

December 2011



Preaching in the (almost) open air



## This Community That We Call Church

On Labor Day weekend our family went to barbecues three days in a row. First was with family in Fresno, then with the new Church of the King in Livingston, and finally with the Church of the Cross in Delhi at the local pool. It struck me that our kids' understanding and experience of church goes far beyond an hour or two on Sunday. For our kids, church means barbecues, pool parties, dinners, Bible studies in our home, community festivals. Church means asking my wife every Sunday, "Are we going to pick up Shawn today?" Church means people. Church means community. I have to say those three barbecues were sweet times of fellowship.

A family of new believers said recently, "The church is small, but people really care for each other. It's like family." I needed to be reminded of that. The church in Delhi really is small and people really do care for each other. Delhi is a town without community, so for those who make their way into this community that we call church it's like finding a stream in the desert. And they didn't even realize they were thirsty for it until they found it.

I just finished a four week sermon series on community in Delhi. My hope and prayer is that this community that is only possible through Christ (nothing else would bring us together or keep us together) grows and overflows into the town of Delhi.

## Delhi Status Update

When I last wrote, the Church of the Cross in Delhi was in a world of hurt. Things have stabilized now, although I can't say we are thriving yet. People do enjoy our worship services, even with small numbers; the sense of community is strong; there is a desire to keep up our community outreach, but in more focused, regular ways; there are some new people getting involved.

As always, I have numerous new ideas, but I'm not sure how much I can do. What we really need is more leaders, organizers, and doers.

## The Birth of the Church of the King

Meanwhile, I have started ministry in Livingston. The Church of the King / Iglesia del Rey started with two informational meetings at a pizza place in August. From September through early November we met every Sunday morning at a park for Bible study and barbecue (or some other refreshments). Then in mid-November we moved to meeting at a local elementary school. There is a sense of excitement, growth, and momentum, things that we have rarely felt in Delhi, to be honest. Last Sunday there were about 40 people. Let me tell you about some of the people who are involved.

⇒ There's the teenager who showed up one Sunday without being invited or even knowing we would be there. She explained that she knew a group met at the park on Saturdays (not us) and thought maybe they would be there on Sundays too. She has always had a hunger for God, and finally decided to find a church.

⇒ There's the first family that I met going house to house in Livingston, who has never been involved with a church before. Their 11 year old cried one recent Sunday morning because they were not going to go to the worship service.

⇒ There's the couple from Oaxaca, Mexico who are foreigners twice over. Not only are they immigrants to the United States, but they are not even quite at home among other Latinos, as their mother tongue is Triqui, not Spanish. Moreover, Isaias suffered a back injury in an accident at work several years ago, leaving him unable to work. He and his wife long for home, but they are waiting for a settlement before heading back to southern Mexico. Despite the crushing load of injury, exile, and poverty, Isaias exercises his faith through raising funds to send down for a church construction project in Oaxaca. Isaias explained to me recently that his father, who is a pastor, is not able to read, so he preaches what he picks up elsewhere. In addition to an offering for the construction project, I plan to provide his father with an audio Bible as well. It is likely that when he returns to Oaxaca, Isaias will begin pastoring his father's church.



Children's ministry at the park in Livingston

Leadership and teaching in the Church of the King are shared between me, Pastor Alfonso Silveira, and Pastor Kenny Perumalla. This team of Anglo, Hispanic, and Indian pastors is perfect for Livingston, as it models how Christ unites diverse people. It also works out well for the three of us, who have felt somewhat isolated in our other ministries. The mix of gifts is also nice: Alfonso is an enthusiastic evangelist, Kenny is a great encourager, and I am a teacher. I am really grateful to be working with such a team. Other people are *volunteering without being asked* to help with music, children's ministry, coordinating refreshments, and so on. What a gift!

Plans for the near future include

- Putting on an Indian Christmas Outreach
- Developing a class for new Partners in Mission (members)
- Launching at least one small group in English and Spanish
- Finding a more permanent home for the Church of the King (anyone want to buy us a building?)
- Spreading the word for a more official launch of worship services (any excuse to invite people)



Our 3 oldest on a recent vacation at the Central CA coast

## Family

Our one year old, Nathan, is walking and barely talking, but he still isn't sleeping very well. It is amazing to me how much Rebecca still manages to do in the church and community. Nate is a cute and delightful boy. He is just beginning to communicate: he can say something like "Uh-oh" and can do the signs for ball, book, and dog. Not useful, exactly, but exciting.

Katherine, who just turned four, loves pink and purple and everything princessy. Peter enjoys school and is picking up Spanish in his dual language program. For some reason he insists on wearing shorts and croc shoes even on freezing, foggy days like today. Isaac is a friendly and responsible boy, though of course he still has his moods. I am very proud of him. All our children are addicted to books. I enjoyed reading James Thurber's *The Thirteen Clocks* to the two older ones last week. Our current book, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, brings back vague memories from my childhood reading.

## συγκοινωνοι (synkoinonoi)

That's Greek for "partners, sharers, collaborators" with a prefix that means "together", which emphasizes the close cooperation. Paul calls the Philippians συγκοινωνοι (synkoinonoi), and that is what you and I are as well: partners, sharers, collaborators in the gospel and the grace of God. The worldwide movement of Christ is sustained by networks of prayer, support, and generosity like this.

Would you like to partner with us by giving a one-time or monthly gift towards the ministries in Livingston or Delhi? Use the enclosed paper to make a donation or to be added to the prayer team.

## Thanks

I am writing between Thanksgiving and Christmas, both events that remind us to thank God for his gifts. We join with the Apostle Paul in saying, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15). And thank you for your gifts as well.

*Merry Christmas! May the Peace of our Lord be with you!*

*Zeke & Rebecca Nelson*

*with Isaac, Peter, Katherine, and Nathanael*

## Prayer Support

- Thanks for the strong sense of community in the Church of the Cross in Delhi.
- Thanks for the formation of a new community in Livingston.
- For a building in Livingston
- That God uses us to make many disciples and leaders.
- Pray for God's provision and guidance for our hoped-for thrift store.
- Pray that God does a mighty work in Delhi, Livingston, and the other cities and towns in our area.

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