

Independent Evangelist

I.E. it's happening



Follow the Leader

By Phil Conybear

March 2006 Volume 1 Issue 1

Welcome to the Independent Evangelist; I.E. it's happening. This is my first newsletter. I am independent of any church, though I am a member of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Woodridge, Illinois. I'm not an evangelist by strict definition of the dictionary but I intend to spread the good news of the gospel and pass on current events pertaining to Christians.

My home is in Woodridge and I will pass on news of Prince of Peace each month but let it be known that the church cannot be held accountable for my opinions or any national or international news I pass on. So without further eloquence, let the first issue of the independent Evangelist begin.

40 Days

Most of you have heard of the Purpose Driven Life, a book written by Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church in California. Last year, our church followed the 40 Days of Purpose in small study groups, as prescribed by the author. The people in each group met at the leader's house and by the end of the 40 days became friends as well as finding direction in the church. It was a wonderful experience I will never forget.

Our pastor, Paul Kopka, took it a step further by supplying a study guide and weekly inspirational messages to an inmate in a nearby prison.

The prisoner is a friend of mine. The man is serving several years and while most people, myself included, would rather die than be incarcerated; it changed this man's life for the better.

The prisoner, I'll call Saul, was dyslexic as a child and still has trouble reading and writing. With his new found time, he began reading; mostly novels such as Star Wars. His reading improved.

Now sometimes, when a person is isolated, the Bible can comfort. I know from experience when I served in combat in Vietnam that a Bible starts out feeling just plain good in the hand, like a good luck charm. When you understand that the comfort comes only when you understand the contents a change takes place you don't expect.

This happened much the same way for Saul. To my surprise and delight though, he didn't just find comfort in the words; he found God.

His reading and comprehension improved remarkably and his hands pass deftly over the pages like magic when he wants to find a proper passage to express himself or illustrate an idea. He reads out loud like he's done it all his life. Mostly though, he has a calm about himself I had never seen before.

Then Pastor Paul got him hooked on the 40 days and soon, he had a following in prison. Along with his usual Bible study, he had other inmates asking to join him in the 40 days. He witnessed many miracles inside that he intends to share as he commits them to paper, as he changed lives positively in a very negative environment.

Rick Warren took the time to write a personal letter of encouragement to Saul and Pastor Paul visited him in prison. Saul's life has changed for the better. He tells us that he has no bars in prison; that he had bars outside that he wasn't even aware of. He has never felt more alive and more joy in his life.

Perhaps, when he gets out he will continue to spread the word and the joy he feels. If nothing else, he has inspired me. I pray for Saul every day though it hardly seems necessary for he has God with him always.

If you haven't read A Purpose Driven Life, read it with a friend. Look for it in any good book store. It will change your life.

A good web site to use as you read it is Rick Warren's site; www.purposedrivenlife.com. I get nothing but satisfaction by passing his site on to you.



Christ Died For Our Sins

Can Star Wars Lead to the Bible?

Now I want to tell you a true story that happened in prison as told by Saul. I'll probably use stories from him a lot; but only because they work for me. They are very real and they tell of very serious people. I will also use a different name for his friend. Let's call him, Mark.

Saul was a Star Wars fan before prison but he found out that the series doesn't have much following in prison. He would sit quietly in his cell reading all the Star Wars books I could find to send him. It was a good escape because he realized that George Lucas incorporated mythology, religion and Buck Rogers and even Einstein and Stephen Hawking into a fun format.

Saul started to change, in his mind, "May the Force be with you" with, "May God be with you". Yoda could be seen as an apostle and Darth Vader, the Devil. The Dark side Yoda would warn of could be Hell. You get the idea.

Now Mark comes into Saul's life. Mark is a brooding loner. He was angry, impersonal, greedy and selfish. He wanted an escape of sorts and he noticed the calming effect reading had on Saul so he asked to read some of his Star Wars books.

Just like in the movies, a prisoner has to pay for any type of favor so he thought it would cost something for the books. He was surprised to discover it cost nothing. It turned out that Mark liked the movies and thought it was cool that someone else inside liked them too. It puzzled him to get something for nothing in prison but that's how it starts; reaching out with a simple gesture.

They started reading together as Saul tells me, "morning, noon and night". At the time Saul was reading Star Wars he started reading the Bible. That's when he says he made the connection between the Bible and Star Wars.

Mark never wanted to read the Bible or talk about religion so they read about five Star Wars books together. At this time Saul tells me that he and Mark started to drift as far as reading preferences went; Saul with his Bible and Mark with all of Saul's old Star Wars books.

Even though Mark didn't want the Bible, Saul did notice a change taking place. The two would still meet in the chow hall and Mark would always be surprised when Saul would give and expect nothing in return. Saul would share his food or pass on reading materials and ask for nothing. That wasn't normal in that environment.

Mark was realizing that he had been following the "Dark Side" like Yoda warned about. His selfishness and greed and dark personality lead him to prison.

Saul says Mark is trying to live like a Jedi now. His life is changing for the better. He now shares without expecting anything in return. He is kind and he's not a loner now. He talks to other inmates in the gym and out in the yard.

The biggest change is that Mark actually talks to his family in a loving way which is a shock to them. He still prefers Star Wars over the Bible but he has changed for the better.

Saul told me in his last letter that Mark has read about thirty books now, mostly Star Wars. It has changed his life in a positive way. I want to quote part of his letter. "So the moral of the story is that you don't always need to talk about the Bible to change people's lives. All you need is some common ground. In this case it happened to be Star Wars. How cool is that"? He closes his letter with, "I do all things for the Glory of God in Jesus' name. Amen."

In his youth, Saul was no choir boy by any stretch of the imagination. Mark seems like he was even worse. Saul is reading the Bible and Mark is reading Star Wars. They have, both found an inner peace, though Saul's may run a little deeper.

Saul runs Bible studies inside but he likes to use Star Wars to illustrate a point from time to time. It is, after all, a common ground. "How cool is that"?

Any way you look at it, that's evangelism. Saul didn't have to read the Bible to Mark, though he still reached him and helped set his life on a better path. Perhaps Mark will make a connection with the Bible in time. Some times small steps are needed. Mark is reaching out to others now and Saul will always seek to do God's work. The seeds have been sown. Star Wars has lead one to the Bible and perhaps more will follow. How cool is that?

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church is located at 2600 West 75th Street, Woodridge, Illinois 60517. The phone number is 630 969-1268. Stop by some time. It's a very friendly church and they are eager to make you feel at home. Services are Saturday, 5:30 P.M., Sunday at 8:30 and 10:30 A.M.

Some favorite web sites;

www.cbn.com

www.bgea.org

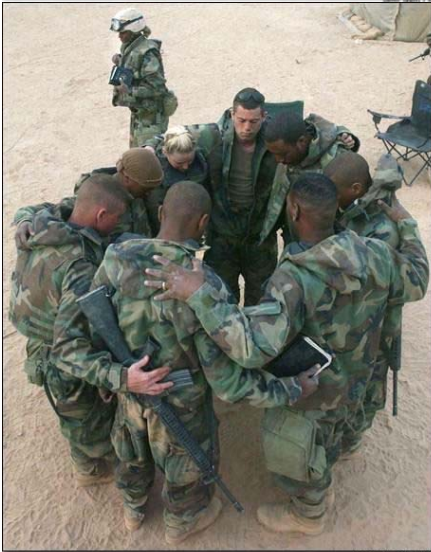
www.danielpipes.org

www.littlegreenfootballs.com

www.ob.org

Let's Support Our Troops

Here are a few pictures our liberal media won't let you see.



There are many ways to support our troops and it doesn't have to cost a lot. For instance, at Prince of Peace the Women's Group is working to collect items to send to service personnel. They are calling the effort, Operation Support Our Troops.

They compiled a wish list from grunts they talked to. A lot of it was junk food they miss and can't get; gum, candy, and various snack foods. There are a lot of personal items on the list such as lip balm, sun block SPF 30+, dental items, vitamins and the list went on.

Some things on the list were things most people wouldn't think of but keep in mind they are kids a long way from home and you think of odd things when you're away from home; gel insoles for boots, disposable cameras, flip flops for the shower, playing cards and books.

Call Prince of Peace at 630 969-1268 if you have similar ideas to share or want to make a donation. The troops will be there for a while doing a hard but wonderful job. A tour of duty in a foreign land makes the strongest homesick.

I speak from experience because I am a combat vet. I served in Vietnam and I remember how a small gesture from a stranger made a huge difference in my outlook.

A teacher from a grade school sent care packages to a bunch of us grunts once. The funniest thing I remember was some Jiffy Pop Popcorn. I don't know if it's still made but older people remember it. It was a self contained pan with a lid and the lid expanded when the kernels popped.

I cooked some in front of Vietnamese tribal villagers that had never seen anything like it. They backed away as it popped not sure what the sound was. It created a carnival atmosphere and for that small moment in a war zone they felt like kids. The biggest thing was the fellowship that was created if only for a moment. It was priceless.

Be creative but try something. If you have teens at home ask them what to send. The soldiers aren't much older and their tastes will be the same.

IN TIME OF WAR

O God, who seest that in this warfare we are seeking to serve thee, and yet in the waging of it must needs do many things that are an offence against thy love; Accept we pray thee, our imperfect offering. Arm us with thy Spirit that our warfare may further the victory of thy justice and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

U.S.



CULTURE

NYC Muslim Group Warns U.S.: 'Your Days are Numbered'

By Erick Stakelbeck
Washington Terror Analyst

[CBN.com](#) – NEW YORK CITY - So far, the violent riots that have erupted throughout the Muslim world over the Mohammed cartoons have not been repeated here in the U.S.

But yesterday in New York City, one radical Islamic group was preaching a message that is anything but peaceful.

It wasn't Pakistan or Gaza. It was Manhattan's east side. The group calls itself the Islamic Thinker's Society—ITS, for short. The purpose of the demonstration was to condemn the now infamous cartoons.

But there was another message as well: that Islam will one day dominate the world.

One ITS member said, "We are here to tell you that there is nothing you can do—and that your days are numbered...all of you who disbelieve: speak good, or Allah will silence you."

The protest began in front of the Danish Consulate. ITS members stomped on Danish flags and warned Denmark that it would suffer "Allah's wrath." The group then moved to the German Consulate, where they trampled on German and Israeli flags—and called non-Muslims "scum."

All of this took place under the watchful eye of the NYPD. Onlookers we spoke to were outraged.

"Some people have evolved and matured and become civilized human beings, but they obviously haven't. And unfortunately we're supporting them and protecting them, too," One NYC resident said.

Members of the ITS declined to be interviewed for this story. But off-camera, their leader told CBN News that the group consists of mostly college students who live in New York City.

The Internet journal *Worldnetdaily.com* has reported that ITS is linked to al-Muhajiroun, a notorious British Islamist group that disbanded in 2004.

That group's former leader—Abu Hamza al-Masri—was convicted in a British court earlier this month of incitement to murder, among other offenses. ITS members deny any connection to al-Muhajiroun, but the black flag flown at ITS rallies—and its goal of a worldwide Islamic state—are identical to those of al-Muhajiroun.

Although this event lacked the violence that has been so prevalent in cartoon protests throughout the Muslim world, the message was eerily similar: America and Europe, your days are numbered.

One thing I'd like to mention is that the above protest took place about a block from 9-11's ground zero. Lest we forget!

U.S.



ARSON

Alabama Stunned as More Churches Set Afire

By Paul Strand
Washington Sr. Correspondent

[CBN.com](#) – WASHINGTON - Investigators are trying to figure out who is behind a rash of church burnings in rural Alabama.

Fires damaged four more churches near the Mississippi state line Tuesday morning.

While officials say they are making progress, church congregations all across Alabama are in shock.

Eyewitness Thornton Coleman said, "I can't understand why someone would set the church on fire."

"It was just -- it's really disgusting. I hope and pray that they find the one who did it," said Johnny Archibald.

The fires come in the wake of five others last week that either damaged or destroyed houses of worship south of Birmingham.

Federal arson investigators believe all the cases are linked. But as far as a motive goes, everyone is baffled.

"There seems to be no pattern," said Gov. Bob Riley (R-AL). "The only thing that I can say is that we are going to do everything we possibly can to find the people who are causing this."

All nine churches were Baptist and included both predominantly black and predominantly white congregations.

"The devil is busy. He is trying to destroy the church," Rev. Walter Hawkins, pastor of Dancy Baptist Church remarked, "but he can't destroy the church, because the church is in us."

A people that values its privileges above its principles loses both – Dwight Eisenhower

A prayer for our nation

Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in thy holy protection; that Thou wilt incline the hearts of citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government, and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for fellow citizens of the United States at large. And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of Whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Written by George Washington

World



WORLD

Showdown May be Looming between U.S., Israel, and Iran

By John Jessup
Washington Correspondent

[CBN.com](#) – WASHINGTON - President Bush says that if Iran attacks Israel, the U.S. will come to its defense.

That statement comes as the U.N. Security Council appears to be ready to review Iran's controversial nuclear program.

The vote could spark a showdown between Iran, Israel, and the West.

It looks likely that Iran will be hit with a referral to the United Nations after two days of meetings and reviewing a U.S.-backed motion that expresses "serious concerns about Iran's nuclear program."

The vote is the result of a move last month when the Islamic republic revived its suspended uranium enrichment program, which Tehran says it needs for energy.

But, the U.S. and the European Union believe that is a cover, and accuse Iran of trying to build a nuclear weapon, which Bush addressed in his State of the Union address.

The President said, "The Iranian government is defying the world with its nuclear ambitions, and the nations of the world must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons."

On Wednesday, the President - in an interview with Reuters - went a step further and said that if necessary, the U.S. would defend Israel against Iran. When asked if that meant militarily, Bush said, "You bet. We'll defend Israel."

Israel hasn't ruled out possible air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

The intensifying conflict prompted a stern warning from Iran's foreign minister, who threatened immediate retaliation if it is referred to the security council.

And he warned that any military action by the U.S. or Israel would have what he called, "severe consequences."

Iran has threatened to strike back with missiles if it is attacked.

Those threats follow the defiant tone of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Before a crowd of thousands at Iran's one and only nuclear power plant, he said, "Nuclear energy is our right, and we will resist until this right is fully realized."

Iranian leaders insist there is still time to avoid a confrontation. But the impending vote only sets the stage for an uncertain showdown.

It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity -

Albert Einstein

World



NUCLEAR AMBITION

France Condemns Iran Nuke Program, U.S. Steps up Action

By John Jessup
Washington Correspondent

[CBN.com](#) – WASHINGTON - France is joining a growing list of nations accusing Iran of secretly building nuclear weapons.

It is the sharpest attack by one of the European countries that have tried to negotiate with Iran.

Iran quickly denied France's accusation, saying its nuclear program has nothing to do with building weapons.

But the latest charge is the boldest statement on Iran coming from usually diplomatic Europe, and shows signs of growing frustration over failed negotiations.

In a televised interview the French foreign minister said, "No civilian nuclear program can explain Iran's nuclear program...Therefore it's a clandestine military nuclear program."

His remarks came just days after Tehran confirmed it was resuming small-scale uranium enrichment, a procedure which can be used to produce energy for civilian use or to build a bomb.

Iran fired back - maintaining its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, and accused the foreign minister of increasing tension.

Hopes of a diplomatic solution all but faded last month when Iran broke U.N. seals at nuclear plants after two years of negotiations had stalled.

And then its hard-line president shocked the world, saying, "Israel should be wiped off the map."

A recent Gallup poll shows Americans worry that if Iran had a nuclear weapon, the U.S., along with Israel, would be among its primary targets.

This week, the House issued a rebuke of the Iranian regime with a non-binding resolution condemning its nuclear program and calling on other nations to apply sanctions. It was approved by a vote of 404 to 4. The Senate also approved a similar measure, sending a clear message that something must be done.

The Security Council meets next month to consider imposing sanctions on Iran over its nuclear activities.

The U.S. is hoping for a peaceful approach, like sanctions or working for changes inside Iran.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked Congress this week for \$75 million to promote democracy in Iran.

Rice said, "The U.S. will actively confront the aggressive policies of the Iranian regime, and, at the same time, we are going to work to support the aspirations of Iranian people for freedom in their own country."

Rev. 22, 20

The one who has spoken these things says, "I am coming soon!"

I pray that the Lord Jesus will be kind to all of you.

Like I said at the start, I am not an evangelist in the true sense of the word. I could never hope to do the work of people like Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, or Rick Warren or other such great ones. I could never speak with the passion and power of Martin Luther King Jr.

In truth, I'm an average Joe who can only hope that a few people read my efforts. Read my newsletters and leave them somewhere for someone else to read.

The thing is, I believe it is the duty of every individual to pass on that which you have learned. Some people's minds are like a cluttered attic or garage. We all tend to keep everything bottled up; our thoughts, emotions, love, ideals and ideas. What are we saving them for? Have a garage sale of the mind. Talk it out or write it down. One of us average Joe's might just stumble over an idea and unlock the secrets of clean and renewable energy or at the very least realize that love and faith can lead us to true and everlasting peace.

As I learn by doing, this newsletter will become more polished and I'll figure out the best ways to distribute it so bear with me while I learn.

I have a lot of ideas but I am open to suggestions. Also, any feedback would be welcomed.

You will read stories from real life experiences; mine and others. I think it's best to draw from life, just like the parables Jesus used. I'll try not to bore you or "drag you down" and I'll try not to be "preachy". I will pray and hope that somehow, something I pass on touches someone.

Thank you and may God bless all of you.

I'll leave you with some laughs.

On the lighter side of religion, here are some actual sentences found in church bulletins and newsletters:

- 1) Don't let worry kill you. Let the Church help.
- 2) Thursday night - potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow.
- 3) Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.
- 4) For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
- 5) The rosebud on the altar this morning is to announce the birth of David Alan Belzer, the son of Rev. and Mrs. Julius Belzer.

6) This afternoon there will be a meeting in the south and north ends of the church. Children will be baptized at both ends.

7) Tuesday at 4pm there will be an ice cream social. All ladies giving milk will please come early.

8) Wednesday, the Ladies Liturgy Society will meet. Mrs. Jones will sing "Put Me In My Little Bed" accompanied by the pastor.

9) Thursday at 5pm there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All wishing to become Little Mother, please see the minister in his private study.

10) This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.

11) The service will close with "Little Drops Of Water". One of the ladies will start (quietly) and the rest of the congregation will join in.

12) Next Sunday, a special collection will be taken to defray the cost of the new carpet. All those wishing to do something on the new carpet will come forward and get a piece of paper.

13) The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind and they may be seen in the church basement Friday.

14) A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

15) At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

16) Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

17) The 1991 Spring Council Retreat will be held May 10 and 11.

18) Pastor is on vacation. Massages can be given to church secretary.

19) Eight new choir robes are currently needed, due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

20) Mrs. Johnson will be entering the hospital this week for testes.

21) The senior choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to join the choir.

22) Please join us as we show our support for Amy and Alan in preparing for the girth of their first child.

23) Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

24) The associate minister unveiled the church's new tithing campaign slogan last Sunday: "I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours."

