



TUNE-UP OR TRANSFORMATION?

“**C**ouldn't we just tune it up a little? Adjust the groups? Replace the connections? Set

the controls a little tighter? Or does the church have to die in order to find its new form?” Those were my questions as I headed for lunch with Gordon Cosby, founder of Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C.—where I have been a member nearly 20 years. Wasn't there some way to keep the old and embrace the new as well?

Being grounded in Christ at Church of the Saviour has been important for my freedom to risk and reach out through Faith at Work. Since 1946, this ecumenical church has stood for commitment by every member to a disciplined inner life and to a servant ministry. Every member has a spiritual director and belongs to a mission group. In 1976, as Peter and I arrived, Church of the Saviour divided into six little worshipping communities, each with a separate mission focus. We chose Seekers, where the focus is justice for children—our own and those at risk in society.

As we approached our Jubilee Year, Gordon called us to let go of the current structures and be open to new forms of the Spirit. I wanted to tune-up the connections instead. “You could easily spend the next five years arguing about essential elements,” he said over soup, “instead of living out the unique calls that Christ has planted in each little church.” I knew he was right about that.

In July, 2/3 of the members voted for movement into separate churches. In August, Seekers had a memorial service to let go of the central church and much to my amazement, new wine began to flow from our grieving process. In my mission group, Learners & Teachers, nine of us began to brainstorm ideas for helping Seekers *listen* for God's voice. Four themes emerged, which we offered the rest of the congregation in a series of sermons and Tuesday-night discussions: belonging, decision-making, stewardship and space.

The sermon-discussions are being followed by eight weeks of intensive study groups in which people signed up for one of the four basic themes. Last Tuesday was our first session and the dining room was buzzing with excitement. 51 adults attended for dinner and study—approximately 2/3 of our regular congregation! By the end of 8 weeks, we will have specific proposals in each of the four areas for consideration by the church. What felt like death is coming to life again!

Although the topic of this Christmas issue is practical help for “tuning up” our spiritual lives, I can say with confidence that Christ may be calling us to a more radical step than that. Like The Seekers Church, you may discover the seeds of something brand new in your life and in your spiritual community—like the Christchild, born again and again. May God bless these new beginnings!

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Faith at Work

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Statement of Purpose

Faith at Work is a national network of leaders and learners at the growing edge of the church—

- committed to Biblical faith
- grounded in life experience
- shared in small group fellowship
- expressed by new models of ministry that offer hope in a hurting world

Current ministries include—

- *Faith at Work* magazine
- regional conferences
- church renewal weekends
- women's events
- leadership training

CEO's. *The leadership can come from anywhere.*

Within a few weeks, another opportunity presented itself. I was getting ready to leave for my denomination's big Faithworks '94 event, where I was to give a workshop and spend valuable time with my 13-year-old nephew. The phone rang at 7:30 am. The sister of one of our supervisors had been found murdered the previous evening.

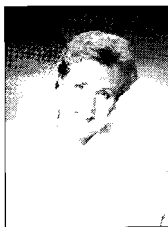
The murdered woman belonged to my church. Because our pastor had already left for Faithworks '94, I quickly decided to get involved from both angles—work and church. This was especially delicate because the murdered woman cleaned house for several of our executives and it was rumored that the assailant had taken their keys and addresses. I acted as liaison, ministered to the family and workgroup as much as I could, then headed for Faithworks '94, pondering the blurred lines that normally separate my life into compartments. I wondered what God was calling me to?

LIVING OUR CALL COURAGEOUSLY

Now I find myself drawn to the scripture about "losing one's life in order to find it." I am encouraged by Parker Palmer in his "Leading from Within" paper: *Finally, we need to remember that all great spiritual traditions...are saying one simple thing; BE NOT AFRAID! They don't say you can't have fear, because we all have fears, and leaders have fears aplenty. But they say you don't have to be your fears and you don't have to create a world in which those fears dominate the conditions of many, many people.*

Whatever happens next, I am convinced that God is calling me to some new form of combining spirituality and work. For a sabbatical year, this has been anything but quiet, but I am learning to trust the process and let God lead—knowing the dance will be different.

Dr. Suzanne Schmidt is a Human Resources Manager for Life Sciences Company in Maryland and an active member of the Seneca Valley United Church of Christ in Germantown MD.



OF PARENTING AND TRANSCENDENCE

BY ANNE EGGBROTEN

It was a wonderful day. In spite of everything else in my life—Christmas preparations, papers to grade, children to take to their piano lessons and Girl Scout meetings—I had taken December 4 to attend an all-day session on contemplative living given by James Finley, a disciple of Thomas Merton.

Several times during the day, friends asked me where my children were and how I had been able to get a day away. Each time I explained that the 8-year-old was in Orange County with her father at the annual baseball game held by his office; the 11-year-old was with a friend in Costa Mesa unless she had found a way to get to her Girl Scout meeting; the 6-year-old was in Los Angeles at her friend's house...

At 4 pm, after we had finished a 10-minute exercise in contemplative meditation—letting go of the worries in our lives and experiencing the transcendent—someone again kindly inquired about my children. I began to explain but broke off, just saying with a laugh, "I've let go of all that."

Arriving home half an hour later, I changed clothes—pleased that I was experiencing "the abyss-like nature of the present moment"—and began watering the parched strip of flowers in my front yard, enjoying the sunset sky and "tasting the divinity of every heart beat."

When the little boy next door asked if Marie could play, I began to explain that she was in Orange County at her father's baseball game—but then it hit me: she was at her friend's house in Los Angeles, where I should have picked her up an hour ago! The *other* two were with their father (I hoped).

I jumped into the car and drove to the friend's house, where I apologized to the friends' mother, mumbling something about an abyss and Thomas Merton and contemplative living.

Yes, to experience the abyss-like nature of transcendent immanence is wonderful, but that abyss may not be intended for parents of young children. Perhaps there should be a warning on the bottle: "Not for use by nursing mothers and others performing child-care."

Ann Eggebrotten is the editor of Abortion: My Choice, God's Grace: Christian Women Tell Their Stories (New Paradigm Books, PO Box 600008, Pasadena CA 91116).

LOAVES AND FISHES

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the people. (Mt 14:19)

GIVER

Betsy Bee
Carla Woodard
Ann Stevenson
Louise Lamberts
FAW Board

IN MEMORY OF...

Kay Holmes
My father, Clark Woodard
Jack N. Austin
J.J. Lamberts
Grace Lentz

What better way to honor the people who have been important on our spiritual journey than to make a gift to **Loaves & Fishes**, a capital fund to underwrite Faith at Work outreach. Be sure to send a brief expression of your special care for the one you wish to honor.