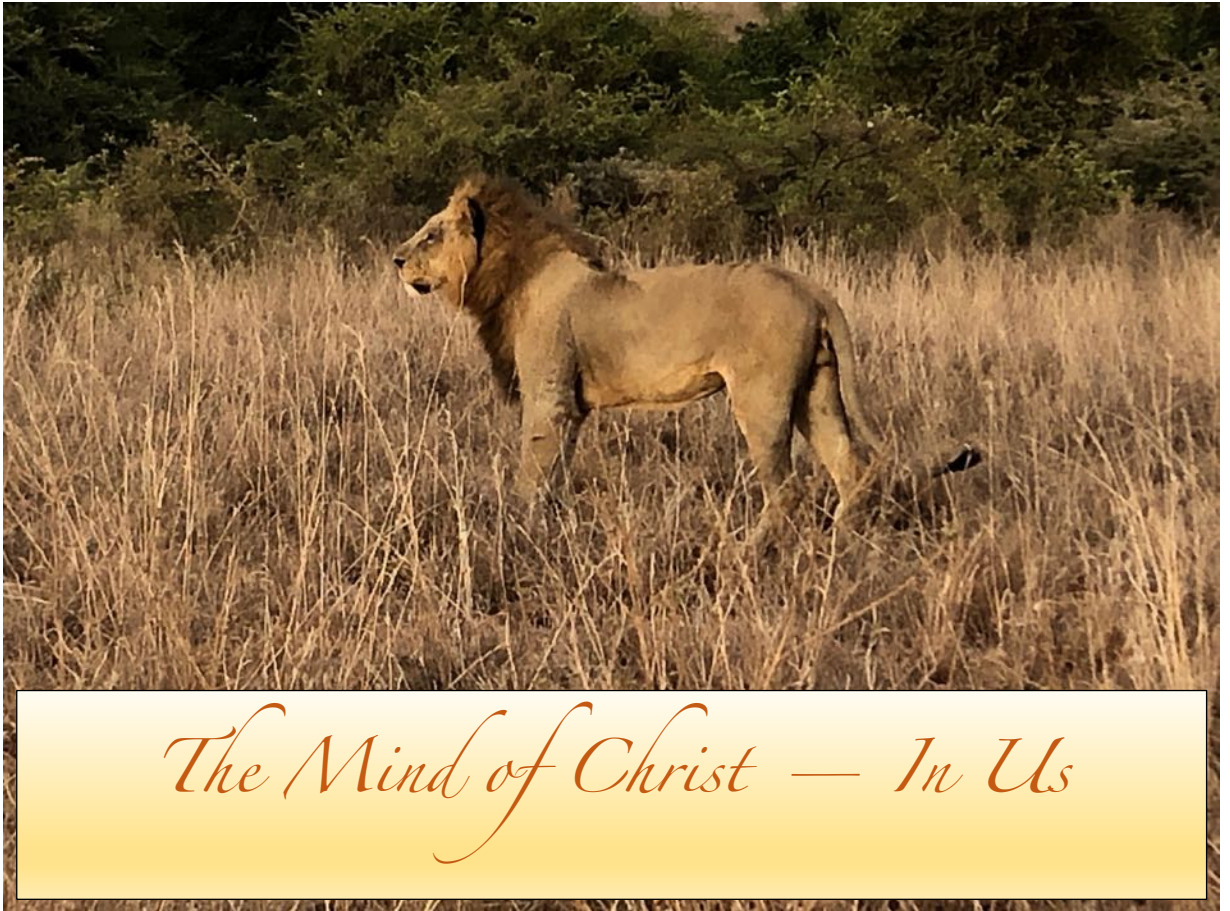


Life Together Christmas

2022



The Mind of Christ — In Us

Photo Credit: Lois E. Olena (Nairobi National Park, Nairobi, Kenya 2022)

LIFE TOGETHER 2022: THE MIND OF CHRIST—IN US

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Preface

Lois E. Olena

Once again, our dear friends, Drs. Stan and Ruth Burgess, founding members of the Life Together Sunday school class at Evangel Temple, have invited the class to present written offerings for a Christmas volume. With a heart for the intergenerational transmission of faith and the passing on of heritage and story, they generously offered to publish the contributions of Life Together class members in celebration of Christmas 2020, Christmas 2021, and now present publication of a 2022 volume in celebration of the Christmas season. This year we consider the theme of *the mind of Christ*, examining ways that His mind has found expression in our lives—both past and present—and with hope for the future.

Without a doubt, Life Together has served as a place of great joy, love, learning, encouragement, motivation, peace, and sharing—a haven and a safe place for expressing ideas, working through issues, and thinking together as Spirit-filled Christ followers. We all feel so grateful for the opportunity to love Jesus together in this place.

Life Together was begun decades ago by Stan and Ruth Burgess and has had the quality stewarding over the years of Michael Palmer, Jim Edwards, Marty Mittelstadt, and Doug Olena. The class has met in the main Evangel Temple church building, the “Corner House” across the street (July 2018), and “The Barn” (August 2019). On March 29, 2020, as COVID-19 raged, we had our first online Zoom gathering. After a brief return to the church facility in mid-2021, we returned again on Zoom before eventually returning to the church facility again in 2022. However, we have continued to offer Zoom as a way to extend the grace of our class to others not on site when possible.

Through all the changes and challenges, our commitment to one another and to walking together in Christ remains. With great thankfulness, we celebrate the relationships we hold so dear and offer these writings in celebration of Christmas 2022—rejoicing in *The Mind of Christ—In Us*.



Thank you, Stan and Ruth!

Theme Introduction

**“Let this mind be in you
that was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5)**

Stanley Milton Burgess

As a young child, I was taught to sing the simple chorus, “Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart, Lord Jesus.” It was a song that requested saving grace, a song purposed to begin the Christian life, a blessed song.

As my Christian life has grown, I have come to learn to add a second verse, namely, “Into my mind, into my mind, come into my mind, Lord Jesus.” This is a cry of my heart to know the wisdom of the Master, to know His divine purpose for my life. Apparently, this also was Paul the Apostle’s desire as he wrote to the church at Philippi.

Paul continues by identifying what he understood the mind of Jesus to be. Leaving the glory of heaven, Jesus of Nazareth took on himself the role of a bondservant, humbling himself, even accepting the ignomy (nakedness and shame) and agony of his death on the Cross.

What does that mean to us two millennia later? Clearly, it suggests that we must seek and then practice the indwelling mind of Jesus in everything we think and do. This is the opposite of being anti-intellectual. It means we must do everything our mind tells us to do that is in the plan of Almighty God. Certainly, we must avoid the wickedness that seeks to invade our person, that cannot be in His plan. It also means that we must fervently seek the mind of Christ Jesus, as revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. This results in our mind being taken over by the mind of Christ. This is a transformational step, available and needed in the life of each Christian. We make different decisions than we would otherwise make. Our very horizons are changed. We may not be called to be martyrs, but it certainly means that we sacrifice our wills and actions to His higher purposes. This means that we are taken over by One who will direct us, purpose our thoughts and deeds, empower us, fulfill His perfect will in us, and ultimately share his eternal presence with us.

Entering into the mind of Christ Jesus in no way replaces or diminishes the preliminary chorus, “Into my heart, into my heart. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.” Both are essential to successful Christian living when uttered sequentially. They also are essential to understand the most effective processes of our “learning to learn.”

So, today I sing to the Lord, “Into my mind, into my mind, come into my mind, Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay. Come into my mind, Lord Jesus!” I wish for you, dear reader, this same experience.

© 2022 Stanley Milton Burgess (Member, together with Ruth Vassar Burgess, Life Together Class from ca. 1967)

Heritage Pundits



Evangel Temple Sunday School Excellence (Phil 4)

James Edwards

Prophetic Preamble: Twila and I joined our Sunday school class because we hoped to dodge theological malapropisms (both words and concepts), typical of Christians who scorn education. In Richard Sheridan's play, *The Rivals*, Mrs. Malaprop is a bossy, arrogant character (though she is deaf to her characterization) who as a young character, Julia, explains, "shall treat me as long as she chooses, with her select words so ingeniously misapplied, without being mispronounced." An example is Mrs. M's effort to correct young Lydia: "Now don't attempt to extricate [stet] yourself from the matter; you know I have proof controvertible of it." Likewise, Huck Finn, reaching for a way to define the point of a sermon he heard with the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords, clarifies by citing the topic as being all about "preforordestination."



The KJV and NRSV present an identical translation of Paul's Philippians 4 hope: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." At least one aspect of the mind of Christ he foregrounds in his impossible command is that believers identify as being part of Christ's body by serving the needs of others. Christ gave up reputation and human life to shape a pattern for such service. This is Jesus' own version of the directive Paul urges: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Paul's wording implies that obedience to this effort must involve careful thought, employment of a believer's mind. Examples of serving others in our Sunday school class are the individuals who spent sacrificial years in formal education and teaching to be able to hint at the mind of Christ, careful to communicate conclusions—in soft lead pencil.

Twila and I, both, wanted to attempt this gospel principle. We were deeply invested in trying to expand the vision of Bible reading for immature youth who came to EU. The AG Fellowship generally viewed(s) the Bible as a source of nifty sayings about God, like "God is an ever present help in the time of trouble." The Bible is also, it was insisted by preachers, the chief source for stoking the rush of SIN-guilt. Whereas the Bible foregrounds divine redemption, multiple sermons we heard accented the *work of Satan*, lashing sermons detailing sin-results, offering pale, glancing testimony to the grace of God. Twila and I noticed that the Holy Spirit inspired writers to wrap sin-guilt in the Blood of the Lamb. Jesus came to love and save sinners. And, once that fact is fully appreciated, the Bible opens up, page after page, into the stunning, overpowering flow of the Revelation of a redeeming Savior. The late Dr. Gordon Fee once remarked that the Savior approaches stubborn hearts' doors, locked for shame, and splinters them open with his plunging cross.

When Ralph Kay founded Evangel Temple in the north half of the EU library, we were immediately attracted. I had been involved in pioneering churches in Lincoln, NE; Walnut Grove, MO; Denton, TX; Columbia, MO. One of the major reasons was that Ralph carried a copy of the Merritt Hughes edition of John Milton's poetry under his Bible to the pulpit. My mother taught me to include music in genuine worship, and soon I was singing in Jesse Peterson's carefully managed choir. He stood at

the entrance of the church choir loft to prevent any who had not attended rehearsal from singing that Sunday. Pentecostals have been and are notorious for sloppily singing un-theological words to un-music.

Another positive ET attraction was that Jack Blizzard built tables just right for little children for Ruth's primary Sunday school class. She brought hand-made pillows, on which our son, Craig, found a cushion for his expanding spirit. When he was three, I held him outside the door of the original barn-sanctuary and introduced him to Holy Communion, which we ate and drank together. He begged me each first Sunday not to leave him on one of Ruth's pillows at Communion time. Evangel Temple was not without its critics: an example is that certain fundamentalist, pharisaical Pentecostals spread abroad the warning that Pastor Kay favored a loaf of bread, instead of thumbnail crackers, at communion; another was that about the third time Craig and I both received communion in the barn/sanctuary foyer, I was assailed by a middle-aged theology-spy for allowing a three-year-old to sit at the Lord's Supper because he didn't *understand* its significance. I asked of this Pentecostal legalist, "Do *you*?"

Twila and I, early, attended an ET Sunday school class where people actually debated Scripture, rather than reading aloud the adult Sunday school quarterly. During that time, Twila perceived that the women coming to EU were beginning to swallow certain feminist heresies without the biblical tools to analyze their choices. Many also came drenched with the heresy that the Bible teaches something like complementarianism. As a mother in Israel, Twila was moved to develop an EU class on "The Role of the Woman in the Bible," which foregrounded gender egalitarianism. Near the beginning of her gender-theology maturation, she and I were asked to give a thumbnail presentation about biblical gender theology, to an earlier form of our Sunday school class. She presented, as a main point, the affirmation that neither Moses nor Jesus nor Paul made women second class, a practical outcome of complementarianism. Her main evidence was creation and Ephesians 5:22, which commands believers to be subject *one to another*. In this context, then, Paul could not mean by writing that man is the "head" of the woman that husbands are their wives' sole bosses, a practical outcome of complementarianism. She summarized recent commentators' scholarship on the Greek word translated "head" (Eph 5:22). During a question time, after summarizing her views for our Sunday school class, a woman reprimanded her for implying that the ordinary person needed scholars' help to understand Scripture, citing her background in Roman Catholicism, in which she affirmed that only priests were allowed to read official interpretations of Scripture to believers. I asked our critic if she read either Hebrew or NT Greek.

Twila's strength was that she taught biblical theology recognizing its narrative/poetic form (both the Bible and fiction of Charles Williams, G. K. Chesterton, and C. S. Lewis), arguing that such a hermeneutic leads to practical religion. For example, one session during her NT Survey, she made certain that her students—men *and* women—heard that men *and* women are created in the image of God. After class, a female, openly weeping, followed Twila to her office. She had been taught the heresy by her local pastor that only males are "made in the image of God" (that is, females are not human) so that females can approach God only through humans created with testicles. The young woman's question to Twila was, "Can it be true that I really am made in the image of God?" Hugging her and praying, Twila, with compassionate, scholarly love, disintegrated the male-umbrella-heresy and restored the woman's humanity, transforming her despair to tears of joy.

That general neglect and violation of sound hermeneutics made Twila and me appreciate the chance to attend a Sunday school class attended by men educated in Bible, together with thoughtful women. So, when there was a change in leadership in our Sunday school class, members were asked whether any of us were interested in participating in the leadership. I raised my hand quickly, fearing someone would take charge who would undermine the focus on serious discussion of the Bible. I realized that I had not the standing to teach the class but could organize the teaching so that discussion of Bible and serious theology would not be undermined.

September to May was fairly easy to schedule, to find teachers qualified to lead learning. One school year's outline scheduled members of the EU Bible Department to offer sessions on Paul's prison epistles. That's the year Dr. Marty Mittlestadt insisted on printing Philippians on a single sheet—to help us see the whole (rather than pieces to which sermons on Paul's prison letters were most often devoted). Sometimes, we were taught by a guest from outside the AG, like the time the Chair of the Religious Studies Department at Missouri State addressed issues raised by Source Theory. Dr. Jim Moyer started his first session by asking us to consider why the Genesis writer interrupts the Joseph story (Gen 37) by suddenly inserting the Judah-Tamar story (Gen 38). Dr. Moyer reminded me that teaching was his profession, and that he expected remuneration for his time with our class—a concept generally nonexistent in any Pentecostal book-of-conventions. The Pentecostal convention was that the whole or part of remuneration for teaching at a church or church college is the privilege of teaching in those venues.

Summers were more complicated to organize because of the variety of summer schedules. One of the successful patterns, perhaps, was to ask for times when qualified teachers would be in town, then ask individuals to give a few weeks' presentation on a topic special to them.

One Spring, it occurred to me that there are many respected AG leaders retired in Springfield, like two of J. R. Flower's sons, a number of influential missionaries, and former members of the AG hierarchy. I scheduled several to address two topics about the history of the AG: the Pentecostal theological principle that was important in their lives and the life practice important in their life as a Pentecostal leader. Most of the retired missionaries gave examples of their stump-speeches-in-churches-to-raise-money. David Flower actually respected my foci and described the significance of family prayers in the lives of Pentecostals. He described a time when, as a boy, he lived with his family on Pacific Street. His father (J. R. Flower who told an AG history class I attended that he participated in "every General Council" up to that date) was leading family devotions and answered the door when one of David's friends wanted him to play workup. Rev. Flower, truly a father in Israel, described their devotion time and invited the friend to return in an hour or, better, to join them.

One summer, Dr. Randy Tate and I presented on the structure and theology of Ezekiel. I described the structural design of the book, beginning with the book's ends (the glory of God and the description of the fantastic temple, a structure that defines all the sin-complaints Ezekiel narrates between the two glories). I suggested that this structure imitates the bookends of the Bible (Garden of Eden and Garden of New Jerusalem—human history defined by divine/redemptive perfection). Randy's overview of the purpose and theology of Ezekiel's prophecy was quite successful. A member of the class told me, categorically, that my presentation was completely opaque to him. Teach the class again, I did not; only organize.

The class was, for Twila and me, refuge from the fundamentalist hurly burly in our professorial lives. All efforts to follow Jesus's and Paul's teachings are patched with clouds. Yet, our teaching in a religious context filled us with astonishing joy. Both of us were called, professionally and spiritually, to open young minds to such important matters as biblical egalitarianism and the necessary value of accounting for the literary dimensions of the biblical text. Both topics, while vital to learning the mind of Christ, were new to most of our students, colleagues, and leaders, to some shockingly novel and brazenly new-fangled.

One of my students taught high school near Springfield following graduation. The student appeared in our Sunday school class one day, looking for a chance to tell me that my EU teaching "shocked" him. She had expected that she would not be assigned stories in which characters violated either the third or the seventh commandment. So, soon as I had the notice of my ill-treatment, the alum disappeared from ET. In an EU class, after reading a story which included the image of fornication, an older female student openly assailed me for the assignment, advising me that "I know everything I need to know about sin." After this information, she bolted to President Spence's office with my textbook, her proof of my attention to moral reality. It is not likely that she mentioned any of the biblical incidents, e.g., of incest (Noah), rape (Dinah), voluntary adultery (Judah's Tamar), nor prostitution (Gomer and Ezekiel 16 and 23). Probably she did not know enough about typical activity in Temples of Baal to bolster her reporting of evil.

Another of my students came from a pressurized oppression of a legalistic father who forbade her to wear jeans or dresses that were not black or brown. She studied in more than one of my classes and is now a leader in the institution where she teaches. Of course, though I had some influence, she had other powerful influences.

I am aware of five students who studied with me who have been or are officers in universities where they have developed into powerful proponents of leading with the mind of Christ (a little appreciated knowledge among most church leaders) and potent supporters of the dynamic of a Christian liberal arts education (not training).

The Sunday school class was a place where we could actually inquire about the mind of Christ. Dr. Bill Menzies defined "Pentecostal theology," the pursuit of the mind of Christ, for me. He held up his forefingers, saying one was *spiritual* and the other was *mental*. He then moved the two forefingers to support each other, equally. Likely Paul would not have been disappointed with Bill's visual. Twila and I added that the character of Christ is not as clear unless readers account for Bible writers' employment of literary conventions. For instance, that Ruth is *characterized* by over forty harvest images in chapter 2.

Ezekiel's *structure* includes a description, in the glorious Temple, of a spring beginning under the redemptive altar and ending in the Dead Sea where it transforms dead salt water into a fresh context for profuse life, a twin image of the fantastic New Jerusalem trees of life along the river of life whose source is the Throne of God. Monthly, eternally, they fruit—extravagant images of the mind of Christ.

³ Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

⁵ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

⁹ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

¹⁵ That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

¹⁶ Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

¹⁷ Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

¹⁸ For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

²⁰ For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

²² But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

²³ Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

²⁴ But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

²⁵ Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

²⁶ For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

²⁷ For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

²⁸ I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

²⁹ Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

³⁰ Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

Remembering Gary B. McGee

Stanley M. Burgess

One of the earliest leaders of the Life Together class at Evangel Temple, Springfield, Missouri, was Dr. Gary B. McGee. Gary was born in Canton, Ohio, the grandson of one of the converts of an Aimee Semple McPherson's campaign in that city in 1921. He graduated from Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri in 1967 and became a faculty member of Open Bible College, Des Moines, Iowa. He returned to Central Bible College in 1970 to teach.

He completed Master of Religious Studies degrees at both Concordia Theological Seminary (1971) and Missouri State University Religious Studies Department (1976), and a Ph.D. in Church History at St. Louis University in 1974. He then joined the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary faculty, serving there until he went to be with the Lord in December 2008.



Gary was my co-editor of the 1988 Zondervan *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. He also published several volumes on the Assemblies of God, including *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2012, 2014, and *The Gospel Shall Be Preached*. 2 Vols. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1986, 1989. He also edited a tome, *Initial Evidence*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991, examining the historic evidence for glossolalia through the centuries.

In thanks for his contribution to Pentecostal scholarship, the Society for Pentecostal Studies awarded Gary the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008 at Duke University.

His volume, *Miracles, Missions, & American Pentecostalism*. American Society of Missiology. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010, was published posthumously (and his wife, Alice, and daughter, Catherine, received the *Pneuma* Book of the Year Award on his behalf at the SPS annual meeting in 2011).



While Gary was totally loyal to his denomination, he also is remembered for his strong ecumenism. He was an early member of the Assemblies of God-Roman Catholic Dialogue, both in Springfield, Missouri and also in Italy and numerous other foreign lands where he ministered.

Gary was one of my closest friends. His integrity and character were exemplary. I will never forget our joint efforts on several of our publications, negotiated at a local pizza restaurant in Springfield. He suffered from cancer late in life. This resulted in a remarkable empathy toward those who had misfortune and suffering. He also was noted for his humor, his joy in his Lord Jesus, and is a fitting scholar to be membered in this booklet devoted to Christ in us, especially in our minds.

I am indebted to Darrin J. Rodgers for his excellent bio of Gary B. McGee, for much of the details in this remembrance.

Life Together

Marty Mittelstadt

Life Together. What might these two words reveal about LT@ET?

Life Together. A place to call home. Evelyn and I moved to Springfield in August of 2000. To settle our family, we committed to finding a church in two months. We attended ET on our first Sunday and were introduced to this class by Mike and Connie Palmer. We met Jim and Twila Edwards. In the following weeks, we visited a few other churches, but Life Together provided us the first links to life in a new city, a new country, and a new culture!



Life Together. We joined a Sunday school with a vision we could have never imagined. We had never participated in a local church Sunday school class with other professional theologians. We had never sat in a class filled with such an array of professional musicians, artists, psychologists, philosophers, nurses, scientists, businesspeople, and educators. Little did we know that Life Together would shape our families, our theology, our worldview, and our lives.

Life Together. We have studied books of the Bible. We've marched through Genesis, Judges, 1 & 2 Kings, Ruth, Amos, Philippians, Mark, John, Acts, Romans, and 1 Corinthians to name a few. We've engaged in general series on the life of Jesus and the life of Paul. Through our shared reading and study, the Scriptures place us before Jesus the Word of God.

Life Together. "All truth is God's truth, no matter where it is found." We study Scripture through a large lens. Studies on art, poetry, literature, and music by facilitators with significant expertise stretch and strengthen our faith. Summer series focused upon on our personal stories, a favorite writer or artist often serve as a time for storied reflection. We are co-learners and co-teachers. We cherish our unique insights, passions, and experience.

Life Together. We are voracious readers. Together we have studied Richard Beck's *Unclean*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, Stanley Burgess' *Christian Peoples of the Spirit*, Peter Enns' *The Sin of Certainty*, Soren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and Amos Yong's *Hospitality*, to name a few.

Life Together. We wrestle with hard and timely topics. We are committed to our faith, but we have so much to learn. Whatever the topic—hospitality, racism, Native American spirituality, creation care, reception history, violence against women, scientific origins, emergence theory, or vocation, we strive to better understand ourselves, to live with integrity, and to translate our learning for our respective communities. Many of us have participated in the local and international Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogues—some from the very beginning of this vital relationship.

Life Together. Like Jesus, we love to eat. Food is more than nutrition. The table provides a place for joy, laughter, tears, humor, vulnerability, grief, prayer, and more. Whether progressive dinners, birthday

parties, seasonal festivities, Panera, or PJs and coffee during the pandemic—there's no excuse not to break bread. We share food during times of hardship. We are a family.

Life Together. We *are* family. Some of us find our homes in Springfield and never leave. Some are transients. We welcome students; they bless us, and we encourage them on their path. Some have gone ahead of us. For those who live far away from home, Life Together provides a place of belonging, a home away from home.

Life Together. We seek Jesus. We take the gospel to our homes. We raise our families together. We live the gospel in our workplaces with a dedicated passion for our respective communities. We live the gospel in Springfield and take the gospel around the world.

We embody Life Together.

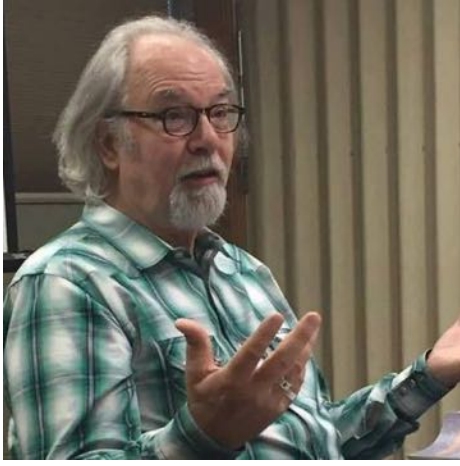
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Following the departure of Jim Edwards, Doug Olena and I accepted the responsibility to lead this group. What a journey we are on. I feel grateful for the opportunity and honored to do so.



Life Together Reflections

Doug Olena



At the beginning when Lois and I joined ET, we aimed at a Sunday School class that might promise both openness to public theology as defined by a fearless approach to asking questions and the possibility of offering responses that might resolve our Christian experience for the modern day. Devoted to the Scriptures well interpreted with all the caveats of interpretative pitfalls, we joined the Life Together Sunday school class. As with any new venture, I approached the class with some caution, but since many of my colleagues were also attending the class, I relaxed. Some of us were also participants in the Society for Pentecostal Studies, so some of my social worries drifted away.

It wasn't long before Lois and I were firmly engaged in the class, and we were learning the culture of Evangel Temple as well. Jim Edwards was the leader of the class in 2007 when we joined, and he brought an interesting selection of topics and speakers. Occasionally Jim would bring something of his lifelong obsession, William Shakespeare. We would reflect on the issues brought up in terms of the Bible and culture. Jim was well versed in Shakespeare's culture, so we had a point of reflection from the history of our culture brought into the present.

My observations do not encompass all the topics we covered or the discussions we had in this era. That is not where I concentrate. My interests lie in the slow movement of my character toward Christ. At this time, I was often attending to a variety of social issues that the evangelical crowd had taken positions about that were not only contradictory to justice, but to the Spirit of Christ. Modern Christian culture had taken positions that seemed in violent contradiction to the sense of the Gospels, an oversimplified characterization of the Christian life more concerned with law keeping than with the value of life it purported to support. I was hunting for a much more nuanced sensibility, and the Life Together class moved in that direction.

Dates and times are all in the fuzzy past to me. If you want to know what happened, I won't be able to tell you. What I have is a memory of the excellent discussions we had, interesting topics, and since Jim Edwards passed the leadership on to me and Marty, I kept an incomplete record of what we did on <https://ltet.net>. Lois, however, will be able to give dates and times to many of the events, since that is how her mind works. She catalogs and collects the wide variety of events in a mental bookshelf that only occasionally requires checking with a calendar or an entry in her journal. I am perfectly amazed at her powers, but I can only give an elementary account of any of those events.

Our class has revolved around three themes, and lately a fourth. The first theme is an abiding interest in the biblical record and what it says for us today, for the ancient Church, and the history of Church belief and activity. We have had a wide diversity in biblical topics, usually centered around a singular

book, and less often around a set of questions about practical theology. We have had scholars from Evangel Temple and elsewhere to open the books that are most familiar to them.

The second theme is discussion around a topic of interest for the Church in general and our local group second. So, we have discussed ancient historical documents like the *Didache*, or with Romy Hristova the interesting history of the Cathars and Bogomils and how their history intersects with European-Christian history with which many of us are already familiar. We have also invited John Schmaltzbauer to flesh out the history of Southern Missouri's and the local region's interaction with Christianity.

The third theme arises normally during the summers where we discuss our personal interactions with the Scriptures, figures in the Scriptures like Jesus and Paul, and any testimonies of our lives in Christ, the books we have read and written, and finally—the fourth theme, social justice issues. We began this fourth theme at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and following the murder of George Floyd. We discussed the political atmosphere around the sin of racism and its many proponents, what a biblical response might be, and what we should do. We also discussed the issues women face with much of traditional patriarchal Christian behavior in a variety of denominational settings in the US.

Happily, we have been able to engage both the class members who have left for other fields, and experts in a wide variety of disciplines. This has added an essential richness to our discussions that make our class a wonderful place for growing in Christ. We, the class, are deeply grateful to God for this opportunity provided by Evangel Temple.



Poetic Expressions



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Two Meditations upon the Speaking Creation

Nathan Nelson

Bear Ruins Choir

For the Chief Ironist. A Meditation.

Even the old-timers have no idea why
the adolescent black bear was standing in the loft
that Thursday morning,
strips of velvet Advent banner hanging
round her neck like a sacerdotal vestment,
the Doxology pealing over and over
from the tripped carillon,
sober St. Swithun's pews kneeling in dazed devotion
at her feet.

She had torn Hope from the wall and left it
twisted round the director's podium
as if (said wits in town) to signify and bless
that good man's weekly battle against entropy.

Down the street, a fundamentalist preacher, hastily
changing his church's signboard in light of events,
advanced the theory that the youngster was a sign
of God's fed-up-to-here wrath against liturgists:

**This Sunday at 10:30 a.m.: Hosea 13:8 (KJV):
“Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them
and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them;
a wild animal will tear them apart.”**

Thus, with a stern thrust from the Authorized Version,
commenced a novel entertainment for a sleepy town,
for the pastor at St. Francis's, though a peaceable man,
woke to feel the green withes about him
and rose to riposte:

Sunday Worship, 11:00 a.m.: Proverbs 17:12 (RSV):
“Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs,
rather than a fool in his folly.”

And this swordplay went on
past Advent and the Holy Day into Epiphany,
while some few of both persuasions
questioned the wisdom of it all. None, though,
could doubt its fine utility: attendance soared,
both champions straining by pulpit and placard
to win the Worship Wars.

Only the quiet sacristan had noticed, weeks before,
that the Thursday celebrant wore Peace around its neck
when the tranquilizer dart struck through the purple
and laid her down among exuberant pages
of “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” rampant
copies of Psalm 148 for responsive reading,
and the wild pink splendor of satin Joy.

This poem uses creative license to expand upon events reported in a news article about an adolescent bear's breaking into a New England church and being captured by means of tranquilizer dart in the choir loft.

Talus: Tellus Nova

Today I cannot see this talus and
This scree as mournful symbols of the Fall.

Oh, fallen, yes, and tumbled, ground, and washed:
But ranged in casual tension, now today
They seem tableaux of some redemption
On the way. At bottom, still, the Word.

These slump blocks, creeping down between the trees,
These alders bowing in their time-worn wake,
Have all the subtle tint of breaking dawn
Against long night. Against the night, the Word.

The night wind finds its rhythm in the trees;
Tectonic plates in basso friction groan
Below the coastal grasses, dunes, and pines
Along the fault, a note of grace: the Word.

- Nathan Nelson

**The Man with the Bent Form on the Metro, Not Far from
Notre Dame Cathedral**

Creative Nonfiction Written in Paris, Summer 2022

LaDonna Friesen

Perhaps he had strayed from his sanctuary, limping onto the train, his hand uncurling for kindness. His body slanted between two Metro chairs like Quasimodo between gargoyles. His trunk bent like a tree curved over time by wind; it couldn't straighten. One knee turned in, one hip out, his head turtled in and out of his hunched back. A spinal injury perhaps. His twisted body thrust one hip forward and then scuffed the other along. Sway, pull, sway, pull. From a long way off, I saw him tilting up the aisle, moaning "Benissez-vous moi?" or "Bless me?" It went out of him like a long-sounding horn, the end crying the last breath of the note with a final blast cut off because the player had run out of air. "Benissez-vous moi?" "Benissez-vous moi?" In his fingers was a paper cup, empty, and those around him turned their heads away. "Benissez-vous moi?" Is there no Esmerelda who will notice this hunchback not far from his cathedral? Quasimodo lamented that he was neither human nor beast, too much a monster to be a man, too human to be a goat. He was in the between, deformed and beautiful, terrifying and pitied. Did this moaning man on the Metro lament the same? If he had been a crippled dog, would others have patted his head, shared their lunch?

"Benissez-vous moi?" he cried, swaying from one car to the next. And are we the monsters and you the human? Are we too far from the sanctuary to give kindness like the gypsy in Hugo's story? Are we, grasping train poles for balance, too straight to bend with you, dear moaning man? Are we gargoyles, stiffened to stone, or can we still fold our hands toward your heart and touch your spirit with ours? For I suspect your moan is weeping for love more than coins, your cup is thirsty for café shared with a warm soul. As Victor Hugo's narrator said, "Love is like a tree: it grows by itself, roots itself deeply in our being and continues to flourish over a heart in ruin." How long until we are all trees?

Family

Scott Vassar Burgess

The wisdom wrinkles on the face of my grandfather.

The girl-like chuckle of my aging grandmother.

The easy living thought of my uncle Ted.

The exact opposite of my uncle Robert.

The outspoken lifestyle of Helen my aunt.

And the warm friendliness of my other, Glenda.

The numerous characteristics of my few cousins.

The serious professor model figure of my dad.

The compassion and understanding of my mother.

The maturing bearded face of my brother Brad.

The learning process revealed in Matt my brother.

The always serious side of Scott my other.

The innocent understanding of Mandy my sister.

The goofy, hyper actions of Davey the youngest.

And there is me!!!!

I am all of these people together.

I am what makes them tick.

I am their inner souls.

I am the strength that lets differences be worked out.

I am the common bond between all these different people.

I am the Family!!!!!!

© 1988. Scott is now a robotic surgeon in Williamsburg, Virginia.

“Call Me Your Friend!”

Stanley Milton Burgess

I have been a Christian since early childhood, having given myself to Jesus at the age of five. For eighty years I have attempted to live a life pleasing to Him. I was a child of missionary parents, and so I committed my future, and my eternal future to Him. I married a godly, kind, and faithful wife, Ruth Vassar Burgess, with whom we raised five children, and now are blessed with ten grandchildren—all committed Christians. I sang the grand old hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, and I always felt close to the One who laid down His life for me.

But we live in a wicked world, where falsehood has become acceptable, now even normative. Wars, and rumors of wars, alternative non-realities fill the airwaves, and preachers call new converts to the Christian faith, more based on deliverance from a vengeful God than on an all-encompassing grace from a loving, life-giving Savior. Fear fills the lives of so many believers, wondering if they will lose their salvation by what seems to be virtually inevitable mis-stepping. Perhaps to protect their flocks, so many ministers fill the hearts of their parishioners with a vision of a fragile eternal destiny. This is so prevalent that many now cling to a notion of a purgatorial cleansing before heaven can be our home.

A few years ago, God began to work on me, insisting that, while I call Him “Lord,” “Savior,” “Sanctifier,” “Healer,” and “Soon-coming King” that I must also call Him, “Friend.” I must confess that I did not respond immediately to this Divine call. I had been trained so long to recognize the so-called Divine Judge (often with quotes from the Old Testament), that it took several Divine impressions to recognize that Jesus really did want me to call him “my friend.”

I began to respond to my Lord, attempting to rise from the dregs of an “eternal insecurity” to the level of spiritual intimacy to which he called me. The words of the old hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” ran through my mind with a deeper meaning:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear.
May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright unclouded there will be no need for prayer
Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our portion there.

Lyrics by Joseph M. Scrivan

Music by Charles Crozat Converse 1855

I now dedicate this brief article to my Divine friend. I trust that those who read may experience the same joy and blessing during this Christmas season. After all, we celebrate the coming of the One who was to give His life for His friends!



1947

Ruth Vassar Burgess

Constant Change Was My Everyday Experience

Time segments affect one's life in various ways. We are influenced by cross-cultural narratives set in various natural settings and domains. The year 1947 brought physical and spiritual hope. Uncle Ben and Uncle Doty returned from the German front, one to find a broken home, while the other bore life-long scars. Rev. Ted Vassar, the third son, and his wife, Rev. Estelle Barnett, and their three children (Ruth, Teddy, Helen) were touring on what was known as "God's deputational work." They believed it was God's will for them to return to Junnar, India to lead the Junnar Boy's Orphanage. Their term would extend from 1947 to 1952. Peace over their decision was not evenly felt among the extended family members. It must not be forgotten that India was in a civil war from 600 years of British Commonwealth rule.

One evening the seven-year-old girl listened intensely as her Texas grandparents begged Ted and Estelle to leave Ruth with them while the couple and their two younger children (Teddy and Helen) sailed back to India. Seven-year-old Ruth was to be placed in an English boarding school several days away from her parents. This was to be a five-year missionary term, taking care of a boy's orphanage in Bombay Presidency. During their first term in India, their elder son (Bobby Jo), had died two months and one day after the young family arrived in Poona, India.



Ruth Vassar, 1947

The families struggled with God's will as different members perceived it.

Frequently this brought differences between cross-cultural practices, but peace was thought to be coming or forthcoming. Peacemaking would have to come through letters, due to the lack of communication available then. Surely, the world around us would be unsettling with challenges, but it was believed that all things were possible if one followed God's will. Using integrity and prayers, one would seek to overcome differences in order to seek reconciliation among life's venues.

Away to India, March 7, 1947, on the *SS Marine Adder*

The Vassar family boarded the decommissioned World II marine ship in San Francisco, California. Ted's large cabin for four men was on the second deck. Estelle and her three

children were assigned to a sixteen-person lodging next to the hold, which was covered by a large grey canvas tarp. There was no air conditioning or port holes. Hot air blew from the hold daily. We were told not to go near the next-door cabin.

On one auspicious evening, the *Marine Adder* began to rock sideways. Cries of fear and anguish filled the stale air. Plates, food, and eating utensils moved and began sliding to the floor. Ted guided Estelle and the two younger children to their steaming, swaying abode. Then he motioned for Ruth to follow him up to the second deck. There he impressed a transcendent value in my mind. “Ruth, storms will come to you in life that you do not cause. But you can handle your attitudes to those storms.” His words of wisdom were put to test in 1947.

A fortnight later the ship’s atmosphere changed. People were wearing cleaner clothes and speaking in muted tones. Mother told a *Tom, Dick, and Harry* story that put Teddy and Helen to sleep. She told me to stay with them until she returned. Ugh. Why was I left babysitting while there had to be some significant action on the ship elsewhere?

When things quieted down, I climbed the back stairs to the second deck. There it was!

A white-wrapped corpse was situated on a slide faced toward the ocean, his burial site. Later we learned the man had died from smallpox, and his cabin was next to the women’s rest chamber.



Location: Kodaikanal, South India; **Setting:** Front, white, good gate to Highclerc Boarding School; **Date:** Spring 1947; **Students:** 3rd, 4th, maybe one 6th grader; **Adult:** Mrs. Bernice Burgess, mother of Stanley M. Burgess, standing to her right side

Thirty-four days later from the docks in Madras, Rev. Ed Davis welcomed the weary *SS Marine Adder* Vassar family. He introduced them to an alternative boarding school in the Palni Hills for Ruth. Highclerc, with an American curriculum, was a boarding school in Kodaikanal, further to the south. Ed and Helen Davis had already enrolled their daughter, Esther. They preferred the American rather than the British curricular alternative in Coonoor. This would make it easier for the children when they returned to the United States.

Junnar

The 113-year-old Junnar Mission bungalow was to become our home. On the first rainy season, Estelle struggled with ninety-nine holes in the roof, lizards occupying the walls, and rats running around open spaces between walls and ceilings. Scorpions and mosquitoes had taken residence under our mosquito nets.

Premanund Wankerdey, our cook, was missing one evening. After early evening devotions, we became worried about his whereabouts. After an hour, a pale-faced and shaking Mr. Wankerdey shuffled into the oil lamp lit dining room. No, he did not bring food. Instead, he told of seeing a wag (cheetah) beside the kitchen steps. He had run and boarded up his family's cabin.

Daddy Vassar, as the orphans called him, sprang into action. In the State of Maharashtra, if one wanted to exterminate a cheetah, you used trickery. A young kid (goat) with a loud cry was tied to a banyan tree where it would cry for its mother. With his gun the hunter would climb the tree and wait for a cheetah to come and to eat the young goat. The sacrificial kid's bleating was heard through the night.

Within a month, Ted and Ruth were waiting on the Poona railway station headed to Ruth's boarding school in Kodaikanal, South India. As the Decan Queen train pulled to a screeching halt, cinders and grey smoke floated over the railway station. We changed trains in Madras (now Chennai). At the crowded train station, a variety of maladies, smells, and cries for help filled the air. I asked my Dad for pice or annas, or even rupees to help these helpless Indians. There were different types of leprosy, and I was not to touch the sores, discolored skin, or marred limbs. Then my eyes saw a group who were involved in therapy for themselves. Their tools consisted of thin sticks near open holes in their legs. Worms had stuck out their heads and upper bodies which the person wrapped the wiggling worms around the sticks. Dad said if the worm's body broke it would slither back inside one's body and then continue to grow again.

During the final year of the British Raj (1947) refreshments could be purchased from a nourishment company. The Spencer servers were impeccably clean in their white uniforms. Their tea services were served in gold and white china. Our server spoke British English with a Maharastrian accent. Reflecting on why we had left our comfortable lone star state of Texas, I began to feel guilty that I had not "led anyone to the Lord." Now this Spencer man looked like the type of man Jesus would like. I turned to my father. "Dad, I want you to watch me to see if I do it right."

The Spencer man prayed a sinner's prayer. Then BANG! Brakes quelled. The railway car moved from side to side. A deathly quiet followed. Daddy and the Spencer man opened the metal sliding door. Daddy admonished me in a stern voice, "Don't move, Ruth."

Life had become too cumbersome for a stone cutter bai. The railway wheels had severed her neck. Her thin body quivered no more. Guilt remained with me for years. "Had our railway car been the one that cut her neck?"

From seven to thirteen years children are thought to develop societal codes for living. These formative years were the ones I largely spent high in the eucalyptus and pine-covered mountains. We represented multiple cultures, but frequently felt lonely. We learned from one another life lessons that impacted family, friends, and foes.

P.S. Matchmaking or Destiny?

All of the parents of two young children who were involved in a devotional meeting at Arcotia Lodge in Kodaikanal have long passed away, and it is too late to ask them the question posed above. It clearly was a significant moment (January 1948) when eight-year-old Ruth Lenora Vassar first met and subsequently visited with ten-year-old Stanley Milton Burgess. Certainly, it was the birth of a relationship that eventually brought them together in 1959, to the marriage altar in Abilene, Texas. This became a long-lasting marriage, now (2022) in its 63rd year. Ruth's natural kindness won the heart of lonely and home-bound Stan, and their marital relationship eventually produced five exceptional children, leading to ten equally exceptional grandchildren. Was this union an example of matchmaking or of destiny fulfilled?

*External
Venues of
“The Mind of
Christ—in Us”*



Welcoming Refugees—a No-Brainer

Lois E. Olena

At the end of 2021, the UN Refugee Agency reported 89.3 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced people, 4.6 asylum seekers, and 4.4 million Venezuelans displaced abroad.¹ As of May 2021, the number of displaced persons had reached 100 million,² thanks to Putin's attack on Ukraine and other ongoing crises around the world. Food and climate crises continue to wreak havoc on nations, often with the most vulnerable populations needing to flee their homes. Türkiye holds the designation of hosting "3.8 million refugees within its borders ... the largest number of refugees"³ globally. This figure is "followed by Colombia, with 1.8 million (including Venezuelan nationals), Uganda and Pakistan (1.5 million each) and Germany (1.3 million)."⁴

And then there is Springfield, Missouri.

In February of 2017, my friend Erica Huinda invited me to a meeting where folks were talking about cultivating a welcoming community for refugees in Springfield. That was the beginning of now over five-and-a-half years of having the privilege to welcome new neighbors from around the world to our city. My husband, Doug, and I have welcomed friends from the Congo, Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Somalia, Burma, Ukraine, and Afghanistan, and thanks to generous friends around us we have had the opportunity to help smooth their journey in various ways.



Here in the heart of the Ozarks, we have had the privilege of building community by walking with refugee friends through a process of arrival, adjustment, and advancement; coordinating with local resources to help provide needs; navigating various challenges; and celebrating wins! Many friends we first met in 2017 now have become citizens, purchased homes, gotten better jobs, married, had children, graduated, and are doing great with their English! Many are growing strong in the Lord in area churches. Others continue to experience the love of Christian neighbors that they had not known before.

Imagine two scenarios: (1) Your parents and grandparents flee war in the Congo, and you are born and raised in a refugee camp in Tanzania. Finally, after twenty years, your application to come to the United States is approved, and you come to live in Springfield, Missouri and start a new life. (2) You are thirty years old. All you have known is war and more war; you even helped the U.S. Army fight the enemy in that war. One day the Taliban takes over your country

¹ "Global Trends Report 2021," UNHCR, accessed November 5, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021>.

² "More Than 100 Million Now Forcibly Displaced: UNHCR Report," United Nations, accessed November 5, 2022, https://news.un.org/story/2022/06/1120542?gclid=Cj0KCQjwk5ibBhDqARIsACzmGLS6scCbhz58f1yx_RpE5CKC6Aw3qs6jrPVd_7YXC68qxxznHE9bPD8aApICEALw_wcB.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

within days, and you and your family of six must leave all they've ever known and flee for your lives. You land in Virginia for several weeks, living on a military base, then one day you fly into the Springfield Airport and are met by fifteen smiling faces. Either way, Springfield is not home—*not yet*. You face weeks, months, and years of adjusting to cultural differences, language differences, needs related to housing, employment, health, education, transportation, technology, personal belongings, missing your family back home, struggling to understand the political issues of the world where you just landed, and on and on and on.



Yard Project Day!



What's the bottom line? Welcoming refugees is a no-brainer. In other words, as Paul says, we *have* the mind of Christ. We don't have to look for it. It's right here, within our redeemed bodies. We need only use it. We need only consider the teaching of Jesus. We don't have to think twice about being hospitable to strangers. Why? Because God himself welcomed us. He brings us into His family. He sets the table for us. He makes a place for us in His family. He calls us His children. He makes a seat for us next to Jesus our brother. So we can cultivate attitudes of welcome, of kindness, and—as God enables us—to share in whatever resources we can.

The mind of Christ, communicated clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, says, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12, NIV). The mind of Christ is echoed in His words that instruct us to do what we do for others as if we were serving Christ himself (Matt 25:40). His words also remind us not perform acts of kindness for the needy to be seen by others (Matt 6:1). His mind is there. His voice is there. We need only look, listen, and then act accordingly.

I have often thought, if I had five minutes to pack one bag and leave the home where I was born and raised for another country halfway around the world to a country where I did not know the language or have any friends or family, how would I feel? What would I hope for on the other end of that trauma?

I would hope for a Spirit-filled believer saved by grace, who has experienced the love and welcome of God the Father, who would then welcome me and make a place for me in their heart and at their table.

What is in the Name?

Rumyana Hristova

The city I was born in bears the name of Sofia, which means “wisdom” (Koinē Greek: σοφία, *sophía*). Traditionally the city has always celebrated its holiday on September 17, which, according to the Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendar, is the Feast Day of Saint Sophia the Martyr and her three daughters: Faith, Hope, and Charity.



St. Sophia Church, Sofia, Bulgaria, 4th century A.D. Source: Flickr

For such a long time, we, the citizens of Sofia, have uncritically accepted that the date designated by the government is indeed the holiday of the city, although we have also been familiar with the fact that our city was named after the Church of Saint Sophia, one of the oldest preserved Christian churches on the Balkan

peninsula, dated to the first quarter of the fourth century A.D. The logical assumption for the non-specialists would be that the church was probably named after the martyr.

However, if we do a more in-depth investigation, we will discover that the name of the church owes its origin to ... Constantine the Great. In 316 A.D. he had a dream in which he was told to build a city in the eastern part of the Roman Empire (the future Constantinople) and to “leave a mark” there. This “mark” refers to Constantine’s idea to build three churches named: God’s Wisdom, God’s Peace, and God’s Power, a project to be accomplished by his sons. The first church was named “Saint Sophia” (the present-day Hagia Sophia or Holy Wisdom church), which was also the name given to a small cemetery church built not far from the fortress wall of Roman Serdica (present-day Sofia) soon after the *Edict of Milan* was issued by Constantine in 313 A.D.

By tracing the Christian heritage of the word “sophia,” we find that in the Old Testament “Wisdom” (the Divine wisdom) is personified as a female figure (Prov 1-9), whereas in the New Testament it is used with reference to Christ as “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24); in other words, Christ is the incarnation of the Divine or Holy Wisdom. Therefore, when the city of Serdica, already within the boundaries of the Second Bulgarian Empire, was renamed Sofia in 1376 A.D., it took the name of the Church, which was named after Christ the Lord.

During the reign of Constantine, Serdica was the capital of the Roman province of Dacia Mediterranea and was known to be his favorite city. Constantine would often exclaim, “Serdica is my Rome!” He was not the only emperor who favored Serdica. His immediate predecessor

the Emperor Galerius called the city “glorious and noble” (*civitas ampla et nobilis*). Furthermore, this is the city where Galerius issued his *Edict of Serdica*, also known as *Edict of Toleration* on April 30, 311 A.D. by means of which he granted Christianity the status of legal religion (*religio licita*).

Why of all the other cities in the Roman Empire did the Emperor Galerius choose Serdica to be the place associated with this historic Edict? It was probably not only because Galerius was born in Serdica and ruled the Empire from there. There is a certain historical logic for that choice considering that Serdica had a sizeable Christian community as early as the late first century A.D. The leader of that community was Clement, a “fellow-



Trilingual (Latin, Bulgarian, Greek) plaque with the Edict in front of the St. Sofia Church, Sofia, Bulgaria. Source: Wikimedia

laborer” of Paul (Phil 4:3), a Bishop of Serdica, who later became a Bishop of Rome. The existence of such a community has been corroborated by the archeological excavations of the foundations of five churches dated to the early Christian period in the present center of Sofia. *The Edict of Toleration de facto* made Serdica/Sofia the world’s first Christian capital.

Apparently, Christ, the Wisdom of God, has been interwoven into the fabric of Sofia in an ineffable way. If the goal of the government was to obscure this fact by designating the Saint Sophia Martyr’s Day to be the capital’s holiday, in practice, this has only magnified Christ’s image and model in the cultural memory of the city. Sophia and her daughters exhibited Christ-like virtues, which everyone can continuously strive to attain and master.

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Zoom Series with Indian Pastors-in-Training

Stanley Milton Burgess and Doug Olena

Stan's Reflections:

During the recent world-wide pandemic (COVID-19), Christians in the west Indian state of Gujarat lost over 120 pastors/priests/leaders. Because this is primarily a rural area of the subcontinent, potential replacements who needed preparatory seminary training did not have finances to engage such emergency services. Because the pandemic decimated Christians of all denominations, it was necessary to find an alternate source—this time from the United States—because of the emergence of Zoom technology, a top video conferencing system used worldwide at present.

I received a call from Reverend Henry Christian, a long-time friend of our family during our trips to our birth-land of India, asking for assistance. He represented many of his Christian friends from a wide range of Protestant and Catholic groups, who needed preparatory training. My dear wife of sixty-two years, Dr. Ruth Vassar Burgess, and I decided to attempt to fill some of this gap. Henry Christian agreed to be the translator from English into Gujarati for all of the Zoom and taped sessions. Missouri State University, where Ruth and I taught for thirty years, provided their facilities for taping, and we used our home computer and cell phones for the Zoom sessions.

A special thanks must go out to our dear friend, Dr. Doug Olena, a tech wizard, and long-time Christian educator, who made the Zoom sessions possible. He also was able to communicate with Indian participants when issues or problems arose. In addition, Doug placed the series on a webpage (bptrain.in) for Basic Pastoral Training in India. The Zoom series would not have been possible without his help and constant encouragement.

Because the series was intended to benefit a wide variety of potential Christian pastors-in-training, we employed a curriculum appropriate to all Christian audiences. This included cognitive strategies, with multiple perspectives employed, commonalities emphasized, and mutual appreciation for Christian brotherhood and sisterhood.

The first two sessions identified a long list of **divine blessings** that affect all of us as Christians, beginning with life, both in the now and in the blessed future after earthly demise. In essence, these sessions provided arguments for why we would want to be Christians.

Four sessions of **Indian church history** followed.

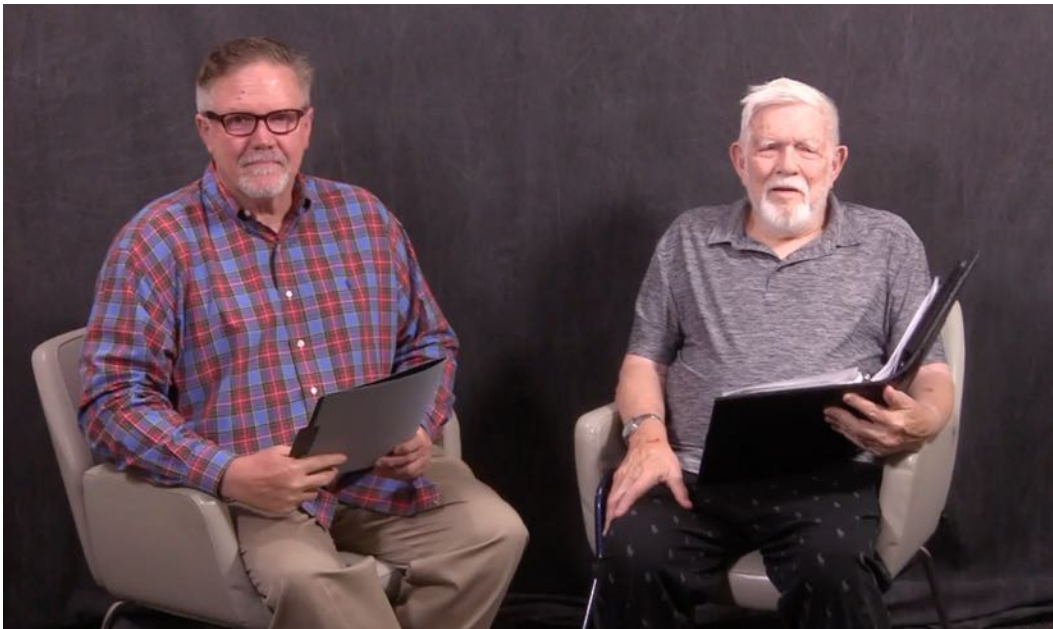
- The first session dealt with Christianity and Hebrew Scriptures.
- The second session studied the early church in India, beginning with the famous stories of first-century C.E. Apostle Thomas, who came to India in the mid-century and was martyred in Madras (Chennai).

- The third session treated Christian faith in India and basic theological attitudes.
- Finally, we studied Christian thought in the Middle Ages in India. For two of these sessions, we were assisted by our eldest son, John Bradley Burgess, who traveled in from his home in California.

Then, Dr. Ruth presented her program on *Shantistan: Enabling a Land of Peace* (“shanti” is ancient Sanskrit for “peace” and “stan” for “land”). This comprehensive program provides thirteen recommended steps for anyone seeking inner peace, couples needing marital help, other family conflicts, economic and political conflicts, religious rivalries, and, of course, international disputes.

The final session dealt with “**end times.**” Here we discussed a variety of interpretations possible for apocalyptic literature, such as the books of Daniel and John’s Revelation.

At the end of all nine sessions, it was our insistence that each Indian pastor-in-training become a trainer-of-trainers, by sharing our materials with the next Christian generation.



The following pages contain the topics from the first two sessions.

DIVINE PROVISIONS **FOR ALL CHRISTIANS- બધાં જ ખ્રિસ્તીઓ માટે દૈવી જોગવાઈ**

CREATION/RE-CREATION- સર્જન/ પુનઃ સર્જન

SALVATION- તારણ, મોક્ષ

LIFE--temporal- દુન્યવી જીવન, દૈહિક જીવન

LIFE—eternal- અનંતજીવન

BREATH- શ્વાસ

FUNCTIONING BODY- કાર્યકારી શરીર

FUNCTIONING MIND- કાર્યશીલ મન

WISDOM- બુદ્ધિ

HOPE- આશા

JOY- આનંદ

HEALTH- તંદુરસ્ત

LOVE- પ્રેમ

PRAYER- પ્રાર્થના

PATIENCE- ધીરજ

GODLY ELDERS- ઈશ્વરીય વડીલો

ENERGY- ઊર્જા

HERITAGE/HISTORY- ધરોહર-વારસો/ ઇતિહાસ

PEACE- શાંતિ

MARRIAGE & FAMILY- લગ્ન અને કુટુંબ

PURPOSE- સંકલ્પ, હેતુ

PRINCIPLES- સિદ્ધાંતો

COMMUNITY- સમુદાય

RELATIONSHIPS- સંબંધ

SELF WORTH- સ્વ મૂલ્ય

WORTH OF ALL HUMANS- સર્વ મનુષ્યોની કિંમત

HONOR- સન્માન

EMPATHY- સહાનુભૂતિ

DEDICATION TO TRUTH/HONESTY- સત્ય માટે સમર્પિત/પ્રમાણિક

INTEGRITY- પ્રામાણિક

DIVINE FRIENDSHIP- દૈવી મિત્રતા

HOLY BIBLE- પવિત્ર બાઇબલ

GODLY LEADERSHIP, PAST AND PRESENT- ઈશ્વરીય નેતૃત્વ, આગેવાની

COMMUNICATION - વાર્તાલાપ, સંચાર

CONTENTMENT- સંતોષ

TRANSCENDENCE- ગુણાતીત, ચઢીયાતું

RECONCILIATION- સમાધાન

HEALING AND OTHER MIRACLES- સાજાપણું અને અન્ય ચમત્કાર

MEDICAL/SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES- તબીબી /વિજ્ઞાનિક શોધો

RESURRECTION- પુનરુત્થાન

MUSIC AND OTHER ARTS- સંગીત અને અન્ય કળા

MATERIAL PROVISION- સામગ્રીની જોગવાઈ

FORESIGHT AND FOREKNOWLEDGE- અગમચેતી અને ભવિષ્યનું જ્ઞાન

REFLECTION- પ્રતિબિંબ

FRIENDSHIP- મિત્રતા

GUIDELINES (e.g., TEN COMMANDMENTS)- માર્ગદર્શિકા (દા.ત. દશ આજ્ઞાઓ)

DIVINE PRESENCE IN MOMENTS OF STRESS AND TRANSITION (e.g., DEATH)- તણાવ અને સંક્રમણની ક્ષણોમા દૈવી હાજરી (દા.ત. મૃત્યુ)

COMFORT- આરામ

HUMILITY- નમ્રતા

BRAVERY/STRENGTH- બહાદુરી/તાકાત

MERCY- દયા

GOODNESS- ભલાઈ

MEMORY- સ્મૃતિ, યાદદાસ્ત,

NEW BIRTH- નવો જન્મ

FORGIVENESS- ક્ષમા, માંફી

DISCERNMENT- વિવેક, સમજણ

CURIOSITY- જિજ્ઞાસા

MYSTERY- રહસ્ય

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES- બહુવિધ પરિપ્રેક્ષ્યો

FOOD AND OTHER NOURISHMENT- ખોરાક અને અન્ય પોષણ

WATER- પાણી

ABILITY TO LEARN- શીખવાની ક્ષમતા

EMOTIONS- લાગણીઓ

STEDFASTNESS- અડગતા

MEDIATION- મધ્યસ્થી

Doug's Reflections:

From May 10, 2022, to June 16, 2022, Stan Burgess led a series of pastoral training seminars on Zoom for new pastors in India, following the COVID-19 deaths of many pastors during the pandemic. My recollection is that over 100 pastors died during that time, so the Church in Gujarat needed to replace them. My part was to provide some stability to the consistency of the Zoom meetings, to host them, and prepare the space for Stan Burgess to teach without distraction. In this I was mostly successful.

Stan's counterpart in India was Henry Christian, an old friend and fellow believer who led the communications and interaction with the local pastors. After the classes were finished, Henry provided translations of Stan's notes in Gujarati and they may be found here at <https://bptrain.in>. If you're interested in viewing these documents or listening to the lectures, please contact doug@olena.com for the password to the site.

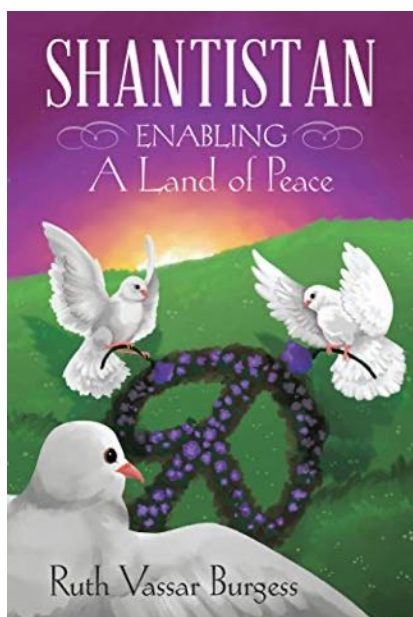
I am deeply grateful for all the wonderful interaction we had, and I recognize the deep commitment to the Good News of Jesus displayed by our Indian cohort.

We were not always successful keeping the meetings working, partly because Stan's Internet connection was fragile but also because our Indian counterparts had their own technology issues. For the most part the meetings came off without a hitch. If you're interested in the details, please feel free to ask. This may not be the place to do more than express our gratefulness to God for His mercy and love for allowing us all to participate.

Our prayers and love go to all who participated. I am thankful to Stan for his efforts to provide a wide-ranging introduction to Christianity for those folks who needed it most.

In addition, Ruth's material on Shantistan was both exposed and discussed. Henry Christian participated in the Shantistan training prior to this series of meetings, and his character and spirit were both exemplary for the participants. Much thanks to Ruth for her part in this effort.

Ruth's book *Shantistan* can be found on Amazon:



Brad Burgess also participated in the meetings while he was visiting his parents.

Zooming for “Shut-Ins”

Lois E. Olena

Before the pandemic, I only knew of a few folks using Zoom for online education and general video conferencing. Not long into 2020, however, everyone was using it, and—though many are clearly sick of it at this point and rolling their eyes at its prevalence—it remains a useful tool for doing many things we simply cannot do when physical presence no longer exists as an option.



When Dr. Stan Burgess of our class asked me to write a few words for this volume on the “ministry of Zoom” for our class members unable to participate in person, I was a bit surprised. I had not really thought of Zoom (now used in late 2022 from our physical class for those who still—or at times—could not be with us physically) as an “outreach.”



However, to Stan, being able to participate in our Sunday school class through Zoom when needed during weeks that Covid would spike brought reassurance that he could enjoy a time of fellowship in a way that would not put the Burgess family at risk.

The Apostle Paul at times mentioned the distance between himself and those he loved and longed to enjoy fellowship with. He wrote of the differences between being with those individuals in person and writing to them from far away. Tone would differ, behavior would differ somewhat, but the message would stay the same, and the reason for it would stay the same. The Spirit of Christ in us joins us together, one way or another! Paul’s letters were his



“Zoom” of the day, his way to connect, his way to stay as close as possible.

As Pentecostals known for our “primitive and pragmatic” behavior (thank you, Grant Wacker), we get to use resources on hand to do our best creatively to continue meaningful and healthy fellowship together. If that means Zoom, then so be it!

We miss our dear Wanda Carter attending class in person, and we trust she can be with us in the classroom again soon. Any time she can join by Zoom, however, that is a moment of grace for which we are grateful! And when other class members have had to stay home due to sickness or are away due to travel, Zoom can still be a ministry of our class to and for one another.



I think of our faithful class members, Gene and Margaret Eflin, who attended for many years—Gene diligently taking notes in his marked-up Bible. Though they can no longer attend, nor even participate on Zoom, please take a moment to remember them now as you read this. Ask the Lord to strengthen them in body and soul. We are grateful for their love, kindness, and Christlikeness that—though they are “shut in”—continues to flow into our minds and hearts in rich memories from the past.

Healthcare Services for Sick and Shut-Ins

Rev. Wanda Carter, Interview with Julianne Nelson

For many years, you cared for the sick and suffering as a hospital chaplain. What were some of the joys of that work?

It was a joy to see patients and staff respond in a positive way when I treated them with care and understanding. I tried to treat each person with respect. It felt rewarding for me to see that sometimes, with care, patients changed their view of themselves to a more positive perception. I hope I helped them revisit some of their life, seeing what challenges they overcame and how significant that was. Sometimes people don't understand how extraordinary they are.



What were some of the challenges or frustrations of that work?

It was very frustrating to see some people disrespected and mistreated because of who they were or were not. I saw that some patients did not get equal treatment, usually because of their poverty or race. That was a major frustration for me.

How did you resource yourself to persistently enter into others' suffering?

I tried to protect patients and staff by keeping myself healthy spiritually and mentally, so I could continue to serve others. And I tried not to carry patient needs home with me, so I could enter freshly into the next day's work.

If you could go back to that work with everything you have learned to this point, is there anything you would do differently?

Yes, I would be a stronger advocate for the marginalized. I would try to have more courage to confront the powers that could provide more equitable care. And, when possible, I would try to help those who were marginalized to be aware of it, so that they could advocate for themselves, too.

If you were talking to someone considering chaplaincy or pastoral care as a career, what would you say to them?

I would tell them it is rewarding to have the opportunity to help so many people in their time of need, but you cannot do that unless you protect yourself by staying healthy. Your self-care remains essential if you want to succeed in chaplaincy or pastoral care.

In the last couple of years, you have experienced several serious health challenges. What has it been like for you to be on the receiving end of caregiving?

I have had to work on the transition from being a provider to being the recipient of caregiving. God has provided some of the most loving caregivers who demonstrate His love through words and actions. I feel their love in how they “walk the walk,” not just “talk the talk.”

Suffering is no one’s favorite teacher, but are there lessons you feel you have learned through suffering?

Yes. I have learned that an intimate relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be even more intense, maybe because of my current physical limitations. In life even now, I have learned to be grateful for the blessings I have. I have more time to pray and focus on loving people. I have what I consider to be a good life. I enjoy living and loving; that is my reason for being.

After your experience of being a caregiving recipient, what suggestions would you give to people now about entering into others’ suffering?

Know that the gratitude you receive for your caregiving is part of the exchange of give and take. For me, the exchange includes mutual respect and love.

Make sure you allow the recipient of care to function as safely and independently as possible. And remember that the person receiving help needs to feel they are giving something back, even if it is intangible.

Any final thought?

For all my years of ministry as a pastor and chaplain, I always wanted to have the mind and heart of Christ living in and through me. That is still my deep desire, even in retirement.



I hope that would be the desire of any Christian offering caregiving, whether informally or in chaplaincy or pastoral care jobs.

A Tribute to the Kay Family

Reverend Ralph Kay, Professor of English Literature at then Evangel College, was the founding pastor of Evangel Temple, Springfield, Missouri. Together with his wife, Virginia, who was a strong spiritual presence in the community, Ralph recognized the need for an additional Assemblies of God church in the still-undeveloped south Springfield. Shortly after ET began services in the EC Klaude Kendrick library, and then in the barn on Luster Street, Virginia became ill and passed away from heart failure. Ralph and his three children, grief stricken, continued to pastor ET.

Approximately two years later, Ralph remarried Reverend Nell Jerene Davis Kay, of Fort Worth, Texas. They continued in ministry in Springfield and in Norfolk, Virginia. After Ralph's death, Jerene continued to minister at ET, eventually becoming a volunteer pastor to seniors. She also was a member of the Life Together class. Jerene passed away on October 11, 2022.

