



PLOTTING AN ADVENT CONSPIRACY
How to make Christmas matter again.



Here we are once again at the season of Advent. Advent is a time for preparation, and perhaps most of all for conspiracy. Christmas has become a flashpoint between two empires: the Kingdom of God and the religion of over-consumerism. Just this last week of the *Community Bible Experience*, I've read the end of the story, so I know who wins. As John says in The Revelation, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11:15, NIV)

It is one thing to verbally declare our allegiance to the Kingdom of God but it is too easy to let another Christmas quickly come and go—with the strange, mystical beauty of the Incarnation lost beneath a mountain of presents and the hectic obligations of the season. But this year again we are participating Advent Conspiracy, which helps us think about Christmas in a new way.

We're conspiring in a good way—with our friends and our neighbors, the people we attend church with, and our families—and pushing against this empire of hyper-consumerism. Hyper-consumerism pushes people deeper into debt, because they think that more is always better. Somehow we've bought into the lie that the giving and receiving of expensive gifts is the best way to express love. We are asking people to conspire against that lie.

The past two years we have entered the story of Christmas by taking time during the season of Advent to Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More and Love All. Advent Conspiracy has us thinking about Christmas in a new way. You can make Christmas matter again by making these four significant commitments:

- To worship God more fully than you ever have.
- To spend less money on Christmas than in past years.
- To give more meaningful gifts to people.
- To love all people you come into contact with, especially those most in need.

This year our Advent Conspiracy project will emphasize local outreach rather than the water filter project for the Dominican Republic. An overwhelming message from the Church Health Assessment Survey revealed our congregations' heart to engage more in local ministry. A three-year dream of our "Count Us In" Ministry Team has been to do something significant and distinctive for special needs individuals and their families. A "Luke 14 Banquet" is already in our plans. This event will be on April 21 and will be a King-sized banquet showing lavish love to, in the words of Jesus, "the least of these brothers of mine" (Matthew 25:40). However, the vision is growing to additionally provide much needed respite for families who are caring for high needs family members. Possibilities include sending a family to one of *Joni and Friends* Family Retreats or helping families with weekly respite so they can attend church or just simply get a break. This part of the project is still forming so feel free to add your creative ideas!!

I am very excited about this Advent project because it emphasizes giving "presence" rather than "presents." It truly is a God-sized vision with plenty of opportunities for all of us to serve as Jesus served and to [Love All].

Let's conspire together to be relational - to reenact the incarnation by entering someone else's world for their joy and restoration. Presence will deepen the meaning of the season like nothing else!!

Plotting together, Pastor Ken



SHEEP SHAPE

By Pastor John Wiker



Living Lives of Integrity

Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary defines "*integrity*" as follows:

- 1: firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values: INCORRUPTIBILITY
- 2: an unimpaired condition: SOUNDNESS
- 3: the quality or state of being complete or undivided: COMPLETENESS

Being known as a person of integrity is something most people desire as a phrase describing their life. However, we can spend a lifetime trying to do the right things and in a moment of indiscretion (or maybe willful disobedience) our lives can implode.

Like some of you, I've been following the story coming out of Penn State University. It is painful to think about victims, coaches, leaders, and the entire University and alumni family. Pain, betrayal, loss, and anger are words that come easily as one reads the story as it unfolds.

Michael Goodwin says, Penn State's Cowardly Lions, by Nov. 14, 2011/ FoxNews.com

"To Pennsylvanians and millions of football fans everywhere, the fall of the House of Paterno is like the collapse of an empire. It crashed without warning or mercy. In truth, the core values rotted away over the years, the work done secretly in the dark, like that of termites and cancer. The end only seemed sudden. Already the most important lesson is clear. Civilizations, from single universities to national cultures, must be defended with relentless vigilance and courage, or they will not survive. Only the details of their demise will differ. A sage, perhaps Edmund Burke, once said, 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.'

"That describes the fate of Penn State. The brilliant days of sunshine, victory and integrity in Happy Valley were not a mirage. They were real for generations of players, parents, students, alums and fans who, over the 46-year tenure of Paterno, believed in the 'grand experiment' -- of winning the right way, with honor. But evil triumphed because of a fundamental failure by Paterno and others to uphold the principles the experiment represented. And so the whole enterprise lies in shambles, everyone associated with it tarnished and generations of adherents suffering an angry loss of faith. In life, even more than in football, courage is required."

The point of this edition of SheepShape is to encourage us to be courageous and hold on tight to Godly instruction ... in the midst of increasing opposition ... and encourage and help each other to do the same!

Proverbs 4:10-15 (NIV '84), "Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. *Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.* Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way."

Proverbs 4:10-15 (MSG), "Dear friend, take my advice; it will add years to your life. I'm writing out clear directions to Wisdom Way, I'm drawing a map to Righteous Road. I don't want you ending up in blind alleys, or wasting time making wrong turns. *Hold tight to good advice; don't relax your grip. Guard it well—your life is at stake!* Don't take Wicked Bypass; don't so much as set foot on that road. Stay clear of it; give it a wide berth. Make a detour and be on your way." (Continued on page 4)



G O D S M Y
LIFEGUARD
 For A Fresh Breath Of Life

C.I.A.
 Christians In Action

Youth News – Looking Back – Looking Forward

Wow! This has been a fast paced and wonderful fall semester and it's not over yet!!! I wanted to take some time to review just a handful of the things that have happened already. In September we had our annual men's retreat, and for the first time we had a little ceremony calling the young men to take the step from being a boy up to manhood. We had great help as we participated in the Trick or Treat So Others Can Eat; it was the fastest we have ever gotten that done. It's amazing what can happen when we have a group that all jumps in and helps! I was also so blessed by all of the students and adults that helped with the community outreach Trunk or Treat Event. We had a lot of students that came and helped for an entire day to prepare and get ready for this event.

On Nov. 2 the students brought money to shop for Operation Christmas Child, and the three groups bought enough items to fill 15 shoeboxes! We also took groups of students to the middle school and high school district conferences and had a great time and were challenged in our faith. As exciting as these events are, I am most excited about how students are living out their faith or at least beginning to live it out. We have spent this whole semester talking about God's Great Commission, taking the love of Jesus to others. It's fun to hear how students are fulfilling this and living it out. We had a student who led a friend to faith in Jesus and others who are in the process of sharing the gospel with their friends. I have heard how students who were walking away from the faith and the church have been encouraged by their friends and fellow students to turn back to God.

As we look forward there are also some exciting things happening in the near future. Coming up on December 18 will be our NOCC Family Christmas. Please be thinking about what talent you would like to share with the rest of the church family! You don't want to miss this night of fun and food. Also coming up, December 25 is the deadline for the middle school Believe Conference to be held in Tulsa on February 3-4. On December 21 we will have a special youth group night. We are going to share God's love with some families in Hays, go Christmas caroling and have a White Elephant gift exchange!!! Also in the works for March is a family ski trip -- more details will be coming out very soon.

It is a blessing and a joy to work with the families and students of our church family. If you would like to receive our weekly updates and encouragement on what is happening with the youth ministry, please email me at jneher@northoak.net.

Jeff

Living Lives of Integrity (Continued from page 2)

As you ponder these verses from Scripture allow me to add our agreed Covenant of Fellowship to the mix. As we allow God to make them a part of **who we are ... our spiritual DNA ...** they will help us *"Hold tight to good advice; don't relax your grip. Guard it well—your life is at stake!"*

Vision Statement: North Oak Community Church, as a local representative of the body of Christ, seeks to build a Christ-centered ministry that is grounded in God's Word and dependent on God's leading. We desire to empower and equip people to share the Saving Love of Christ while ministering to the needs of each other, our community region and the world.

Believing our chief purpose is to glorify God ...

Believing the Bible is accurate, true and reliable in all that it addresses...

Believing the Bible to be our authoritative guide for faith and life ...

Believing eternal life is a gift of God's grace, received by faith ...

Believing the Holy Spirit empowers believers to live holy and sanctified lives ...

Believing Jesus Christ has instructed His church to make disciples of all nations ...

Believing all we are and all we have belongs to God ...

Believing Jesus Christ has instructed us to love one another as He loves us ...

Believing families are of vital importance to God ...

Believing our entire lives are to be lived as a testimony of God's love and grace ...

As the body of Christ we endeavor to live out these truths by:

Growing in my personal life and devotion to Christ

... By reading and studying His Word for myself

... By praying that God will transform me into Christ's image

Working to keep the unity of my church family

... By loving the other members (as Jesus Christ loves me)

... By praying for my brothers and sisters in Christ

... By praying for the pastors and elders and deacons

... By not listening to or spreading any gossip

Sharing the responsibility of my church family

... By praying for its growth, both spiritual and numerical

... By a lifestyle of saying "yes" to God and "no" to sin

... By living in a spirit of submission to the church family (as unto the Lord)

... By inviting the unchurched to attend

Serving the ministry of my church family

... By using my God-given gifts and talents

... By becoming equipped to serve

... By developing a servant's heart

Supporting the testimony of my church family

... By participating freely, reverently and regularly in corporate worship

... By living a godly lifestyle at home, at work and in the community

... By giving regularly of my time, money, resources and abilities as God enables

Supporting the mission of my church family

... By loving my neighbor as myself

... By praying for God to bless my city and its people

... By involving myself in community life, as the Holy Spirit leads, to lift up Christ

Continued on page 5

To the North Oak Church family,

The North Oak Elders and Deacons along with our Finance Team have met several times over the last two months regarding the opportunity before our church family to experience spiritual growth in stewardship.

Our increasing budget deficit since the fiscal budget year began July 1 has motivated us to much prayer and discussion, seeking the Lord for his direction. The budget reality is this: After the first four months of our fiscal year, offerings are lagging behind planned expenses by about 20%, or about \$10,000 per month. We know that our cash flow cannot sustain this trend for many more months.

We firmly believe that we serve a generous God and that he continues to open doors for us to make his abundant grace and salvation known. Each year we try to build a budget that reflects the God-inspired vision of our entire church, with abundant input from all Ministry Teams and ultimately the entire church family. We trust God to drive that process by first giving us vision for ministry then helping us develop the budget as a planning tool to help us accomplish God's vision. Consequently, our deep conviction is that our offerings are not about adhering to or merely meeting a budget but about giving to God and the vision of ministry he has given us.

We confess that we have not always done a very good job of holding that vision before you. We have not adequately communicated the significance of the ministries supported by our weekly opportunities to give to the Lord. We are taking steps to change that.

Special projects such as Operation Christmas Child, Advent Conspiracy and mission trips provide opportunities for us to be adventurous in our giving as God opens a specific door for ministry and then blesses people with the resources to share. These projects highlight what God can do with generous givers.

These two realities face us: 1) a budget deficit; and 2) the known joy and blessing of this season of special projects. These realities feel as if they are at odds with each other and compel us to seek the Lord for direction.

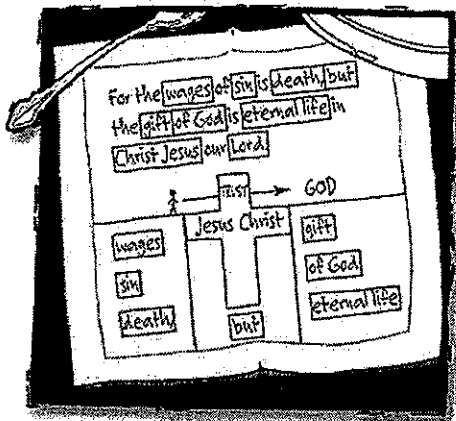
In our meeting on Tuesday, November 22, we strongly sensed God moving us to go forward with the special projects associated with the Advent season. Our emphasis with these projects has always been to buy fewer and less expensive gifts, taking the money we did not spend and giving it away to a united project. It is not about redirecting our regular tithes and offerings to an appealing project. We urge us all to be mindful of this as we cheerfully and generously give, reflecting God's grace.

We also determined to implement several initiatives to address the budget deficit: 1) to take any steps possible to immediately realize a reduction in spending without affecting permanent personnel expenses and essential operating expenses; 2) to communicate further through various means to make sure the whole congregation is aware of our financial situation; 3) to schedule a congregational meeting early in 2012 to discuss options and consider a comprehensive stewardship/discipleship plan.

We are committed to leading us to live out our stewardship as something grounded in God's abundant provision for all needs rather than merely a budget driven program based in human scarcity.

Thank you for your faithful prayers and support,

The North Oak Elders and Deacons



Many people feel that to be effective in evangelism they must memorize a complex illustration and a multitude of verses. But the Gospel is most powerful when shared with love, clarity, and simplicity.

One-Verse Evangelism is a simple, interactive way to share Christ's love conversationally and visually. It is based on asking questions and sharing. It's easy to learn because it uses just one verse. One-Verse Evangelism is also sensitive to peoples' busy schedules because it can be shared in just 10 or 15 minutes.

Here's a brief look at how it works. Let's say God's leading you to share the Gospel with your neighbor, Jeff. Write out Romans 6:23 on a piece of paper or a napkin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NIV). Then put your Bible away. Ask Jeff if he would like to see a simple picture based on this verse that will explain God's relationship with people.

wages

Circle this word and ask, "How would you feel if your boss refused to pay you the wages that were due to you?" Deep down, we all know that it is only right that we get what we deserve. Similarly, we earn wages from God for how we have lived our lives.

sin

Draw a circle around "sin," asking your friend what he thinks when he hears this word. You might explain that sin is more an attitude than an action. It can be either actively fighting God or merely excluding Him from our lives. You can ask, "Has God ever seemed far away?" If he says "Yes," add that that's one of the things sin does-it makes God seem far away. Now draw two opposing cliffs with a gap in between.

death

Circle this word and ask what thoughts come to mind. Explain that death in the Bible always means some kind of separation.

but

While circling this word, mention that it is important because it means that a sharp contrast in thought is coming. What we have just looked at is bad news; what follows is good news.

gift

Draw a circle around this word. Ask, "If wages are what a person earns, then what is a gift?" Remind your friend that someone must purchase every gift.

of God

Circle this and explain that the gift you are talking about is free. It is from God Himself. It's so special that no one else can give it. Ask, "How do you feel when someone gives you a special gift?"

eternal life

Circle these two words next, and then ask, "How would you define these words?" Contrast one side of the cliff, death, with the other side, eternal life. Ask, "What is the opposite of separation from God?"

Christ Jesus

Draw these words so they create a bridge between the two cliffs. Help your friend to consider that every gift has a giver, and only Jesus Christ can give the gift of eternal life.

TRUST

Write this word over the bridge you just drew. Explain that friends trust each other, and tell your friend that Jesus wants a trusting friendship with him. All he has to do is admit that he is responsible for the "sin" of either fighting or excluding God from his life. That is what trust means-trusting that Jesus wants to forgive us for rejecting Him from our lives. At this point, you can ask him if he wants to start a relationship with God that will last forever. If he says "Yes," invite him to pray a short prayer in his own words, asking Jesus to forgive him.

Close by reminding him that this simple illustration shows what God is like: Someone who cares about people, especially him. Invite him to read all about it in the Bible, perhaps beginning in the gospel of John.

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Living Lives of Integrity (Continued from page 4)

I'm going to let Oswald Chambers "have the last word" ...**AUTHORITY AND INDEPENDENCE – Oswald Chambers**

If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments.

Our Lord never insists upon obedience; He tells us very emphatically what we ought to do, but He never takes means to make us do it. We have to obey Him out of a oneness of spirit. That is why whenever Our Lord talked about discipleship, He prefaced it with an IF - you do not need to unless you like. "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, let him give up his right to himself to Me." Our Lord is not talking of eternal positions, but of being of value to Himself in this order of things, that is why He sounds so stern (cf. Luke 14:26). Never interpret these words apart from the One who uttered them.

The Lord does not give me rules, He makes His standard very clear, and if my relationship to Him is that of love, I will do what He says without any hesitation. If I hesitate, it is because I love some one else in competition with Him, viz., myself. Jesus Christ will not help me to obey Him, I must obey Him; and when I do obey Him, I fulfill my spiritual destiny. My personal life may be crowded with small petty incidents, altogether unnoticeable and mean; but if I obey Jesus Christ in the haphazard circumstances, they become pinholes through which I see the face of God, and when I stand face to face with God I will discover that through my obedience thousands were blessed. When once God's Redemption comes to the point of obedience in a human soul, it always creates. If I obey Jesus Christ, the Redemption of God will rush through me to other lives, because behind the deed of obedience is the Reality of Almighty God.

John 14:15 (R.V.)

The choice to be a person of integrity – a whole person – is yours. Christ has done everything for us – we are complete / whole / in integrity in Him. What will you choose as you see this truth?

National Bible Bee Update

North Oak Community Church hosted a regional National Bible Bee contest on August 27th. The winner of our senior division, Laura Hedstrom from Oxford, Nebraska, qualified for the national competition in Nashville, Tennessee that took place Nov. 18-19. She placed 3rd in the national competition, receiving \$15,000, a bronze trophy, and, most importantly, a heart filled with a lifetime of God's word.

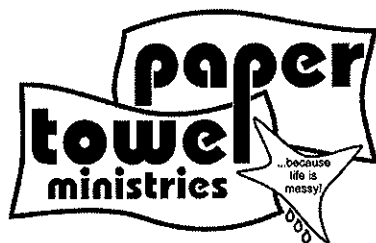
NOCC Dinner & Show 2011

Sunday, Dec. 18 @ 5:00pm NOCC Sanctuary

To Raise funds for NOCC Mission Trips/NOCC Family Christmas Program

It is the annual Soup Supper and the NOCC Family Christmas Program for one tremendously fun evening of food and entertainment!

- Tickets are available in the foyer or at the church offices
- Please bring tickets with you to the evening because they will let us know how many people are coming as well as serve as your bidder # for the silent auction.
- A freewill donation will be taken with all proceeds going for the NOCC mission trips.
- There will be a silent auction for gift baskets that will make perfect gifts for Christmas. If you would like to donate a basket please sign up at the table in the foyer.
- If God has given you a talent that you would like to share with the rest of the church family please sign up your act in the foyer or contact the church office.
- We need 37 Dozen Cinnamon rolls – Sign up in the gathering area!
- Also please bring your favorite Christmas snacks and desserts to share with everyone.



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Isaiah 61:1-4

This note is to introduce to you the newly formed Paper Towel Ministries. Paper Towel Ministries was founded in Hays, Kansas as a way to reach out to people because life is hard, people bruise and bleed, and God tells us to love His sheep.

What better way to love on others in a world filled with pain and defeat than with hope and encouragement?

In 1999 while living in Dallas TX our family experienced an extremely scary and lonely situation. As a firm believer, prayer was obvious, but God knew I needed more. We were lovingly placed on a prayer chain with a group of women from Kansas we had never heard of or met. They faithfully held us up in prayer and sent hand written cards of encouragement each week. I was always amazed, for their precious words of hope would arrive on my worst days and give me the strength needed for the task at hand. It was tangible proof that God was working.

Through that experience God planted a seed in my heart to pay forward the harvest of encouragement. Out of that seed Paper Towel Ministries has been formed and is now available to you and others you know to request prayers and/or cards of encouragement to be sent anywhere around the world.

All that is needed is the name and address of the person(s) in need of encouragement and cards will be sent periodically to encourage them in life's bumpy journey. Details of their situation are not needed but if you would like more personal words written in the card, an overview of their situation might be helpful. PTM can be contacted by e-mail or by phone, with web-site and Facebook pages coming soon.

Please use our confidential services, anytime you feel others would benefit, as another way to show the love of Jesus.

Hugs & Blessings,
 Michele Eiland
 Paper Towel Ministries Founder

FAMILY ALBUM

BIRTHS:

We rejoice with grandparents David & Debbie Breeden, Great-Grandfather Ormond Breeden and Great Aunt Karen Breeden on the birth of Liana Faith. She was born to Mark & Anne Breeden in Tulsa on August 2 weighing 9 lbs, 3 oz.

Randall, Leslie & Eli Buchanan rejoice in the birth of Isabella Grace. She was born on September 1 at HaysMed weighing 7 lbs, 12oz. and 20½ inches long.

Ross & Marti Stadalman are grateful for the safe and healthy arrival of Hadley Stella born September 1 to their son, Kyle and Bethany Stadalman.

We rejoice with grandparents Roger & Toni Lohrmeyer in the birth of Marley Hope Fowler. She was born to Jeramy & Carmen Fowler in Nebraska on September 20 at 3:37pm weighing 7 lb., 12 oz. and 21½ in. long. She has a 3 yr old brother, Gavin.

We rejoice with grandparents Ron & Pam Blau in the birth of Bailee Hoffman in October.

Baby Jonathan Levi arrived November 10 to the joy of Liam & Jenni Stringham. He was born at HaysMed at 11:35am weighing 8 lbs. 7 oz and 20 in. long.

Mike Stremel & Cindy Stremel—grandparents rejoice in newly adopted children, Lucy & Jude from Ethiopia, parents—David and Stacy Rogers

SYMPATHY:

Darrell Eiland's father, Kenneth, died September 13.

Leslie Buchanan's grandmother passed away in September.

We extend sympathy to Jessica Neher and family in the death of her uncle in October.

Our condolences to Jill Goertzen. Her uncle passed away in October.

The Elvin Family (David Breeden's cousins) were at the Reno Air races in box seats on September 16; parents, two adult sons, and one daughter-in-law. The Mom was killed; the Dad, sons, and daughter-in-law all lost their right legs.

JoLeen Cunningham's dad, Clyde Kaufman, died on October 19.

Julia Kuntz' grandfather, Virgil Hamm, passed away on October 29.

Don Chambers' dad passed away on October 29.

Eric Austin's brother in law, Bill Dryer passed away.

WEDDINGS:

We rejoice with Stefanie Stevens and Mario Lozoya in their wedding on October 15.



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Growing in Christ...

...Taking Him to Others

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Luke 14 Banquet SAVE THE DATE---April 21, 2012

"... When you have a banquet invite the lame, the crippled, the poor, the blind. . . Invite those who cannot repay you. . . Go out quickly and bring them in so that my house will be full!!!" Luke 14

We are excited and thrilled to be setting a date for a vision God has given to our "Count Us In" ministry team. This will be an all-NOCC outreach event inviting junior & senior high school students & adult individuals with developmental disabilities along with parents & care staff. A Luke 14 formal Banquet will be like a King's Banquet -- displaying the lavish love of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Why?

- To "celebrate," honor, and bring joy to ones that are often overlooked.
- To boost self-esteem.
- To be God's hand and feet to the community of Hays.
- To bring individual attention and care and blessing to each person God has uniquely created.
- To raise awareness in our church and community of the precious life God has given to all.
- To open opportunities to share Christ with friends, family, and staff that serve and care for many special needs adults in our community.

To work together as a church to accomplish a God-sized mission for HIM!!!

You will be hearing and seeing more about this banquet very soon! Excitement, joy, and a response of "oh, yes, let's do this -- let's do this right!!!" --came from the Servant Community leaders when the idea was presented this past week! We know you will be excited and jump at the opportunity we have before us, as a church family, to bless and give!!!

Please put April 21, 2012, on your NEW calendar and plan to be involved with the plans from the very beginning! See Debbie Breeden, Shelly Keller, Amy Webb, or Maddie Keller for more details!