



**SATURDAY MORNING WORSHIP:**



"The first time I ever read through the book of Acts," said Vineyard Pastor Ray Shriver, "I was absolutely amazed at the explosion of people who were eager to know about the Son of God." He pointed out that in chapter 1, there were about 120 converts; in chapter 2 there were 3,000. In chapter 4, there were 5000 men, so with women and children there were probably about 15,000.

By chapter 6 God's message had gone into ever widening circles, including many Jewish priests. By chapter 8 believers were growing in strength as well as numbers. In chapter 9 the populations of two whole cities had converted. Chapter 17 talks about women, in particular. There were many prominent women as well as men that came to the Lord. "And so it continues," Pr. Ray said.

Acts 13 tells of a group in Pisidian Antioch who were gathered on the Sabbath. They were hungry for some good news so they sent to Barnabas and Saul and said, "Brothers, if you have any good news, come and tell us." Paul and Barnabas told them the story that God has sent his Son among us, even to die for us, so that the darkness in our lives would be made light. That news brought so much joy that the next week the whole city turned out to hear the good news.

"This was not too terribly surprising," Pr. Ray acknowledged. "When we men start something that does make perfect sense and works, we're pretty anxious to tell someone else. When women's hearts are touched by a love that's beyond belief, they can't stop telling about it to anyone who will listen. When someone invites someone else to come and see what Christ has done in his or her life and in the life of others then the light in that other person's life begins to rise, the light bulb goes off and the light dawns."

"We think of the book of Acts as being about Paul," he continued, but explained that it was about "a lot of people." It wasn't just Peter and Pentecost; it wasn't just Barnabas and Paul. "The book of Acts names about 40 people who told the story and couldn't keep it inside," he added.

Pastor Ray then described his own *Via de Cristo* experience. About 1990, a pastor named Ed Simonson invited him to go on a spiritual retreat weekend. "And I thanked him and told him no," he recalled. Over the next two years the invitation was repeated over and over, and then Pr. Simonson was joined by Pr. Dave Schrader, "who told me to stop being such a hard head and go on a weekend." He went on the weekend at a camp in Northern Virginia in November, 1992 and, in his words, "much like any pilgrim, I found myself wondering what I had gotten myself into." He decided to divide himself into two people; one part that would enjoy the

weekend and one that would sit back and evaluate the weekend and what was going on. I wanted to see if it was something that would light a spiritual fire in my congregation. Pastor Ray described his congregation as good people but just too comfortable."

"In a matter of four short days, 72 hours; God gave me the answer I had been searching for. I couldn't wait to get back to the congregation and see if I could get someone to go," he continued. Pastor Ray focused on a young couple, Craig and Debby Wasilius, who seemed to be hungering for the Lord, and they went the next year. "Then I found I just had to get out of their way. They were doing what the new believers did when Paul lit them up. They were good solid people who just came alive; they wanted to tell somebody else."

Pastor Ray described the outcome. "The long and short of it is, by the time I retired there were about 60 people in the congregation (about one quarter of the congregation), who had gone on a weekend, and the effect on the ministry there was remarkable. There were people who would come to me and say, 'Could I teach Sunday School next year?' We actually had run-off elections for council. It was strange. It was awesome."

"How in the world can we share in the work of the Holy Spirit?" Pr. Ray asked. "By telling someone else what it's done for you, what it's done for us, for me, for our church." He noted that there seems to be more of a spiritual famine in people these days. The desire to have better things has changed in these post-recession days. "Perhaps that's a good thing," he commented. "Many people are searching for something deeper in their lives because *stuff* doesn't work anymore."

"The people said to Paul and Barnabas, 'If you have any words of encouragement, please come and tell us.' Actually encouraging others is the theme we are going to focus on today," he stated, quoting the line from the weekend, "*Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ.*" As a pastor and a spiritual director on weekends, Pr. Ray noted that his focus has been on getting other pastors to serve, and he admitted that he "kind of lost sight of bringing somebody myself." Sometimes, Pr. Ray said, when we even casually mention it to someone else, they might just be the ones that are looking for some spiritual refreshment.

Pr. Ray is retired but does a significant amount of pulpit supply. "I'm never at one church very often, so I can't tell others there because I don't know when I'll be back to follow up on it," he said. Yet I find "when we least expect it, God gives us a surprise in our hearts."

He told a story to illustrate. Recently, a pastor named John asked him to cover three dates for him. He could do two of the dates but not the third because that would have been this coming Sunday. He told the pastor he would be at the national gathering for *Via de Cristo*. "What's that?" the pastor asked. When

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Pr. Ray told him about *Via de Cristo*, he also mentioned *Cursillo* and the *Walk to Emmaus*. At that point the pastor said, "I know about *Walk to Emmaus*, and I was looking for one. I didn't know the Lutherans had one. When's the next one?"

"The Lord wasn't just opening the door," Pr. Ray laughed, "He was pushing me through it."

Pr. Ray explained to Pr. John that whoever invites a person also takes care of everything, saying, "It's a gift to you—you don't pay for anything," the other pastor asked, "Did you invite me or did I invite myself?"

"Pr. John surprised me," said Pr. Ray, "because I expected him to be way too busy." The man is the pastor of a small church in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, as well as the pastor of the Methodist church down the road and the pastor of an Episcopal church. He's also the President of the Senate of West Virginia. A mutual friend told Pr. Ray, "If you get him on the weekend, take away his cell phone and chain him to the chair."

The pastor is signed up to go on the weekend in the spring. "You never know when somebody is ready to go," Pr. Ray stated. "It was a wake up call to me."

He concluded, "God said, 'My presence will go with you. I will see the journey to the end.' We haven't reached the finish line yet, so we ask for God to open our eyes to see the needs of other people so we can be an encouragement to them, so we can invite them to join us on the journey, so that their darkness gets a little brighter and they can share that light with others and we'll all be filled with the light of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, 'Let your light so shine'— turn the light on!"

#### SATURDAY EVENING VESPERS

The final NLS evening service was a series of litanies and scripture readings, led by Steve Gielda of Rainbow and Elisha Barnett of Journey in Faith. Jim Arend from Lutheran VdC of Minnesota led the closing blessing. Nita Shank and the worship team led the gathering in praise music.

#### BUSINESS MEETING #4 HIGHLIGHTS:

Steve Barnett asked for any comments or questions regarding the proposed budget that was handed out yesterday. Seeing none, he accepted a motion to accept the budget. It was carried unanimously.

The Outreach report was given by Tedd Smith. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". Tedd felt that he worked well with the 10 Regional Coordinators and the R & R (Rediscover Recommit) program. We had heard from Kim Brownlow yesterday for Region 1 and today we heard from Regions 2, 3, 4 and 7. Many of the Regions have held multiple R & R programs with more on the schedule. The coordinators did ask that if your Secretariat has not held one to call them and get one set up. Tedd stated that the program helps communities rediscover the joy and commitment from our weekends.

Current Coordinators are Kim Brownlow, Wendy Schowalter, Bob Qualm (not present), Dick & Loretta Volker, Steve Manasco & Chris Rasmussen, Penny Klein and Dottie Schwartz. Tedd is looking for a replacement for Alice Allison since she is part of the Executive Board.

Pam Gross, the 2015 Host Committee chair presented a "brief" history and her team did a song as an invitation to next year's gathering. Living Water will be the host team in the Quad City area July 23-26, 2015 at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois.

The passing of the banner from Mark Carson (2014 HC) to Pam Gross (2015 HC) ended our business for this year. There was a motion to adjourn and announcements made regarding open appointed positions once again.

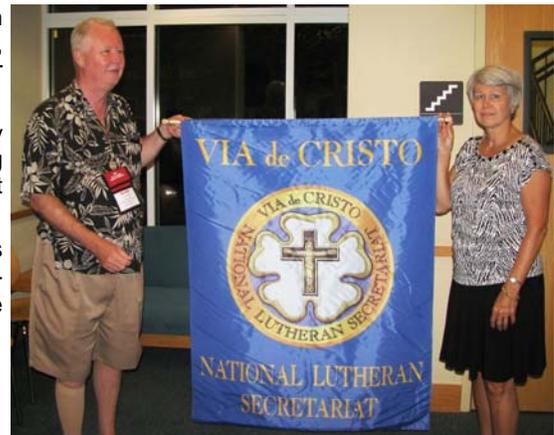
Complete minutes will be available on the web next month.

#### A poem of inspiration

Each year at our National Meeting/Gathering we are inspired by others to share the gift's God has given to us. At the Discipleship Dialogue this afternoon one man was prompted by the Holy Spirit to share these encouraging words from his heart:

*I walked along a lonely road,  
trying to follow Christ.  
He said, to me, you're a leader  
of men,  
I said, I am not.  
Christ showed me where to go,  
and which path to take.  
I looked down that lonely road,  
realizing I'm not alone.  
I turned to see, on the road be-  
hind me, my friends following  
me.*

Ellick Morey, A-OK VdC  
(Arkansas and Oklahoma)



## ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO JOURNEY



The speaker for the third forum, Donald Witham, has been a law enforcement officer for 24 years, first as a campus police officer, then a city police officer, then a state trooper, and finally working for the federal government as part of the Secret Service.

Don began by reminding the audience they had learned from the previous forum speakers that Christ needs each of us to know the person sitting next to us, and that Christ takes us outside our previous norms. This talk, he said, would focus on how we live a life of discipleship and attempt to bring nonbelievers to a life with Christ. He confessed that he was not given the gift of evangelistic speaking at birth. "But just when you think you know the limitations," he added, "God opens your eyes to find that he has given you the tools to expand your horizons."

First, he addressed the need to evangelize within the home. He and his wife, Tara made a conscious decision to raise their children to know God. Their daughter Megan, unexpectedly, was born "a couple of months early," weighing between three and four pounds. She was placed in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), and doctors did not have an encouraging prognosis. "Even if we had to do it through glass walls," he said, "this child was going to know Christ." But they did not know how much time they had.

While he continued working, Tara stayed with Megan. Leaving work, Don would rush to the hospital, where he would get an update from the people who were there praying, including members of their reunion group. Then he would visit Megan. "For weeks I talked to her, prayed for her, sang to her," he said, laughing at the image of a police officer in full uniform, with all of his equipment, "singing the crazy chicken song" to his child. "Our intent was to make Megan know Christ," he explained. "We didn't think about the impact on those around us."

Megan will turn 19 next week. When she finished high school, she told her father she wanted to attend a military academy.

"Absolutely not," he responded.

"Can we talk about it?" she asked.

"I thought that we just did that," was his reply.

At the United States Coast Guard Academy, Megan was accepted as a walk-on to the softball team. She was told that she would have to take a mandatory trip to Florida with the team during Spring Break. However, she was already committed to making a trip to Israel over Spring Break, to see the Holy Lands. She called her father and said, "I have a dilemma."

When he heard the problem, Don asked his daughter, "Do you plan to play softball all of your life? Do you plan to serve Christ all of your life?"

She said, "Thank you, Daddy."

"I thought you wanted to talk about it," he protested.

"I thought we just did that," she answered.

Don also told about his son Zachary, who is 16, and what a pleasure it is when he has the chance to see Zachary lead other Boy Scouts in prayer or conduct a Bible study with them. "Our families are obviously a rich and fertile land to

carry forth our faith," he noted.

When Don applied for his job with the Secret Service, he was asked in an interview, "Where do you draw the line between long-standing family obligations and your job?" His immediate answer did not get a positive reaction from the interviewers: "God is first in my life, my family is second, and my job is somewhere below that." However, he elaborated that he would be a very committed employee, "but if my job would ever cost me my family, my job would have to go. And if my wife were ever to turn away from Christ and want me to do the same, then my family would have to go."

Don's family says grace standing up and holding hands, no matter where they are. They do this to thank the Lord, of course, but also because it makes a statement, and people may be watching.

At a 15-week course Don attended, he prayed before meals. "Some doors were cracked open," he described. "If I had charged in, it might have scared them." One man saw him about to pray and said, "Get me in there," and he replied, "I always do." That was the beginning of a relationship that eventually drew the man into a closer fellowship with God.

Don's job has taken him to some amazing places. He described, "I have seen firsthand the atrocities that occurred in Germany, in Rwanda, and most recently in the Ukraine. I have seen the hurt that was caused in Vietnam and in Japan. I have prayed at the Great Wall of China and the pyramids of Egypt. I have walked where certain races and sexes are not considered equal."

He then offered the challenge, "*I encourage each of you to pray for the person that you least like, and to pray for the person that you least understand or agree with.*"

When Don was asked to promote a baseball team by sponsoring a banner to be hung at the ballpark, he asked his pastor if he could hang a banner with the church's logo. "Maybe it will plant a seed for someone who is looking for something," he explained.

"Christ wants every one of us to take advantage of the environment he has placed us into," he concluded. "God has given all of us gifts. Use them to serve others."



**Three Generations of Witham's**

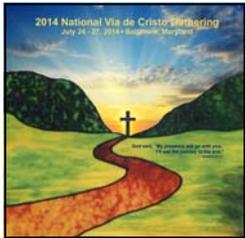
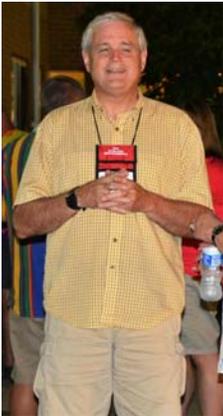


**REMINDERS.....**

- There is a **\$400.00** (lost key) and **\$25.00** (swipe card) replacement charge.
- Check Out: Leave pillows, sheets and towels on the bed; place trash in the receptacles in the common areas and check your room for any personal items. Return room key and swipe cards to the residence hall office in the lobby on the first floor.
- Boarding Passes: Your airline boarding passes can be printed in the Hospitality Room.
- If your transportation plans change, please let the host committee know.
- Palanca Posters: each secretariat needs to pick up their posters
- Medical Concerns: Marilyn Ayres (301-514-5309) and Sylvia Schrader (717-261-7827).
- Medical Emergencies: Call Campus Police at: 410-455-5555 and they will call 911.
- If you missed contributing to the offering at the Saturday Morning Worship Service. Checks can still be written out to the **NLS**, and given to a board member.



**Emergency Numbers:**  
**Mark Carson;**  
**410-456-5146**  
 Campus Police:  
**410-455-5555**  
 or  
**410-455-3133**



**Evening Hospitality:**  
 The Saturday night specialties from Virginia included: funnel cake fries, Virginia ham mini's, apple strudel bites, peanuts in a shell, brownies, chips and salsa plus cooling beverages.

With a heartfelt **THANK YOU** to the communities of *Journey in Faith VdC*, *Notes of Grace of Middle TN*, *Rainbow VdC*, and *Vineyard VdC*; our 2014 NLS Gathering was a success. It was a remarkable weekend with many new friendships made and others renewed. *We give all the praise and glory to God!* In less than a year, this host team pulled together what was needed for all of us to be encouraged in our journey. May God bless you as you travel back home to your communities and we hope to see you in 2015 in Rock Island, Illinois!!!



**CONEXIONES**

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Schedule for Sunday, July 27, 2014			
Time	Event	Building	Location
7:00 a.m.	Breakfast	B	True Grits
8:15 a.m.	Worship	C	Meyerhoff 030
10:00 a.m.	NLS Executive Committee Meeting	A	Harbor Hall classroom
11:00 a.m.	Check Out ends	A	Harbor Hall Cafe