

# Independent Evangelist

LE it's happening



Follow the Leader

Phil Conybear – Writer

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Vol. 2 Issue 9 Mary Conybear – Editor

*The wild gander leads his flock  
through the cool night,  
Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down  
to me like an invitation:  
The pert may suppose it meaningless,  
but I listen closer,  
I find its purpose and place up there  
toward the November sky.  
Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, 1855*



Welcome to the November issue of the Independent Evangelist. Walt Whitman has echoed sentiments I've held as I watched the Geese head south from my yard. They are a reminder of the breadth of God's gifts, here on Earth if we just take the time to notice.

**"Don't Cram your religion down my throat!"**

I get the Chicago Tribune just to have some light entertainment in the morning. I could never take their news seriously because the writing is terribly biased but I like the old fashioned format and the comics. They have an advice columnist, Dear Abby on the comic's page. I rarely read her column but the other day her headline caught my eye.

**"Don't cram your religion down my throat".** A mother resorted to blackmail to get her daughter to join her in church. The daughter said she believes in God but going to church was not her "thing".

Volumes could be written, pro and con about their relationship and their faith but I think I'll leave that to the experts. I will pray that the mother and daughter give their lives to Christ and their bitterness will melt.

The things that caught my eye and made me scratch my head in amazement were the comments from other readers. One person said that church is just a place for old people to meet new friends. One reader said that there was too much "preaching" and she didn't "get" the whole scene. I felt more sorry for the others than for the mother and daughter. At least they went together. That's a start.

On one hand, I would like to tell the daughter and the others, "Don't cram your atheism and slovenly ways down my throat"

but instead, I'd like to challenge them to ask why so many millions go to church. Also, if they just looked objectively at the whole "scene" they'd find it's not so bad after all and they just might meet someone their own age. They just have to "break down" the whole "scene" and think about the "why" of it all.

All services have the same basics, whether they are traditional or contemporary. The music calls everyone to worship; kind of like ringing a dinner bell to hungry ranch hands and feeds the spirit throughout the service.

The service starts out with announcements which are like the evening news getting you caught up with the events in the community. You shake hands with your neighbors and say, "Hello" and settle in for some words from God. Okay so far?

The readings and the sermon may seem "preachy" unless you quit being stubborn and actually listen to the words. I know there are some that think the Church and the Bible are "Old Hat" and can't possibly be relevant to today's issues but I will argue that with anyone.

When I write these newsletters, it doesn't matter what I'm writing or how modern or obscure an issue is, a reference will be found in the Bible to each subject and when you reach out to your lost faith, the Bible and your Church might just give you the answers to your troubles.

And anyone who thinks just "Old People" go to church should come to Good Shepherd. I parked in back recently and had to enter through the lower level; there were more children than I could count and they were having a blast. But they weren't all down there as evidenced by the number of families visible in the sanctuary.

When you add in the fact that you can witness baptisms and receive communion you will wonder why you never gave the "Church Thing" a chance before and you may even learn a thing or two. You may decide to make a covenant with God.  
***And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.***

*John 6:35*

At the very least, only the coldest, most cynical person will leave unmoved and even they will realize nothing was "crammed down" their throats.

***Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.***

*Job 22:21*

## *Behind the scenes*

My wife and editor came to Good Shepherd with another couple, Mark and Pam Jacobsen. I looked over at Pam during the first song of that first service we attended and I knew the four of us would be members of the church by the way she was reacting to the music. She was singing loud and smiling and swaying to the music and I could tell she felt at home.

Then I looked at Mark and I could see in his face that he wanted to be a part of the band. He had the look a musician gets when a song feels right and he knows he could contribute.

The timing was right because the band needed a bass player so Mark started rehearsing right away with the band, Pam auditioned for the Eighth Day singers and soon was right where she felt she belonged. Now, I realize that it doesn't always happen so fast that one gets what one wants but God does work in mysterious ways. So, how did it happen that they fit in so well and so fast or was it really so easy for them? I wanted to illustrate how it felt for these two to fit in with such a well established and professional worship team so I interviewed my friends.

I call Mark, "Mr. Bassman" which is a reference to a song from the early 60's. We met Mark and Pam at our previous church where they sang in the choir and Mark played guitar and Pam organized a children's choir but I had no idea of their musical background.

This is what he had to say;

*"I took 2 years of piano lessons when I was 12. When I was 16, I bought a cheap acoustic guitar with a chord book, and started strumming. In my twenties, my friends and I started a garage band. I played rhythm guitar, and did some singing. We played mainly Top 40 rock music. We stayed together for 8 years, and eventually got good enough to play at some Chicago area clubs and bars. I didn't play seriously again until almost 20 years later, when we joined Prince of Peace. The praise band that had been playing there for 10 years, decided to call it quits a few weeks after we arrived. I had mentioned to some people in the congregation, that I had once played in a band. When an attempt was made to put together a new band, I was asked to join. Knowing nothing about Christian music at the time, I was nervous about getting involved, but decided to give it a shot. **We didn't have a bass player, so I bought a bass guitar and started adding some simple bass lines. I've loved playing bass ever since**".*

Most people would have been intimidated moving to a church ten times larger than their previous church and immediately joining a group of professional musicians. Mark's answer was interesting and made me realize the quality of the effort Paul Wood, Pete Leo and the rest of the worship team do to make the music easier to grasp for newcomers and help them feel welcomed.

*"As far as moving from a small church to a large one, the difficulty is greater because the music is more complicated, and there's more songs to learn each week. At the same time, it's easier because I only have to worry about my bass part, and not singing or picking out songs."*

But did he feel intimidated? *"Did I feel intimidated about playing with the 8th Day Band?.....DEFINATELY!!! **When Dave Rice asked me to plug in my bass and jam with him at my first practice, I felt like saying adios! I managed to control my nerves enough to play some basic bass lines for the songs they were doing that week, and to my surprise, he said that he thought I would fit in well with the band. I was on cloud nine when I went home that night! I still feel a little nervous about playing, but it's probably good because it motivates me to put in a lot of practice time.**"*

Was there a favorite event? *"My favorite performances have to be the two times we played with the Waubonsie Valley HS choir. It was enough to make your spine tingle!!!"*

Pam read the questions I asked Mark and offered a reply that surprised me.

*"At a very young age, my mother taught me how to harmonize. She would sing with me whenever I would ask her to sing. We had a lot of fun and these are some of my greatest memories of the time we had together. I have loved singing all my life and when I was in high school, I joined the choir and was an alto. As I became an adult, Mark and I sang together and he played the guitar. We would have friends over, we'd pass out music and everyone would sing and laugh. It was great fun! **I worked as a nurse in the neonatal intensive care unit for many years, and I would always sing very quietly to the babies I was caring for; soft singing and gentle swaying is very comforting to little ones.** I sang to my children when they were young and now I sing to my grand children. I have taught Cara (10 year old grandchild) how to harmonize and so we sing together when she comes over. **Music is a big part of our family life.***

*At Prince of Peace, I sang soprano in the choir, sang soprano in the praise band and both Mark and I led the children's choir. We had a lot of fun singing with the children. They seemed to really enjoy the singing and that was very gratifying for Mark & I.*

***Yes, I jumped head first into the music at Good Shepherd. I absolutely love to sing "praise & worship" songs. It was probably a good thing that I jumped in so fast, because if I would have had time to think about the audition, I might have been more anxious than I was at the time. I believe God was right there with me at that audition. I love learning new songs and I look forward to the practices every week. Everyone is friendly and help each other with parts. I really enjoy being apart of this ministry."***

***I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness:  
and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most  
high.***

*Psalms 7:17*

***Music is a big part of our family life.**  
Pam Jacobsen*

## Tales From The Cell

My buddy, Saul was on the phone talking about his schooling in prison, through CBI; Crossroad Bible Institute. As I mentioned in the August newsletter, CBI has their program scheduled in Tiers. He is near the end of Tier 2 and they only select a few to move on to Tier 3. After that, they sponsor individuals to take seminary courses.

He's excited about the future and he is always enthusiastic when any part of the Bible is in a conversation. I asked about his feelings of the Psalms and Proverbs and his answer was uplifting and needed to be passed on. The rest are his words. They are only edited for grammar and length of content.

"In April, 2002, I was locked up in Cook County jail. For the first time I started to read the Bible, yet only one Psalm jumped out at me; Psalm 25."

*Version: KJV*

*psalm 25*

*1. \*[A Psalm] of David.\* Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. ...4. Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. 5. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou [art] the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. ... 20. O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee. 21. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee. 22. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.*

"Yet once I was released, I stopped reading. Again, in June, 2002 I was locked up in Will County and again I started reading the Bible and again only one psalm, 25, jumped out. Yet, as before I stopped reading once I was released."

"Now, jump ahead to September, 2003. Once again I was in Will County and eventually I started reading the Bible again. I started seeing more of my life displayed in Psalms and by September, 2004 I would read forty psalms daily. God was allowing me to understand them more and more each day."

I could have left out this next part but his regimen fascinates me, as well as his devotion, as it will fascinate you as well.

"In September, 2005, I started to read the Psalms in a week in a regimen. Monday, Psalms 1-21 and Psalms 51 and 119: 1-24. Tuesday, Psalms 22-42 and Psalms 51 and 119: 25-48. Wednesday, Psalms 43-64 and 119: 49-72. Thursday, Psalm 51, then 65-85 and 119:73-96. Friday, Psalm 51, then 86-106 and 119: 97-120. Saturday, Psalms 51, 107-129 and 119: 121-144. Sunday, Psalms 51, 119: 145-176 and 130-150."

Here's why I left that in, and remember, he figured this out for himself behind bars.

"If you notice, I read **Psalm 51** daily; this is my daily confession. **Psalm 119** is my life in Christ. I break it down into seven sections for it is the longest chapter in the Bible."

*Version: KJV*

*psalm 51*

*2. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin [is] ever before me.... 6. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden [part] thou shalt make me to know wisdom. ...8. Make me to hear joy and gladness; [that] the bones [which] thou hast broken may rejoice. ...10. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within.*

"Now the reason I read Psalms every day is because of the truths and promises in them. **When you read them and see those people going through the same or similar problems and read the end result, you understand where hope comes from.** For God never changes and His love endures forever. In Psalms, you will experience every emotion there is. Glory be to God".

"Now, we know most of the Psalms were written by David and his son was Solomon, who wrote the Proverbs. When you read them both, you can see the wisdom of God in both, the father and the son".

I read a Proverb a day as there are 31 and there are around 31 days per month. **When you read and live your life by them, you find there is wisdom that transcends worldly knowledge.** When you read them daily, they give you life balance and give you common sense and direction."

"As of September, 2006, I stopped 'reading' the Bible and started to 'live' the Bible. By reading Psalms and Proverbs you start to experience the wisdom of God."

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

*Psalms 119:59*

Before prison, the Bible and CBI, Saul had no real direction in life and though outwardly content, he admits he really wasn't happy; something was missing. Now, his past no longer matters. His old ways are already gone forever and he grows spiritually by leaps and bounds each day. He has more freedom behind bars than most of us could imagine on the outside and his faith gives him a freedom few will ever know that no one could take away.

*proverbs 2*

*1. My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, [and] apply thine heart to understanding; 3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, [and] liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4. If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as [for] hid treasures; 5. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth [cometh] knowledge and understanding.*

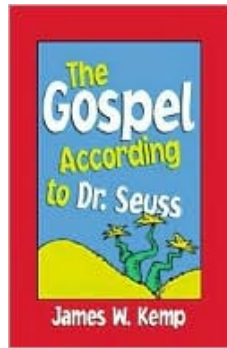
*Things do not change; we change.*

*Henry David Thoreau*

## Book Corner

I recently had the pleasure of reading two engaging books with similar titles. The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss and The Gospel According to Disney are definitely not what they seem. The covers make them look like children's books but the kids better be able to read at a much higher level than Walt Disney or Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss) ever intended.

**The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss** was a delightful surprise for me. The stories of one of the world's most beloved children's authors are both imaginative and entertaining. But a closer look at Dr. Seuss's stories reveals that many are also inspirational. In this accessible and immensely enjoyable resource, James W. Kemp finds parallels between the actions of cats in hats, Grinches, Snitches, Sneetches, and other "creachas" and lessons found in Scripture.

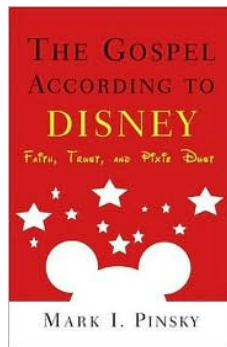


Each reflection begins with an insightful biblical passage and features lines from the original Dr. Seuss book. Thus, as the author shares his enthusiasm for the creativity and wisdom of Dr. Seuss, both the meaning and the relevance of many Bible passages come to life.

Consider the hope for redemption, as seen in the Grinch; the need for commitment, as seen in the journey On Beyond Zebra, the necessity of acting on the behalf of others, as seen in Horton and the Whos, and so forth. It is a bit odd to see theology injected into his works, but many readers should be charmed by Mr. Kemp's reflections. I sure was.

**The Gospel According to Disney** had a similar format but the author added some history of the Disney empire and the reasons why Walt Disney kept everything secular.

In the spirit of his popular *The Gospel According to The Simpsons*, religion journalist Mark Pinsky explores the role of Disney animated features on the moral life and spiritual development of American children. Examining the themes of 30 famous Disney films, he shows how the "Disney gospel" of goodwill, trust in yourself, and "a little bit of something magical" have been imprinted in our moral and religious norms. Mr. Pinsky also discusses recent Disney developments and the impact of theme parks on American culture.



The "Disney gospel" is simple enough in outline: believe in yourself, never give up, good will be rewarded and evil punished. It's a very insightful book, indeed.

## Wildfires

Every day during the past few weeks, our TV's and newspapers were flooded with images of the wildfires in southern California. I was amazed at the heroic efforts of the firefighters and watched in awe of the calm and orderly way victims evacuated to safety.



Californians are used to fires and the Santa Anna winds as well as other natural disasters indigenous to that state. I was horrified and disgusted to learn that this wasn't an act of nature but rather an act of arson.

As a Christian, I wondered how anyone could begin to think up such a despicable act towards others and nature. I'm sure the media will explain the sickness of each individual and time will heal all wounds and Californians will rebuild but I am bewildered.



*Nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him.*

*Fyodor Dostoevsky*  
Russian novelist (1821 - 1881)

***And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let [them] go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards [and] olives.***

*Judges 15:4-5*

These California fires obviously weren't the first act of arson and I'm sure they won't be the last. The following page tells how families cope with such disaster. We can help with our prayers.

***The sacrifice of the wicked [is] an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright [is] his delight.***

*Proverbs 15:8*

***Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until [these] calamities be overpast.*** *psalm 57:1*

## What's Next for Southern California?

By Melissa Charbonneau  
CBN News  
October 29, 2007



CBNNews.com - Residents are returning to survey the damage caused by wildfires that forced hundreds of thousands across the region to evacuate their homes.

As they sifted through the rubble in their neighborhoods, many gave thanks Sunday that lives were spared and that God had helped so many that needed it.

**"When things are going well, God has to call and make an appointment with us before we'll listen,"** said Dan Maxton, pastor of Rancho Bernardo Baptist Church. Flames fanned by hundred-mile-an-hour winds burned a hole in the church's roof.

**"But when the firestorms come, I think just about all of us listen with a greater intensity,"** he said.

### Many Still Reeling from Loss

Many who are still reeling from the loss of home and property say they are grateful for the support of family, friends, and neighbors.

**"You don't realize how terrific and how generous people are and how they band together in times like this,"**

California resident Colleen Martin said.

Another resident said, **"True to your religion is helping those in need. Whether you lost your home or not, if someone loses it, everyone loses it."**

As evacuees head back their homes - eager to see what remains - emergency shelters are beginning to close down.

### Schwarzenegger Vows Retribution against Arsonists

With arson suspected in two of the fires, California's governor warns those responsible will be hunted down and prosecuted to full extent of the law.

"If I were one of those people who started the fires, I would not sleep soundly right now, I tell you, because we are right behind you," Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said.

On the frontlines, thousands of firefights continue fighting back against the flames that have left a half-million charred acres charred in their wake.

Emergency officials are optimistic they can fully contain the fires this week. But they say there is a chance dry, offshore winds could whip up again, and rekindle what they've worked so hard to put out.

Personally, I would not want the "Terminator" looking for me. I would turn myself in before Mr. Schwarzenegger found me. In all seriousness though, it touches my heart to see people band together. Imagine how much could be done if we banded together always.

## Church Reaches Out to SoCal Fire Victims

By Mark Martin  
CBN News  
October 26, 2007



CWN.com - SAN DIEGO, Ca. - The fires have burned hundreds of thousands of acres and destroyed more than a thousand homes. The need is tremendous, and Christians in this area realize that and are stepping in to help.

It's Robin Kaufman's first time back to Rancho Bernardo since she fled her home a few days ago. The place her family has owned for thirty years is gone -- destroyed by merciless flames hungry for fuel.

**"I'm just glad I'm alive," she said, breaking into tears. "It's the first time I've cried in days."**

Robin's neighbors faced the same destruction. Fire tore through one community leaving home after home reduced to ashes.

Tim Nellis is the youth pastor at Rancho Bernardo Baptist Church. The fire burned through the roof of the sanctuary and did serious damage.

**On the platform inside the sanctuary, only the wooden cross is untouched.**

But the church is not consumed by the damage to the sanctuary. **Instead, they're focused on reaching their neighbors by providing free water, free copies - even free child care.**

It was the proudest moment of being a member of this church: Christians being Christian," Nellis said.

First Baptist Church of San Diego has set up a collection site for donations and is helping to coordinate an area-wide church outreach for fire victims.

Scott Furrow, the church's pastor said, **"This is the reason for the church.**

"New life comes from the fire," Nellis said.

It's an uphill battle for people here in Southern California. But amidst the devastation there is hope, especially when the Church comes alongside them.

*We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.*

*Sir Winston Churchill  
British politician (1874 - 1965)*

*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

*Galatians 6:2*

*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

*2 Timothy 2:3*

## ***What does the cross mean to you?***

Pictured on this page is a simple cross made of copper and supported by a cheap, Army issue metal chain; the same type of chain used for a soldier's "dog tags". It was the type of cross offered by Army Chaplains during the Vietnam War.

Many soldiers took one but rarely wore them because of the conditions in that type of combat zone. After all, in the jungle heat and humidity, the less one wore around one's neck, the better.

When I take it off and look at it, I can see stains from blood and Agent Orange and the metal is pitted from sweat. I remember the torrential monsoon rains and the mud and the disgusting swamps it was dragged through. I still see the typhoon that ripped it from my neck and remember finding it lodged in a nearby tree branch.

I still have nightmares about the Viet Cong that captured me and beat the daylight out of me when they found the cross around my neck. I remember how they would pretend to give my cross back and hope I would reach for it. If I did they would hit me in the head with a rifle butt and laugh as they spat on it. God gave me the strength to get out of that spot and take my cross back from the hands of my dead captors.

***Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
[shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or  
famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?  
Romans 8:35***

For decades I kept it hanging on a wall alongside a picture from Nam. I tried to replace it with a decorative one from a jewelry store but it never felt right; it was just too fancy. After a while, it ended up on the wall with the first one.

I quit wearing a cross for a long time until recently. One reason I quit was because of nerve damage that drives me nuts if something touches a certain spot on my neck. It can feel like a hot poker sticking me there, if irritated. The other reason was the negative feelings of Nam connected with it.

Recently, I was reflecting on the just what a cross symbolizes and I took the original, stained and beat up little cross off of the wall, washed off the dust and put it back on. The blood and Agent Orange it encountered and the fierce weather and jungle conditions and the fight to get it back after my enemies spat on it are nothing compared to what Christ went through for me and everyone who wears, or plans to ever wear a cross.

***And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify [him]: and the third day he shall rise again.  
Matthew 20:19***

I cry when I think about it. Those Roman soldiers beat Jesus so badly, his friends could barely recognize him. The tortures described in the Bible and every story ever presented about

Jesus defies the physical ends to which even the strongest man could endure.

Now, the only thing that makes me hesitate when I put on my cross is that I don't feel worthy. Still, when I read about lawsuits started by the ACLU because a Muslim is offended by a cross displayed somewhere, the old soldier in me comes out. I get fighting mad and say, "**Each time you give up a piece of your faith to fit in with the ways of the 'world' you lose it forever and the 'world' will never give it back**". I refuse to give any of my faith away.

People have worn crosses around their necks for much longer than I'll ever know and I find it amazing, especially when you think of the attacks on Christianity throughout history and especially now. Crosses have been burned, abused, spat upon and discarded and those wearing one have been ridiculed and spurned and even killed for their faith the cross portrays. Yet we keep on wearing one. Imagine that.

How will you respond, the next time someone asks you, "**What does the cross mean to you?**"?



***The glorious gifts of God are not to be cast aside.***

***Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son;  
and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.  
Galatians 4:7***

*the lighter side*



*How to tell if a Catholic is driving too fast!*



Life is full of illusions.



Stare at the four dots in the middle of this picture for about 30 seconds. Then look at a flat, white surface; what do you see?



Smile!

