

Direct Connect



**Christian Reformed
Home Missions**

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At His Feet

I'm reading a book about spiritual disciplines. The author instructed me to read the story of Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38-42 several times in order to sense what God was telling me. I know the story well; do I even need to read it? In compliance, I opened my Bible and read and re-read the story. This time something new and fresh popped out at me. Surprise!

You know the story; Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha is distracted by the details of the gathering. Martha expresses her anger to Jesus about her sister. "Tell her to help me". Jesus lovingly responds, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed." What is that one thing? To experience the presence of Jesus.

Why did I need to hear that? Leading Coffee Break and co-directing requires work; snack schedules, lesson prep, childcare, phone calls, etc. Somehow my experience of Jesus, like Martha, transitioned into what needed to be done. Work. I'm sensing I'm not alone. God reminded me that the power in Coffee Break is the experience of meeting Jesus.

So, as I prepare now, I remind myself that Coffee Break is an event where Jesus is the main guest. We read his words and feel his Spirit make them real. I have renewed excitement and anticipation. What is Jesus going to say this week?

I'm lucky to be able to hear how others are meeting Jesus in Coffee Break. I regularly receive calls telling me about what is happening:

Transitions

Reluctantly we say goodbye to Lois Hoogeveen, Small Group Ministry Developer who lives in Sioux Falls, SD. Lois served CRC Home Missions and all of you in the West Central region for over 12 years. She raised the bar for Coffee Break, Story Hour and Little Lambs as she trained, encouraged, and resourced leaders. Among other things, Lois was co-chair of the 2002 Small Group Evangelism Conference for Women in Minneapolis/St. Paul and also hosted a Morning of Joy every year for women. Lois turns to a new chapter of coaching and encouraging leaders, using her experience and gifts to help others be the best they can be. Thank you, Lois, for the many lives touched and brought into the kingdom because of your efforts.

Getting to *Know* You

Here are some ideas for building "community" in your group. In other words, getting to know each other and creating a safe, loving environment to learn from God's word.

1.



Judy called to tell me how much she loves Coffee Break. She became a Christian in her group.



A long time group is very encouraged. Their church has recognized the outreaching power of Coffee Break and is offering renewed support.



A woman, who had walked away from church, returned through Coffee Break. She is beginning seminary this year!



Melisa learned to read her Bible in a nearby Coffee Break. She wants to start a new group at her own church.

Jesus, come and be our teacher! Help us not to worry and be distracted about the details but to enjoy your company. We also ask that you will provide for groups who need more Marthas and Marys to lead groups, prepare coffee and care for children. Amen.

Sam Huizenga
Small Group Ministry Developer
Great Lakes Region



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Quote

“Prayer is changing me from someone who knew a lot *about* God into someone who's *experiencing* God in deep, though sometimes difficult ways. - Nancy Guthrie

2008 Small Group & Evangelism Wrap-Up

Pass around a bowl of M&M's, have each person take one and tell why they took that color. (or choose a color that reflects your week, mood, day, etc.).

2.

Think of a candy bar that describes you or what you love. (ex. Payday, Snickers, Almond Joy, Nestle's Crunch, etc.)

3.

If money were not an object, what would you do this week?

4.

What is the best memory you can recall from birth to ten years old?

5.

If you were forced to move to another country and could choose, which one would you select?

6.

On a scale of 1 – 10, what is the fun factor in your life? (10 being highest).

7.

How many pairs of shoes do you own, and what does that say about you?

8.

If you got a tattoo, what and where would it be?

9.

Show with your body how your past week was experienced by you.

10.

What is your favorite go-to meal? (home cooked or not!)

It was so good to see many of you at the Conference this summer! We were stretched and blessed in our leadership roles and inspired for evangelistic ministries. You can listen to the keynote speakers online at www.crhm.org/conference. Paul Faber from Faith Alive Resources was encouraged by your feedback on the Discover Your Bible studies. Just to update you on that series, [*Discover the Parables of Jesus*](#) is the brand new study that was released this fall. A new study, [*Discover Mark*](#) will be released by December 1. Looking ahead to 2009, there are several exciting projects underway. A brand new series for Coffee Break is being planned and Esther will be the first inductive study published. In the Discover Life series, a new study on the ministry of Paul will be ready in the fall of 2009.

God was with us in a powerful way at the 2008 Conference. Linda Greer stood and gave the testimony that you will read below. Please let it fill your heart and compel you to ministry as we again appreciate the value of reaching out to children with God's stories and his love.

Dykgraaf

Diane

Linda's Story

Life was good! My husband and I had two beautiful children – a girl and a boy who brought us joy. We enjoyed good jobs and living in our neighborhood.

For us, a crisis came in September, 1990. My husband lost his job and our almost 3-year-old son, Dan, needed to have open-heart surgery. Our family did not have a church home even though we considered ourselves Christians. God in his mercy, put me in a wonderful place...a place called Little Lambs.

Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church offered a great Little Lambs program. It provided me with a two hour time period each week that I used to get my errands done. Our daughter, Kristen, had loved the program and although Dan had just started, he looked forward to Little Lambs day each week.

Outwardly, I was cool, calm, and collected, but inwardly I was in near panic mode. Little did I know that God had a plan! A divine encounter occurred one afternoon when I bumped into the director

Getting to Care for You

To show love and care for each other, end the session (after Bible study) with a prayer for each person that relates to what they shared in the opening sharing. For example, if I chose a blue M&M because I'm feeling down about something, the person sitting next to me could briefly recall that and offer it in prayer. If I had suggested a heart tattoo over my heart with the word "Mom" in it, my neighbor could give thanks for my family. If your group is new and uncomfortable praying out loud for each other, you as leader could pray and name each person, offering appropriate thanks or petition.

Resources

Spiritual Formation Resources

[*Soul Care Resources*](#), by Mindy Caliguire. Four titles in the series, *Simplicity*, *Soul Searching*, *Spiritual Friendship*, and *Discovering Soul Care*, integrate God's word with spiritual practice. These Formation books by InterVarsity Press encourage personal reflection and growth, and also include optional group discussion.

[*Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*](#),

by Ruth Haley Barton. Barton, a spiritual director and retreat leader, uncovers the basics of spiritual formation – solitude, self-examination, discernment and Sabbath. Other titles of hers dealing with the same subject: *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*,

of Little Lambs in the grocery store. She recognized my anxiety and asked a few questions. I poured out my heart to her and she responded with love and encouragement. The next week at Little Lambs, one of the teachers told me that the staff was praying for Dan and his upcoming surgery. I remember feeling that a huge weight had been lifted from me.

Dan's surgery was successful. The director of Little Lambs brought a card and a gift to our home. My heart was touched and I began to yearn for a closer relationship with God. I saw something special in the ladies that volunteered at Little Lambs and I wanted to know what made them different, so I started helping out as a substitute and then as a craft teacher. I also began attending Coffee Break to learn more about the Bible. My spiritual journey shifted into high gear as I realized that the missing piece in my life was a relationship with Jesus Christ. Marie VanAntwerpen wrote in her book, *Coffee Break...Touching Lives with Love*: "Danny's heart was repaired by surgery. The process was complicated and costly. The hole in Linda's heart needed repair also, but that transformation was provided free of charge...for Jesus had already paid the price." I accepted Jesus as my Lord as well as my Savior. With a grateful heart I continued to volunteer at Little Lambs.

Years went by quickly and I did not tire of telling Bible stories and planting seeds of faith in our Little Lambs children. My favorite time of year is the week that we ask the children if they would like to invite Jesus into their hearts. We spend six weeks helping the children understand the steps of salvation. The joy of seeing the Holy Spirit actively working in the hearts and minds of the children is indescribable.

Fast-forward:

Valentine's Day, 2008. A breaking story came on the evening news of a shooting at Cole Hall on the campus of Northern Illinois University. I was at work at Marianjoy Rehab Hospital in Wheaton when I heard that a shooter had entered the science lecture hall at approximately 3pm and for no apparent reason, opened fire from the front of the room. Initially I was able to continue my duties, even though my son Dan was a student at NIU. Dan was a business major and to my knowledge, was not taking any science class.

Everything changed when Dan's father called me at work with the news that Dan had been in that classroom; that he had been shot; and that he had died at Kishwaukee Hospital. An hour later we were on our way to DeKalb. No one spoke; we were in shock.

Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership, and Longing for More: A Woman's Path to Transformation in Christ.

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, by

Richard J. Foster. This book explores the "classic Disciplines," or central spiritual practices, of the Christian faith. Along the way, Foster shows that it is only by and through these practices that the true path to spiritual growth can be found. Dividing the Disciplines into three movements of the Spirit, Foster shows how each of these areas contribute to a balanced spiritual life.

Online Resources

www.christianitytoday.com – this website provides resources and reading for almost all facets of ministry and leadership in the church today.

www.childrensministry.com – you'll find practical (and free) ideas for working with children. Check out the Ages & Stages tab for these: Ribbon Prayer, Fidget Busters, Leader Helps, Praying with Toddlers, etc.

www.crayola.com – Many free coloring pages and craft ideas.

Study Resources

Discover the Gift of Christmas, a four session basic inductive Bible study available from Faith Alive Resources.

Coffee Break Postcards, sold in sets of 25 from Faith Alive Resources. These are being

We learned later that Dan had been in the classroom because his girlfriend was enrolled in the class. It was Valentine's Day, and he wanted to be with her. Dan, Lauren, and a girlfriend of Lauren's were seated close to the front of the room with no chance to escape. When the shooting started, they got down on the floor. Dan held Lauren's hands and prayed outloud. All three were shot: Lauren's girlfriend was hit in the elbow and the thigh. Lauren had a bullet travel through her abdomen and chest. She was airlifted to Northwestern Hospital. She required open-heart surgery in April, and presently is healthy physically and healing emotionally. Dan was shot from behind in the left shoulder and back of the head. He was still alive when he was taken from Cole Hall but he died at the hospital.

I believed from the beginning that God allowed this event to occur. When I saw Dan's body and said goodbye to him, I experienced the presence and peace of God. I knew that Dan was safely home in heaven.

So why is Little Lambs so important to me? From the beginning of time, when God created the world, He had a plan for an ongoing relationship with his people. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus made many references to children and he chastised his disciples for sending them away. Jesus cherished the children and told his disciples, "unless you change and become like a little child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:3) Children are open-minded and love hearing the stories that are found in the Bible.

The Little Lambs program at Elmhurst CRC was started with a vision for outreach to the community. With much prayer and hard work, Little Lambs has had a significant impact on people's lives. Sometimes the changed lives are evidenced early – sometimes not for many years. My story is only one of many. We do not know how much time God will give us on earth. I am grateful that my children had the opportunity to attend Little Lambs. As for me, I am content and even eager to plant the seeds that can grow into a mature faith. My prayer for our Little Lambs children is that the Holy Spirit will do the work through whatever the circumstances of the child's life to bring about a great harvest in God's time.

In closing, I would like to leave you with this quote from Oswald Chambers. "The life of a child of God is always the life of a child, simple and open-hearted, no ulterior motives."

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Donations Appreciated

Small Talk and Direct Connect resources are offered free of charge by Christian Reformed Home Missions. You can help support small group ministries through [your donation](#).

May the Lord be praised.



Linda Greer
Little Lambs teacher, Elmhurst, IL



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