



May 8, 2007

Dear friends,

Greetings from Montana. Almost hidden in the midst of a birthday note to Via were these words: *"We pray for your new ventures, not enough, surely, but we do more upon reminders."* Here are some reminders. If you are someone who is praying for us and you want to skip to the itemized prayer requests, they mostly begin on page 3. But, if you have time to read on, then please do.

An important question we must answer is: *"To whom does the church belong?"* During a recent phone conversation, I asked a good friend: *"To whom does the church belong."* He replied, *"God."* Visitors in some churches intuitively sense that the power structure belongs to a person – or to a family or families – or to a kind of tradition – but, not to God. Still, Jesus bought and paid for the church with His own blood. If that truth becomes our guide – if we are responsive to the Holy Spirit instead of the default power structures of our age, then – wonder of wonders - we also have the privilege of depending upon Jesus' promise: *"I will build **my** church"* (Matthew 16:18). What a relief! God, make the church Your church.

I pressed my friend further: *"If we believe the church first belongs to God, then to whom does it next belong?"* He replied: *"Those bought and paid for with Jesus' blood – my brothers and sisters in Christ."* I was glad to hear his answer because, if the first truth is challenging, then this second one is too – especially for those in leadership. Let's give honor to whom honor is due – to the Body of Christ – to His Bride – to those who faithfully invest their gifts and hearts in the local church.

I needed to press my friend further one more time. *"So, to whom does the church next belong?"* He simply answered – *"To the 'whosoever.'"* I knew he had in mind the passages where the King James Version of the Bible translators translated one of the words Jesus used as "whosoever." Here are a few – from *The Message* – where the antiquated "whosoever" becomes "**anyone**" and "**all**:"

- John 3:16 *"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, **anyone** can have a whole and lasting life."*
- John 4:14 *"**Anyone** who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."*
- John 12:44-46 *"Jesus summed it all up when he cried out, "Whoever believes in me, believes not just in me but in the One who sent me. Whoever looks at me is looking, in fact, at the One who sent me. I am Light that has come into the world so that **all** who believe in me won't have to stay any longer in the dark."*

Could my friend be right? We believe he is. If so, we must not only pray for and love the "whosoever," but also in leadership meetings of the church we must devote time to those who are not enfolded in the church yet – to those who are disconnected – to those who have never been connected. How can we love our community? That's why you have sent us.

Part of the challenge to you who call yourselves followers of Jesus is that the "gospel culture" of the church must move. For Christ's sake, you must love your neighbor – you must love your enemy – you

must engage your culture. You cannot sit at home. Even as you pray and your prayers ascend to heaven so you also talk with that person in line with you – that person who is serving you – that co-worker – that leader. Perhaps, you will be able to tell them explicitly about the faith, hope and love that are in Jesus – perhaps that conversation will take place in the future.

Let me give you an example. Last week I learned that the local library was initiating focus groups – seeking input regarding how the library can better serve the community. What an opportunity to love our community - but the only meeting I could make was held at 10 AM, Friday. When I walked in the door, the facilitator said, *"This group primarily is for young mothers – but, you can come too."* Inwardly, I rejoiced. Via and I have been meeting young couples with very young children. There has been a "baby-boom" in Helena. We had prayed that we could continue to meet these young families and serve them. Now here were seven young children – and four moms. I was grateful they made the effort to come. And the brainstorming worked. Our facilitator took page after page of notes. As we brainstormed, I realized how many similarities libraries and churches share. For example, the young mothers would like to have older mothers reserve the main meeting room in the library to meet with them and mentor them in mothering. Would you pray about that? Libraries and churches have a lot in common. Maybe churches should have focus groups to find out how better they can serve their community!

Afterwards, the facilitator and I talked. She learned that I was in Helena to plant a church and wondered when the church would start. I told her that we would start when a number of people who had no present connection with the local church were interested in coming. *"That's like me – and I might come,"* she said. I told her that, once a church gets started, it is challenging to keep on investing in the community – attending meetings like the one she had facilitated - because the church requires so much time. She said, *"That is understandable. People in the church would want your attention. But, we need your input too."* Followers of Jesus, are we listening?

She asked me how I was meeting people who are not connected with the church. I gave her one example. Recently, I had lunch with a community leader I had met through Kiwanis – a man who has lived here for 40 years. After asking him why he loved Helena – what challenges Helena faces – and what kind of church could help meet those needs, I also asked him how he could connect with the 50%+ of Helenans who have no official connection with the church. He told me that he and his wife plan to have Via and me over to his home to meet friends of theirs who are outside the church. He asked what my focus would be for that meeting. *"I hope we can point people to Jesus."* He asked, *"In what way?"*

I replied, *"It has been remarkable to visit so many churches in the last several months. Imagine what we have seen and heard. Anyone could find excuses to disconnect from the church. But, then imagine what Jesus heard and saw when He attended the synagogue. The One who knew the worship of heaven, saw 'worship.' The One who knew the love of heaven saw how the people treated one another. Still Luke records: Jesus "went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom" (4:16 – by the way: if you want to get a sense for the habitual regularity Luke intends by using this word, look at the three other places where he uses it: 1:9; 2:42; 22:39). In other words, if we can see Jesus and understand life as He does, we will find good reasons to connect with the local church customarily."* We hope to help people discover true spirituality and community. There are good reasons they have not yet considered for being part of a church community. Those come into relief when we see Jesus. Please pray that we will point people to Jesus.

1. Prayer requests for folks in Helena:

- A 62 year old woman recently contacted me to ask that we pray for her relationship with one of her two sons. Until recently they were estranged. She thanks God for hearing her prayers and realizes she needs wisdom in deepening this renewed relationship.

- A friend has put her Helena home up for sale. Although it is a fine, old, large home, she has had no offers. The “hot” market we experienced when we moved here has cooled off. She has bought another home. Please pray that her home will sell. And please pray for God to prosper her business, Lasso the Moon Toy Store.
- I recently met with a woman whose husband of 29 years is unable to care for himself – due to a brain injury. She has a responsible position in state government and needs strength. She also is grieving the loss of her mother. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s comfort for her.
- An entrepreneur came to Helena to start a help a friend by starting a restaurant. He discovered they needed more capital before opening that business. As a result, he is working elsewhere, raising capital. Pray that God will prosper his efforts.

2. Prayer requests for Helena

- Pray for Jim McHugh as he leads the Helena Downtown Visioning Partnership. After 18 months of meetings, focus groups, and surveys, this group has developed a plan for the future of downtown Helena. Pray that God would use it to help Helena thrive.
- Pray for Roger Brooks, CEO of Destination Development. Roger came to Helena in January to tell of his work with over 400 communities across the nation. Helena decided to hire him and he decided to make Helena one of the three new projects he personally oversees each year. **This Thursday, 5/10**, he will present his initial findings from 8:30-12:30 in the Lewis and Clark Library meeting room. Pray that there will be significant “buy-in” and that his work will result in not only a significantly healthier downtown but also Helena as a whole..
- Pray for Judy Hart, Director of the Lewis and Clark Library, as she seeks to help the library effectively serve the community. Thank God for her involvement in many organizations within the community.

3. Prayer requests for The Helena Project

- Last year, at the April, '06, Rocky Mountain Presbytery in Colorado Springs, I met Josh Charette. Josh was on his way from Billings, MT, to Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. Although Josh had been in ministry previously, he realized he needed the training Covenant provides. He, his wife, Katie, a graduate of Helena High School, and their two young sons have benefited from living on campus. In a recent letter, Katie wrote that Josh, a three time state wrestling champion, *“has shown that he is more than capable to wrestle his seminary studies to the ground through his favorite training methods: time, hard work, prayer and passion. His professors have blown us away with the intellect and ability to teach.. I start feeling overwhelmed by how much Josh has learned and attempted to pass on to me, but it is a welcome overload. My view of God is expanding, meaning that I am seeing how much bigger He is when it comes to grace, love, and mercy, and my view of myself keeps shrinking.”* **Please pray for Josh as he takes finals this week and next.** Pray for this family as they travel back to Montana. Josh will be interning with me this summer. Pray that God will unite us and that we will see His hand in this church planting movement.





Luke Osborne and his wife, Amanda, and 7 month old daughter, Marybelle (“Cutie”), pictured here, are friends of the Charettes. Luke and Josh are long time wrestling buddies. A month ago, the Osbornes moved from Alaska to just down the street from us. We are grateful for their friendship. Please pray for Luke as he establishes a branch office of his Dad’s business, Hydro-Solutions, Inc., in Helena – and for Amanda as she establishes a new home for her husband and daughter. Both Luke and Amanda are graduates of the Air Force Academy. Amanda just completed her tour of duty as a helicopter pilot.

4. **Rocky Mountain Presbytery (RMP)** is a group of churches in Colorado Wyoming and Montana. I am accountable to this body of church leaders. Since some of my time is invested in the presbytery, let me give you a few updates from our, 4/25-27 meeting at Village Seven Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs.

- I am on the Christian Education Committee of RMP. That committee met with 5 men and approved that each of them “come under care and begin their internship” for pastoral ministry. I will be the liaison between the committee and Jason Musso. You will be encouraged by Jason’s story. His dream had been to be a rock and roll star. As he pursued that dream, he found his life to be empty. He returned home for his grandfather’s funeral. His grandfather had been a veteran. When the flag was presented to his grandmother with the words: “*On behalf of a grateful nation...*,” Jason wondered if anyone would be grateful for his life. As a result, he decided to abandon his rock and roll career and enlist in the Air Force.

Jason’s master sergeant often talked with him about his need for Christ and invited him to church. Jason put his faith in Christ. He is now married, the father of two sons and completing his seminary education at Denver Seminary (you may know that I began my seminary education there). Seeing the radical change that Christ has made in his life, Jason is eager to see others come to faith in Christ. He wonders if he too will plant a church in Montana. Please pray for Jason and his family.



- Via and I were married in the sanctuary at Village 7 Presbyterian Church, Colorado Springs, in May, 1976, by Bill Leonard, Art Scott, and Donovan Graham. Donovan, long time professor and chaplain at Covenant College, also married our oldest son, Jared, and his wife Rebekah – in Atlanta on the 25th anniversary of our marriage, May, 2001. Donovan and his wife are now missionaries with World Harvest in Ireland. However, in God’s good providence, Donovan was in Colorado Springs during RMP. Not only did he and I have our picture taken in the same room (now Leonard Hall – see below) where he helped marry Via and me 31 years before, he also came to visit my parents, Warren and Ruby (also see below). It is good to ponder how faithful God has been during these past 31 years – to Donovan and his family – to Village 7 – and to us. Kind providences of God, such as Donovan unexpectedly being in Colorado Springs instead of in Ireland, encourage us in the midst of this new venture. I hope you too can see the kindness of God – if not in His providences then especially in Jesus.



5. Prayer requests for our family:

- Please pray for Jared, Rebekah and Jackson – expecting Savannah in August (just before Jackson’s second birthday). The residential real estate market has cooled in Atlanta too. So, Jared is switching companies and getting more involved with selling commercial real estate. Please pray for God’s provision.
- Jordan and Claire are considering moving back to Cary, NC. Claire could apply to work as a nurse at Western Wake, and Jordan has some painting jobs lined up. He also could complete his graphics design degree at Wake Tech. Please pray for God’s direction.
- Rachel and Nathan are completing the final renovations to their Fuquay home. Please pray for it to sell. Rach will continue her Art History degree at UNC, Chapel Hill, this fall.
- Zach is studying at Capernwray, England. Pray for good fruit from these Biblical studies. He will return to Kitty Hawk, NC this summer. Micah is working in Kitty Hawk now – and making decisions about next year.
- Pray for Noah, Jesse and Isaac as they complete school – and as they pursue soccer (Jesse and Isaac – on competing teams!), track (Jesse) and piano (Isaac).
- Pray that Via and I will love each other – our children – and Helena – for Christ’s sake.

Blessings,

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