential for us to grasp "ultimate meaning and the transcendent" and to identify this as "an intrinsic aspect of the human experience". It spoke of our need for meaning and

purpose and our ultimate end. We primarily find this in the Gospel! The report noted the need for nurturing, authoritarian community. How critical to be incorporated into Christ's living Body, to be built into that living Temple and to devote ourselves to "the fellowship". God's word is true and it is life for us!

How good God has been to us: He has brought us to this. God, who is Trinity and community, has made His Body a vibrant and formative reality for us. He regularly meets us there; He dwells in our praises! He is the one who invites us into this. I am grateful and awed. How rich and life-giving our life has been here in The Word of God Community for my family and me. This has been a place of nurturing for us. Huron Valley School was a place for my children to encounter the Lord and grow straight in Him. Pine Hills Camps and various youth programs have radically affected our children. The brothers and sisters who served there were models for my children of godliness and wholesome maturity. The community offered teaching and training for my home and family life. There was the consistent touch of the Holy Spirit in our community worship and church life. How good the Lord has been to us!

We are created (and recreated) related. John 1:12 states: "Those who received him, who believed in his name, he gave them power to become children of God." If children (sons and daughters) of God, then brothers and sisters together. This is a fundamental reality we have known and accepted over the years. No Lone Ranger Christianity here! It's about being family, God's family together.

***'Here God Himself dwells among us and we take on the very image of Christ.'***

Paul's closing blessing in 2 Corinthians 13 is noteworthy: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." "The fellowship" we have known derives from the Holy Spirit! With His release in us, our spirit's DNA changed, to desire the fellowship. He has made known to us the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. This fellowship has the power to make the crooked straight, to sanctify and redeem human lives, and to make us children of the light. Here God Himself dwells among us and we take on the

strong in the Lord. We partake of the very fellowship of the Father and Jesus, from whom all life and blessing flow.

"The fellowship: then is not simply on an "authoritarian community". Yes, our community does share some of it's elements ("groups of people who are committed to one another over time, and model and pass on what it means to be a good person and to live a good life. ... philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor.") **But it is much more than all this because it is**

This is why it works! This is why lives transform and we experience release from evil. And this is why "they devoted themselves ... to the fellowship." Here one encounters the Lord of heaven and earth. Here one finds rest and peace, and comes to know why he exists.

Let us not fear what the Lord has called us to; let us not hold back. Rather, let us give our lives to Him again, trusting as a good Father, He knows what is best for us. Let us embrace one another, for this is the People the Lord has given to us to love and serve.

"Lord, we trust you. We thank you for your wonderful salvation. We thank you for "the fellowship", for our home groups and districts and district dinners and our community gatherings. Please continue your work among us, keeping your hand upon us and making us your family!"

■



*Loving interactions between adults and children in committed relationships where Christian faith and morals are both taught and 'caught' — it turns out these are the best way to ensure human health and success for children! Our efforts to follow the 'manufacuter's manual' all these years are getting confirmation from secular sources! That's great, but we already knew it was right because God said so in His Word and confirmed it through His Spirit!*

very image of Christ. Of course, there is God's power here to heal our dysfunctions and woundedness, to transform our character, and to bring the blessing of God upon our homes and families and to raise up youth

**something God Himself is in. It is not that God is part of our community, we are actually part of His!** For our community is already a participation in Trinity.

# Defeating Lies, Receiving Life

by Martha Darling

## Lie #1

*Christian families should not have problems with their children, especially embarrassing problems.*

## Lie #2

*If your family does have such problems, you should not tell anyone.*

## Lie #3

*If you do get desperate enough to tell someone, that person will secretly condemn you or look down on you.*

Do any of these lies sound familiar? It's tough trying to fight the mental battle alone. That's why a number of brothers and sisters decided to band together. They have formed two fellowship groups especially for parents of older children experiencing serious difficulties.

Sara and Steve Royce started such a support group about three years ago. Sara explains, "One of the ways Satan tempts parents is to tell them that their family difficulties are unique and shameful. Our group reassures parents that they're not alone. We mentor each other to become better Christians, as well as better parents."

Group members meet at the Royces' house in Ann Arbor on the second and fourth Mondays of each month. Top priority is praying for each other's children. Sara Royce says, "We make sure that our children get prayed for, not just discussed." The support group also listens to spiritual growth tapes. The members spend time sharing

about their lives, trading ideas, and helping each other to have a deeper friendship with God.

Last year, Rob and Mary Carpenter started a similar support group which meets in the Ypsilanti area. This group meets the first and third Mondays of each month. "We alternate Mondays between the two groups," Mary Carpenter says. "That way there's always a Monday group available. If you can't get to one, maybe you can get to the other."



Sue Leger, who has been a member of the Royces' support group for three years, has this to say. "Having a place to share those 'out-of-the-normal' experiences is a relief.." She is strengthened by the confidentiality of the group, and by the emotional upbuilding she receives. "The depth of the honesty gives more strength to our relationships within the group. This type of support conquers Satan's despair. We come away encouraged when we see that other people have survived the same trouble we may be currently enduring."

Another couple who are regular attendees of the Carpenters' group have this to say. "We feel like this group has renewed

our faith in God's love for our children, regardless of their issues. We have been seeing concrete examples of God's action in the lives of all our kids. This is happening regardless of whether the kids are actively seeking God or not."

This same couple also comments, "Sometimes when we come, we feel burdened. But we always leave feeling lighter for having shared our load. When we're in the midst of problems, it's hard to see our children's beauty. When our group prays together, it's like God shines a spotlight on the beauty of each child, so we can see those kids with His eyes."

If this sounds like something you want, please contact Steve and Sara Royce at 971-7199, or Rob and Mary Carpenter, 665-6943. ■

### Fellowship Groups with other focuses available

If you are interested in interested in the depth of relationship and growth experienced in these Fellowship Groups, but don't experience an acute need to be praying for your children, contact Phil at the community office (994-3243) to discuss other sorts of Fellowship Groups. When we gather, Jesus promises to be in the midst of us!

## God and Bill both show up at spring retreat!

*Note: Bill Brannan was back in town again to speak at the MissionChrist spring retreat, but more importantly, God was in town, or actually out at Somerset Beach Campground, too! Bill and Stephanie have actually since moved back to Ann Arbor for the foreseeable future as he takes over pasturing the Kingsway Church locally. Here is a firsthand report from Stuart Murray, a MissionChrist regular.*

On April 22-24 Bill Brannan returned to Ann Arbor in order to lead the MissionChrist spring retreat. Taking place at Somerset Campground it consisted of a time of worship, of prayer, and of instruction in the mornings and evenings.

A main focus of the retreat was the burdens of the Lord. The word was to be humbled before God and receive a burden in accordance with His heart. That is, to dismiss our own ideas of how things should be done, and honestly go to the heart of God and be in prayer and action concerning the things that move God's heart.

At the end of the retreat there was a time for giving testimony to the work of the Lord of the weekend. Almost every one of the nearly thirty students took advantage of this time to tell of the great impact that these words had on each of them.



*30 high schoolers, solid teaching from the Word, extended worship over a weekend, and the power & presence of God — a sure formula for great retreat. The MissionChrist Spring Retreat was just such a time of refreshing and empowering.*

## Annual Community Meeting June 5th

Remember the family meetings around the kitchen table to discuss the purchase of a pet dog — what kind do we want, who will take care of it, how much will it cost. That is what we will be doing as a community on June 5th—minus the kitchen table and the dog!

During the second half of the prayer meeting that day, instead of a talk, we will discuss the upcoming year, elect Leadership Team members, and talk about our financial business. It might not sound as exciting as hearing Peter Herbeck preach or getting testimonies of God's action in folk's lives, but it is part of our commitment



*...to take responsibility for those the Lord has given us; to be a new family, members of the same body, brothers and sisters working together in the mission He is entrusting to us as a people.*

as we say in our covenant.

Please make every effort to join in, it is a testimony to God's action in our lives!

### Initial Report

## New Way of Living a Success!

Sixteen people attended at least part of the New Way of Living seminar which we offered in May. Fourteen of those folks were prayed with to be filled with the Spirit. Thank you Lord! More details including some personal stories will be in the next Newsletter, so stay tuned!

In the meantime, if you know of someone who would like to attend a New Way of Living seminar, please call the office (994-3243). We are considering holding another this summer and will certainly hold one in the fall.



# County Christians join in outreach to families in need

For years the pastors and leaders in Washtenaw County who form PACT (Pastors Alliance for County Transformation) have talked about doing joint outreach. The time has finally come! This August 13th many churches and ministries will be joining forces to bless families in need by giving out free backpacks with school supplies and information about ongoing programs of support. There will be entertainment, games, food, prizes, and the grace of God poured out in abundance! Let's pray for this, but also get behind this effort. To help, contact Phil Tiews at the community office, 994-3243. Many hands will make light work!

"Give a Kid a jump on the school year"

## Operation Jumpstart

**Sponsors:** Christian Law Enforcement Fellowship, Pastors Alliance for County Transformation, other churches & ministries, and businesses in Washtenaw County – hopefully including you!

**Goals:**

- 1) help families in need get a jumpstart on the school year through the distribution of school supplies
- 2) help families make connections with ongoing programs which can provide support of many types, including connection with local churches where desired.
- 3) make a public witness to Christian cooperation by working together to bless those in need

Blessing and helping parents and children in the name of Jesus.

**Description:** a four-hour outdoor festival with games, entertainment, food, representatives of services, opportunities for prayer, and prizes, culminating in the distribution of backpacks of age-appropriate school supplies. Children need to be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Representatives of programs which offer ongoing help such as tutoring, substance abuse counseling, parenting classes and the like will be available to meet with parents to explain their programs

**When:** Saturday, August 13, 2005 from 10 am to 2 pm

**Where:** Montbellier Park, on Ellsworth Road

**What do we need / How can you help:** a partial list of the needs and opportunities include:

- Planning Team Members
- Entertainment, especially youth groups
- Game organizers
- Donations of school supplies & prizes
- Sound system and team
- Prayer!
- Food and servers
- Promotional help
- Volunteers to help work with guests
- Intercessors
- Financial contributions
- And more

**For more information or to sign up to help contact:**

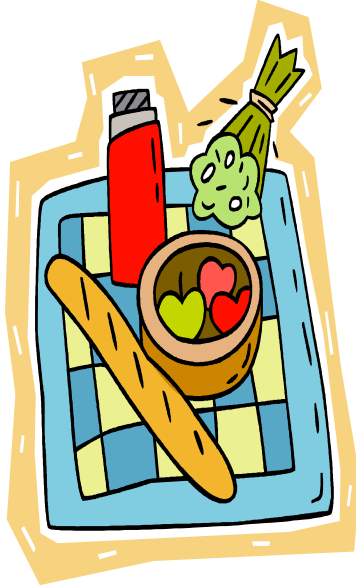
**Phil Tiews**

**994-3243**

**pact@rc.net**

## Joint Prayer & Picnic with Word of Life July 24th

Mark your calendar now for July 24th. That Sunday we will have a joint prayer meeting with the Word of Life community followed by a potluck picnic. Both will be held at Covenant Presbyterian Church. More details will follow, but you can spread the word to folks you think would be interested in joining us, whether they are former community members or not! It should be a great day.



## Join us in June

**6/5 Prayer Meeting, 4:30–6:00**  
**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**5171 Jackson Road**

**Pray for the camps:**

**6/19-25 Pine Hills Girls Camp**

**6/26-7/2 Pine Hills Boys Camp**

**6/26 Prayer Meeting, 4:30–6:00**  
**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**5171 Jackson Road**

**7/10 Prayer Meeting, 4:30–6:00**  
**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**5171 Jackson Road**

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