Rainbows of Hope

The Barnabas Letter

To encourage, enrich and equip

Volume 1 No. 1 Jan/Feb 1997

Where the grace of God is missed, bitterness is born. But where the grace of God is embraced, forgiveness flourishes. The more we immerse ourselves in grace, the more likely we are to give grace.

Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, (Word Publishing 1996) p. 107.

IN FOCUS

Phyllis Kilbourn

How encouraging to scan through the WEC Communications Directory and count thirty WECers already engaged in ministry with children in difficult circumstances! Praise the Lord, we already have inquiries from about thirty more wanting to become involved!

Working with children in difficult circumstances is a challenge. Workers must keep on the cutting edge of effective strategies and interventions that will bring healing, reconciliation and hope into the children's young lives. An effective ministry approach enables children to accept Christ's invitation to "come to Me."

Since we have been wisely advised to wait awhile before launching the Rainbows magazine, we have decided to include a worker's insert into the bimonthly newsletter. Hopefully this will provide additional stimulation, fresh ideas and inspiration for your ministry and work.

These pages are yours and can be used for sharing your ministries, debating, challenging, feedback or whatever. So, it is important to hear from you about the topics or issues you would like to have addressed.

In this issue I have chosen to highlight an article on community involvement from Michael Duncan's *Costly Mission: Following Christ into the Slums*. In the Philippines, Michael struggled with the difference between *doing things for* the poor and *working with* the poor. A vast difference in ministry approach! The number of children facing difficult circumstances are so numerous that we dare not own their problems alone. We must solicit the input, advice and involvement of community leaders at all levels.

A community-based approach has paid off in a project for street children in Russia. A 2,000 member indigenous church in St. Petersburg has agreed to accept responsibility for the 1,000 imprisoned street children and numerous other children living on the streets in that city. Church leaders have come up with a three-year strategy plan revolving around the formation of twenty ministry teams to the children. Some of those teams have already formed and are active in ministry. Our part is to help with the training, praying and providing encouragement. The front-line workers are those who know the children best—the Russians!

Continuously, from all corners of the globe, we are confronted with the ugliness of "ethnic cleansing" in all its guises. Lonnie Lane's experience provides a forceful testimony to God's power in ethnic forgiveness! May you be encouraged by the awesome importance of being used as an instrument to fulfill Christ's desire to touch and bless today's children.

Pontius' Puddle

Borrowed. Original source unknown

A Lesson in Ethnic Forgiveness

Lonnie Lane

Dale Schumm points out the importance of rituals to seal the experience of forgiveness. He states, "No person can tell another, "You must forgive." It is a choice that only the wronged person can make. When forgiveness happens, reinforce it by giving it a definite, concrete form."[1] *Lonnie's story is a powerful example of how to use rituals to bring about forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.*

When I, a Jewish woman, came to the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, I was released from the weight of sins I didn't realize I was carrying. Because I was forgiven by God, I forgave the German people for the Holocaust, the destruction of six million of our Jewish people during World War II. However, I did not realize that bitterness and fear of Nazi Germany was still with me. They surfaced during a chapel service at the seminary where I am working and taking classes.

An international student speaker talked about the many nations represented at the seminary. He described the people from the "corn" nations, the "rice" nations and the "wheat" nations.

We were to begin the service by singing "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus" in Tamil, the national language of India, to represent the rice nations, and in Spanish to represent the corn nations. My American perspective fully expected the "wheat" language to be, of course, English. I was taken aback to find that we were to sing in German! Suddenly, I felt threatened, frightened, and alone. As the only Jewish person there, I felt alienated from the group with whom I'd had no self-consciousness moments before. I was also confused and shocked at my own reaction. I found myself unable to sing, even to mouth the words transliterated before me, as the language was a symbol to me of all that was fearful.

"Lord, forgive me for what I'm feeling," I prayed silently.

The song ended and now we were to take communion together. The "bread" would be of rice, corn or wheat, and three people, one from each "nation" would serve it to us. The three rose and stood before us. Nearest to me stood Peter, a German, holding a tray of wheat bread. Each in turn prayed. When Peter prayed, instead of closing my eyes I stared at his head bowed before God and listened as he tenderly prayed in German. I could understand most of what he said as German is very close to the Yiddish. I had never heard anyone actually *pray* in German before. I'd heard German in World War II movies when it spoke harshness and destruction to my people, but never in humility before God.

My mind reeled; I felt nauseous. Stunned by the depth of emotion within me I numbly took a piece of bread from the tray when it came to me. At that moment even this symbol seemed alien to me. In my congregation we used matzo (unleavened bread) for Communion, since it is a representation of the Last Supper, a Passover Seder. Communion to me meant matzo, just as German to me meant Nazis. I was being challenged at my core with what the symbol of the communion bread represented to me.

While others slipped the bread into their mouths I sat with it burning in my fist, knowing I could not possibly partake of it with this bitterness in my heart. I wanted to run away.

But the speaker came before us again and explained that the two large glass bowls of water and towels on the table were for the purpose of washing each other's feet, only we would be washing hands, not feet. We were to go up in pairs—corn, rice and wheat folks—all sharing the experience together. It was to be an act of true humility both to wash and to be washed, a submission one to another.

I sat and watched as, two by two, people approached the water bowls and proceeded to wash one another's hands. God began to knock at the door of my heart. I became aware that He was telling me I needed to be cleansed, but it would have to be by the hands of a German. I needed to wash his hands as well. My face burned with humiliation at the thought of approaching a German to ask him to do this with me. My heart was pounding. I sat riveted to my chair, fighting humiliation, fear, embarrassment, and possible rejection. I knew that if I walked out of the chapel without submitting to God on this, I would carry the bitterness with me. I decided to fully follow Jesus as we had just sung.

I stood up and walked to where Peter was sitting and knelt down to talk quietly to him. I asked if he as a German and I as a Jew could go through this hand washing together as a symbolic gesture for healing in my own life. Without hesitation he looked at me and said "I'd like to do that," and I wondered if he himself welcomed the chance for such a reconciliation in the Lord with a Jewish person.

At the water bowl, Peter took my hands in his own—his German hands—and lowered them into the bowl and rather than dipping them into the water he bathed my hands scooping water onto mine with his and gently washing every finger, and between, as if he were wiping away deeply imbedded dirt that easily slid off my hands when it came in contact with his own. Then he took the towel and gently wiped every part of my hands, one finger at a time, and between, until they were dry. I felt myself relax my hypervigilance as Peter took on more and more the character of a person rather than just "a German." I then repeated the same process, washing his hands, his

German hands which had now become to me as Jesus' hands for they had just cleansed me of my sin of bitterness.

I dried Peter's hands as he had mine, then lifted my eyes to his and said, "Amen." A great victory had been won for the Kingdom of God in my heart. I wondered if it had in Peter's heart as well.

I sat for a moment then walked out quietly to the cover of a small grove of trees nearby. There I sobbed out to God all that I didn't know had still been in my heart: the rage at being totally subjugated by those whose enjoyment was our suffering, and the profound frustration at the impotency against such cruelty by the hands (yes, the hands) of those who were unmoved by our pain and terror. When that was done I wept deeply with great sorrow and grief over the loss of the lives of so many of my people and others. It all came pouring out of me as I stumbled among the trees, releasing to God all my agony over the incalculable loss and pain. I cried until there was nothing more and the storm was over. Later, I told Peter what the experience meant to me. I shared with him my feelings and he was able to really "hear" me. What a healing that was! Part of the rage had been the German's denial of our pain, the relegating us to non-humans with no care that we were in pain. Peter cared that I had been in pain; he listened to me and he responded with tenderness, acceptance and respect.

This major incident in my life left me with a deep sense of trust. I now know that I can entrust myself to God to experience the deepest of pains and come out whole. I can face the enemy and, if God is leading, do as Jesus did to wash the hands or the feet of one who has been the greatest threat to me. In so doing, I found that the "enemy" has become my brother, and together we found our way to reconciliation. To God be the glory!

[1] Schumm, Dale Henry, "Forgiveness in the Healing Process" in *Healing the Children of War*, Phyllis Kilbourn, ed.: (Monrovia, California, MARC Publications, 1995), pp. 278–79.

Lonnie's article used by permission of the author and of YOUTH, Box 1707 Fort Washington, PA 19034, for which she first wrote her story.

A Revolution from the Heart

Michael Duncan

One night I awoke with a nagging question: Why are you here in the Philippines? The answer seemed obvious: We were here to serve the poor, to be servants.

Then another voice entered the discussion. I sensed God speaking to me. "You are here," I felt he was saying, "not just to do things *for* the poor, but also to work *with* the poor." For the rest of the night I grappled with what that meant. A week later I was introduced to a book that was to bring about a revolution in our hearts.

The book was the story of Father Niall O'Brien, a Catholic missionary priest and member of the Society of St. Columban. Father O'Brien had lived and worked with the very poor of Negros, in the Philippines, for over twenty years. His encounters with widespread injustice, political corruption, crushing poverty, illegal arrests and torture led to his arrest and imprisonment under Marcos, on a phony charge of murder.

O'Brien helped the poor to help themselves. He had created self-reliant communities where the poor prayed together, looked after one another, cared for their own sick and dying, gained courage from Scripture and worked for political action.[1] Page after page presented a powerful message: it is better to work *with* the poor than do things *for* the poor.

As we surveyed our first four years in the Philippines we concluded that Servants had done much *for* the poor. We had given food, bandaged the sick, built houses, created jobs, made converts and constructed churches. Like some corporate Santa Claus we had spread abroad many gifts. Not surprisingly, one of our number referred to us all as "the walking wallets" in the slums.

But we had done little *with* the poor. O'Brien's book raised many questions that challenged our efforts. Had we taken the time to see what the poor could give?" In our giving, had we robbed the poor of their opportunity to sacrificially give to one another? Had we unintentionally communicated to the poor that what they had did not count, that foreign was better than domestic? Had we done things for them that they could have done for themselves? Had we ended up controlling their destiny? Put simply, had we disempowered them?

What had our giving done to us as missionaries? One woman in Servants had struggled with playing god with the poor. She had the power to give and radically transform a poor family, but she also had the power to withhold help. She could control the destiny of people's lives. Living with this responsibility became too much and was one of the reasons for her departure. "I can't be God to these people!" she exclaimed.

Furthermore, our giving seemed to compromise our precious incarnational mandate. We had relocated into the heart of the slums so as to be one with the people, but our giving had made us the elite of the slum, the patrons, the upper class. As the providers we were now the benefactors and the poor were the beneficiaries.

The school

It was back to the drawing board. The mistakes, failures and crises of faith forced us to review what we had done. We needed to learn lessons. Most of us had experienced pain on the streets; now we were to discover pain in the study. The books we read showed us we were on the right learning track.

- We discovered that we should not seek to do for others what they must do for themselves.
- Many skills are either already present or can be produced within the people.
- We should not focus so much on designing programs "on behalf of others." Rather, we should strive to collaborate with others in developing the emotional and practical resources they require.
- Enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives.
- Foster local initiatives.
- The people should participate in their own development.

Although some of these concepts were new to us we discovered that the key thoughts were thousands of years old. Lao Tsu penned these words in 700 B.C.:

> Go to the people, live with them,
> learn from them, love them.
> Start with what they know,
> build on what they have.
> But with the best leaders when the work is done,
> and the task is accomplished,
> The people will say,
> We have done this ourselves.[2]

"Go to the people." We had done that. "Live with them." We had done that. "Love them." Well, we had tried. But "learn from them, start with what they know and build on what they have?" These we had not done. When we arrived in Damayan Lagi we took one look at the slum and its inhabitants and concluded they were in a desperate plight. As far as we were concerned, there was nothing good there. This was our first mistake. We concluded that the people had nothing to offer and it was up to us to do all we could. Thus began the array of mercy-giving options, job creation schemes and capital loan facilities.

We were now being asked to believe that in the midst of the muddy and disease-ridden pathways, the crude, ramshackle houses, the open sewers and cramped conditions, there were numerous resources. We could add what we had to offer to these resources, but we had to get the starting point right and not create the perception that *our* resources were the most important.

A new identity

We had already made the mistakes. We knew it and so did everyone else. It was humbling walking the streets. All we wanted to do was escape the slum and start afresh somewhere else with our new ideas. We no longer had respect. We were no longer the experts, teachers and saviors to be looked up to, to be eagerly listened to and followed. We felt like children.

As we read we realized this should have been our attitude from the beginning. We should have come as fellow travelers, as children not as adults, as learners not as teachers, in weakness not strength. We should have come willing to share our flawed humanity with the poor as a sign of solidarity with them. We were not to discount the place of the expert, teacher and healer but to complement them with weakness, fragility, openness and vulnerability. Often, showing our weaknesses can accomplish more than merely depending upon our strengths.

A new partnership

"That is all well and good," complained one of the Servant missionaries, "But where do I now fit in the scheme of things? Do I have a place any more? If it's all up to the people why not just go home?" We were in danger of ending up with a high view of the poor person and a low view of the missionary, empowering the poor and demoralizing the Servant worker. "If the Servant worker comes off second best in all of this rethinking," we responded, "then it's only because we are trying to correct the imbalance."

For so long the poor person had been demoralized in the development process led by foreigners and national experts. But in lifting the poor up we were not wanting to then demean the role of the missionary.

A new formula was taking shape. The poor were to do all they could do and only then would we do *with* them what they could not do for themselves. By doing everything for them, we were robbing the poor of their opportunity to help each other. Thus we were also robbing them of the joy there is in laying one's life down for a friend.

We would have to wait and see if and how these new ideas would work, but they felt right. Development was to be a shared process that respected both the dignity of the poor and the missionary.

---

[1] Niall O'Brien, *A Revolution from the Heart* (New York: Oxford Press, 1987).
[2] Anne Hope et al., *Training for Transformation*, Book I (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), p. 82.

The above article is from *Costly Mission* by Michael Duncan (1996) pp. 51–54. Used by permission of MARC, a division of World Vision International, 800 West Chestnut Avenue, Monrovia, CA 91016-3198

Costly Mission

Following Christ into the slums

Michael Duncan

This book tells a story of loss, pain and perseverance in the Manila slum of Damayan Lagi. Duncan's tribulations attest to the well-known but often forgotten fact that mission is indeed costly—often at a personal level.

You may order your copy from

Rainbows of Hope

Box 1766

Fort Mill, SC 29716

$7.95 plus shipping