



Light

“Count Your Many Blessings, Name Them One By One”

There is this great old song I grew up singing in church. Its chorus is “count your many blessings name them one by one. Count your many blessings see what God has done.” It is with great delight in this edition of the Bethel Light that we look back on the previous year and see all that we have accomplished through the help of God. Personally when I examine the last year I am amazed at all that has been achieved. I cannot tell you how many emails we received this year that go something like this: “Dear Bethel, I am amazed at all that you have been able to accomplish with such a small congregation. It is an encouragement for my church which is also small....”

While I think that the numerical delineation is problematic, I am honored to be living alongside a community that is striving to walk the way of Jesus, both individually and corporately. The decision by our church to seek the Kingdom of God in the present world is an example and light for our community and our world.

This year we decided to focus our work with two different excellent non-profit organizations to bring about change in the San Fernando Valley, the first being LSS Community Care Center in Van Nuys (LSSCCC). Bethel has a long-standing relationship with LSS and will continue to grow this relationship throughout the next decade. In 2009 Bethel gave over one thousand bags of food to families in need, over 75 of those bags came from our first community bag distribution during the 40 Days of Hope. Also during the 40 Days of Hope, we shared 400 pounds of bread with the homeless. We collected over 190 toys during the “Christmas in July” project, personally raised over \$12,000 during the LSS Walk-a-thon and donated over 3000 of articles of clothing. In September we worked alongside Sherman Oaks Lutheran to serve our first meal to the homeless and Theatre Encino has donated 15 percent of its proceeds from each of its shows to LSS programs. Our relationship with Lutheran Social Services is central to our vision and values we are honored to journey with walk alongside such a phenomenal organization in living Matthew 25:35 throughout 2009.

A new relationship for Bethel in '09 was with the San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission. In October we served a meal for the families in their shelter and we donated bags of food, clothing, and furniture to the Valley Rescue Mission Thrift Shop. We look forward to further connection with this organization in 2010. You can see more of what we helped them accomplish in a personal letter from their director in another part of the Bethel Light.

During this year we have worked with countless other groups. We have helped the Travelers Aid Society send two couples back to their homes of origin. Each of these people was stranded and alone in the huge city of Los Angeles. We worked alongside our local social worker to provide toys and clothes for each of the children on her caseload, providing 18 children a memorable Christmas season.

(continued on page 2)

("Count Your Many Blessings..." continued from page 1)

We helped two people into drug rehabilitation clinics both of whom have remained sober. We added another anon group on campus and it is one of the largest in the valley with over 100 in attendance each week, finding freedom from the effects of family alcoholism. We also worked with Living Water International to provide clean drinking water for people in the developing world. We specifically sent to date 250.00 in pocket change to build clean water wells in Africa. Our children were influential in this endeavor.

Through prayer we have seen over 100 requests answered. We have seen 13 people get new jobs, 20 people's cancer go in remission through proper medical treatment, and 32 other illnesses receive healing. We celebrated alongside our families as their children have remained sober, rejoiced as families have connected with long lost or separated relatives, and grieved with families that have lost loved ones. It is in the midst of these prayers, that we have become more deeply aware that we are in relationship with an amazing God.

This year we celebrated the baptism of Michael Pobanz. We increased our weekly attendees on an average of 17 people per week an increase of 26%. Through your faithfulness our offerings have increased on an average of \$93.57 per week, during our nation's largest recession since the great depression. We rehabbed the church offices, the sacristy, two classrooms, the library, and the preschool center.

Each of these events and actions are just part of what we have done with God's help. The real beauty of all of this is God is doing even more in each of our individual lives. We will hear some of these stories throughout the month of January as we hear the sermon series, *One Church Many Voices: The Community Speaks*. In this series each week a new community member will share their story with our congregation.

God is truly blessing this community. What is most beautiful is that Bethel is taking those blessings and pouring them out on the world around it. Thank God, Thank you, and I cannot wait to see all that the second decade of the 2000's will bring.

Peace and hope,

Pastor Rustin

**Church Family Vision Night and Potluck
Jan 24th in the Social Hall
5:30pm**

Four times a year we get together to talk about the future of . On the 24th of January we will be having another of the essential get-togethers. Please join us as we share a meal and have a conversation on the upcoming 2010 calendar, budget, and future planning of Bethel. We will continue to discuss Calvary's exodus and what avenues we have been pursuing to fill the void that will exist upon their exit. There will be signups for the pot-luck for the next three weeks! Join us, bring good food, and enter into the active life of this great community. God is doing so many amazing things through this community come and participate in the vision making for 2010!

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RSVP: Jan Maseda

email jmaseda@lsssc.org

818-901-9480 ext. 110

LSS FOUNDATION
Lutheran Social Services of Southern California

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Contact Donna Horne to make a reservation.

My Talent, My Kid, and My Talented Friends

By Melanie Ewbank

My talent gets me into trouble. It is attracted to other people's talent, which leads to relationship, which leads to commitment. A play leads to a workshop which leads to another play then a touring company then a benefit performance and suddenly (suddenly?) on Sunday mornings your alarm is going off and you're sitting in a church parking lot waiting for the hug-fest to end so you can sneak in and sit in the back.

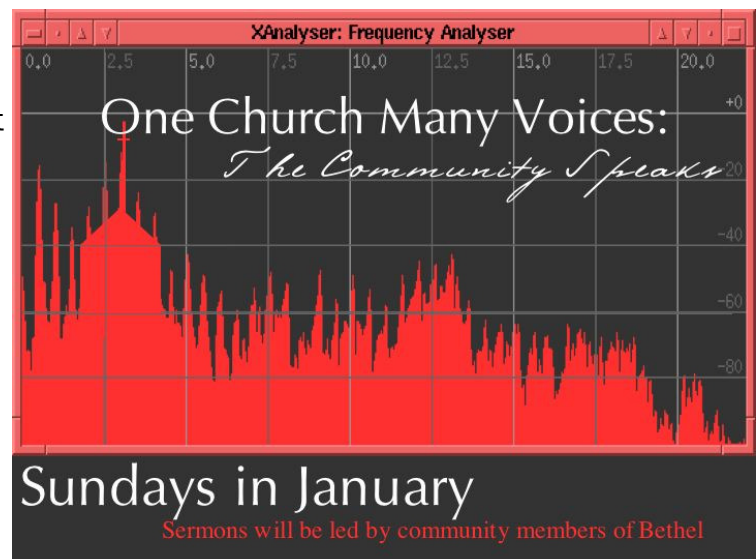
My kid also gets me into trouble. She is attracted to people's genuine affection, which leads to relationship, which leads to commitment. A ladies' tea (with child care) leads to another function (with child care) which leads to another function (with child care) then another function (with child care), and suddenly (suddenly?) on Sunday mornings your kid is asking "is it church day" and telling you that she wants "to go to the one with Deryk and blonde Lisa."

My "sudden" foray into the pews of Bethel can be traced years back. Little imperceptible nudges...the faithfulness of and repeated invitations from a couple of friends which was reinforced time and again by the genuine affection of those we encountered...a stealthily crafted "sudden" journey to something that I had been longing for since moving back to Los Angeles in 1992.

I find it difficult to visit churches. I'm not comfortable with peace passing, or prayer circles, or turn to your neighbor stuff. I hate plays with audience participation, so imagine my discomfort participating in interactive church. A couple of years ago I attended one for a few months that both the kid and I really liked. In Canyon Country. But it was big, and impersonal, and it seemed silly to drive that far to avoid relationship when I could just as easily avoid relationship a little closer to home. So I accepted the next invitation from the Stilwells to visit Bethel.

And I found a group of talented, caring, supportive, down-to-earth, authentic people, who also just happen to be Christians, and who are actively going about that business. And so we stay, hoping to effect change in a world that can be so harsh.

I sometimes wonder what might've happened had I accepted the first invitation from the Stilwells...or if I hadn't written the show that we toured to Bethel with...or if I hadn't participated in the benefit for Justin. But I didn't...and I did, and I capitulated with the wishes of my kid, and I now set the alarm even if I've been at the theatre until the wee hours. We feel welcome, and we feel home.



The San Damiano Foundation

The San Damiano Foundation recognizes the power of film to touch and inspire people, making it a perfect medium to communicate Franciscan spirituality and concern for the poor, social justice, peace and nonviolence. The vision for our films is twofold: to raise funds for Christian charities aiding the world's poor, and to awaken the hearts and minds to the plight of the poor, hopefully inspiring viewers to serve those in need through acts of compassion and mercy.

A vital part of the way the San Damiano Foundation puts the power of film at the service of the poor is screening our films at churches, high schools and universities across America.



& Prayer

January 10th at 5:00

Bethel Encino ELCA Sanctuary

The San Damiano Foundation puts the power of film at the service of the poor. Film maker Gerry Straub will lead us through an interactive film and prayer experience teaching us to engage poverty through prayer and action. We are asking all those who attend to bring a can of food for LSS community care center. Call 818.788.2653 for more detail.

From the San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission...

Thank you for your support in 2009! This has been a year of challenge for many. The economy drove so many families to our doors. And you, our faithful friends, responded to their need with amazing generosity. Thanks to you, there were over 37,500 meals served, 27,400 nights of shelter provided, and 73 families found housing and a new life off the streets. Thank you again for your compassion. Happy New Year!

Frank Mastrolondardo

Mission & Ministry at Bethel

First, I want to start by saying thank You again for taking on the task of providing gifts for families in need.

A little bit about me.

My name is Carol and I'm a newly single mother of 3 girls ages 22, 19, and 15. I know I don't look like I have kids that old (LOL). Well I've been with the Department of Children and Family Services for 3 and half years. Two of those years as a case carrying social worker and then 1 year as an intern. I have always wanted to be in the helping profession. For a big part of my life I worked in the medical field but never quite found my niche. During a work related event I began to speak to social workers and child life specialist at the hospital and something clicked inside of me and I knew that social work is the area that I wanted to go into.

As a child I remember when my mother passed away the social worker that assisted our family made a very difficult situation bearable. The impression that the social worker made on me never left. I love helping people get through a difficult situation. Many times families enter our system and feel hopeless. I try to make families feel that just because they are going through a hard time doesn't mean they are bad people they are just people experiencing a bad situation. I ultimately would like to be a Marriage and Family therapist and I am applying to CSUN MSW program this fall to further my education. My hobbies are spending time with my family and I love reading, making flower arrangements, decorating and crocheting.

Caseload

I currently have 23 kids on my case load which consists of eleven families. The children on my case load range in age 1 month to 17 years old. I am very happy to say that most of the children on my case load seem like they will reunify with their parents. I have 3 families that I am assisting with Family maintenance services which allows the children to stay in their homes. Unfortunately I have one teenager Sertell who will not reunify with her family and has not been able to live with any family members. Sertell has been in foster care for the past 2 years and is in the process of working towards transitional housing. Sertell has had a difficult time but is hopeful in exiting the DCFS system.

From the Eyes of Bethel.

Each year we participate in the "Giving Tree Project". We pick children's names off of a tree and provide them with gifts that will help make their Christmas better. As a community we have made a point that we are going to love all God's community. These children are amazing. They are so resilient, and strong. What better way to honor Jesus at Christmas than to love his children, kids that have been forgotten, or neglected by society and even sometimes by their own families.

After having received all the gifts that Bethel purchased it was such an privilege to give them to Carol. She came in so surprised by the amount of the gifts. She was elated hugging everyone in the office telling each of us how much this means for her children. Each of the children wrote a cute thank you note to Bethel thanking us for making their Christmas a bit brighter.

What Bethel Encino Means

To Our Family

By Susie Najera



When I asked my kids what Bethel meant to them my daughter Sonora said, "I like Bethel because it's about forgiving." Pretty insightful from a four-year old, I thought. She also said it was good to learn about God while getting snacks. My son Julian thought it was important that we learn how to pray and give thanks to God. He thinks it's good that people donate money to causes, ones that provide clean water and help people stay healthy and alive.

At my own pace: In 2005, my sister Joelle and her family came to our house in Encino for a visit from the bay area. She and her husband Jim have always been religious, dedicating time and prayer to God and the church. I was always one of those who just went to church on holidays

because I thought it was the 'good' thing to do. If you were 'good' you went to church. On her visit, she noticed Bethel as it was located so close to our house and she asked me why we weren't taking our son to school there. I had no answer. Before I knew it, all of the information was printed out and put in my hand. The next thing I knew, Julian was registered and attending Bethel Early Education Center three days a week. Soon thereafter, I received a notice that said my son was going to be in the Christmas play which took place in the Church and I was very excited for him. Unfortunately my husband Rick was not there to witness it, but something happened the night of the performance. I'm not sure if it was the thrill of seeing my kid perform in front of an audience for the first time but it dawned on me as I looked around inside the church that I was in a safe house, a place of comfort, almost like a home away from home.

Dr. Hong cured my anxiety with a saw: My husband Rick knows the Bible well and has even studied a bit at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena. I suggested to Rick that even though I wasn't hugely religious, I would entertain the idea of going to church to try it out and see what it was like, even though I was hugely petrified of people waving their hands around in the air hysterically. (Not that there is anything wrong with that.) I used to have this crazy idea that if I went to church, God would point a red laser down on me and expose all my faults. The first few times we attended Bethel, I was very nervous and anxious, especially when we took communion. I just didn't want religion forced on me and wanted to just take it slow. But soon, I had an experience that would change everything. Longtime church member, Dr. Hong, an exceptional retired surgeon, walked up to the front and took a saw out of a bag. The kind you buy at Home Depot. I thought he was either going to kill us or do a funny trick of some sorts. Instead, he sat down and gently started 'playing' his saw with a bow. I laughed so hard inside and just had the biggest grin on my face. But I wasn't laughing at Dr. Hong, I was laughing at myself for taking the church so seriously and this was the moment when I knew I was among friends and other people just like me who are fun and weird and have flaws and aren't perfect and don't judge. I felt such a sigh of relief that day and I knew it was a place we could stay.

The Pastors and the Band: When we arrived at Bethel, Pastor Jim Lee and Pastor Willis were interim Pastors. I admired both of them intensely for their humility, humanitarianism and humor. They knew the Bible and I was their student. Each message was heartfelt and real and I could relate to their experiences or empathize with others. The band intensified everything more, The Daylights. The first time I heard them, I thought wow, we get to have Dave Mathews and U2 sing right here in our church every Sunday. Their music sends me on a spiritual journey each time and sounds so beautiful I can barely describe it. It's soothing, powerful, meaningful and just so good. They are the icing on the church cake. *(continued on page 7)*

("What Bethel Means To Our Family..." continued from page 6)

Lisa Brown: Lisa Brown deserves a plaque in front of Bethel. This is her home and her kids were born and raised at Bethel (not physically born at the church, but you know what I mean). She knows the place better than anyone. One of the reasons Bethel is so important to our family is because Lisa is like a second mom to all of us. She is a giving, smart, beautiful, talented woman, and a very dedicated mom and wife and overall genuine person. I'm proud to call her a friend and neighbor. Her daughter Brittany, who we all adore, became our first babysitter since we had kids. And Bethel is blessed to have Brittany carrying on the family tradition by working with its Early Education Center.

Prayer ADD: I don't know if this is a real term, but if not, I just created it. It's when you start a prayer and then think of your to-do list. I have tried to get better at prayer by concentrating and listening to others. Wallyce Todd is a master at prayer, she has a special talent. Sometimes I think my prayers are just hopes or wishes, and maybe they are, but I think they all lead to the same path and happen when and as they should.

The future of Bethel: We have been so blessed to find a new Pastor, Rustin Comer and his beautiful wife Heather. During his first year, which flew by, he has accomplished so much as far as accelerating the church to new levels. Fresh paint, cleaned out rooms, purged files, budget reviews, fundraisers, new logo, new designs, new website, reorganized classrooms, clothing drives, collecting food, reaching out to others, community programs that work, encouraging people to 'take' action not just think about it. Along with the support of the board and members, I truly believe Bethel is at a great place because of Pastor Rustin and Heather and will continue to thrive and be a force in the community.

Our family has benefitted greatly from going to Bethel Encino. Since going to Bethel, we have baptized all three of our children there and have made some incredible friendships. I especially love that our kids are well taken care of in their classes during the sermons. Bethel has enriched our lives and given us something special to look forward to each Sunday as a family. And I have my sister to thank for it all.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

This year we voted to accept our new vision statement and the key values which, have guided us all through the year and will continue to guide the future of Bethel. In thinking how to start the New Year, the council thought it would be a great idea to continue to put this vision and these values before our community.

We wanted to pose the question to you. How well did we do this year living this vision? How good were we at keeping these values as the lens through which we live our life both communally and individually? We would love to hear your thoughts. Please email the church at bethel_encino@sbcglobal.net to give us your opinion. We will post the findings in next months Bethel Light.

Vision Statement

Bethel Encino seeks to be a relevant presence of love, compassion, and acceptance to everyone in our community; Helping them to experience the transforming love of Jesus, through an intimate communal relationship with God. We strive to live missionally by praying for and serving our community and those in need.

Key Values

~Love, acceptance, and compassion for everyone

~Community

~Transformation and Creativity

~Following the way of Jesus

By serving humanity especially the rejected

By being missional

By sharing the good news of grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness

~Relationship with God and humanity

~Grace at all costs

~Excellence and consistency

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BETHEL ENCINO ELCA

Sunday Worship

9:00 A.M.

Sunday School & Childcare available every Sunday.

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Administrator: Lisa Brown



Director: Stefani Ernst

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