

November 2007 - Vol. 13



## [Rise O People, Called to Worship](#) by Ed Conlin, Detroit, Michigan, USA

### How does praise and worship draw us into God's presence?

*Listen to an audio clip of an awe-inspiring song of praise and discover how God wants to bring you into his courts of heavenly worship.*

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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## ***Rise O People, Called to Worship***

***by Ed Conlin***

Click  to listen to an MP3 audio clip of [Rise O People, Called to Worship](#), written by Ed Conlin and sung by [Brian Blum](#)

*Angel Song*, watercolor by [Jamie Treadwell](#)

Prayer, renewal, community, and ministry to the poor fuel Ed Conlin's inspiring and Spirit-filled songwriting. Ed is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#), a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He lives in community in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, where, as a licensed substance abuse counselor and chaplain, he serves the poor caught in homelessness and addiction. Ed has a deep desire for, and appreciation of, praise and worship as a powerful agent of transformation for communities and individuals. His lyrics are usually taken from scripture, though some spring from the early church Fathers and great writers such as Augustine and John of the Cross. We have asked Ed to tell us about worship and about one of his new songs, *Rise O People, Called to Worship*.

### ***Why do we worship?***

We were created by a God of infinite love who has called us into an intimate relationship of unity with the triune Godhead — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That unity is possible because the Father sent his Son into the world to redeem us and fill us with his life-giving Spirit.

It is our highest purpose to share the Trinity's life. This statement is the reason for our worship.

Each of us, says Augustine in his commentary on the Book of Revelations, is uniquely gifted with the ability to glorify some aspect of the Divine Beauty as no one else can.

### ***Drawn to the Lord***

Hopefully, every individual who has experienced the life of God within them can recount some brief moment in worship where every fiber of their being was overwhelmed with a sense of God's presence. We come to realize that our increasing desire for God increases our longing to give more of ourselves to him. In these encounters with God in worship we grow in our realization of the great mystery of the Trinity: the eternal exchange of infinite love ever seeking to give and receive totally.

In our community life within the Sword of the Spirit, we are especially blessed with the charismatic dimension of prayer and worship — with singing in the Spirit, praying in tongues, singing with jubilant praise and tears of joy, listening to the prophetic word, and bowing in reverent silence before the presence of the Lord. Deep worship which is reverent, non-indulgent, Spirit-orchestrated, and God-centered in praise is the treasure I believe God has given us to steward. It's a gift which I believe that God wants to give not only to those in charismatic communities and prayer groups, but to the whole Christian church.

As community members, we have covenanted our lives together to be a people of praise and worship. I believe that our brotherly and sisterly commitments are truly a sign of God's presence and work among us. Every scriptural description of heaven is replete with images of community. Gathered around the throne of God are a great company (or community) of saints and angels who join their voices in a great song of praise and worship. Here on earth, covenant commitment is a most extraordinary form of love — especially in today's secular society which places individual freedom over faithfulness and places self-indulgence over sacrifice and the common good. Covenant love is the context of our worship of God who draws us into union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and into community with one another as members of Christ's body, the church.

### Lyrics to *Rise, O People, Called to Worship* [and [audio clip of song](#)]

Rise, O people, called to worship  
 Heaven's highest praise to share  
 Clothed by God in holy splendor  
 Joined by Jesus' priestly prayer  
 Here and now we see but dimly  
 Then and there our eyes behold  
 Him who we by faith now worship  
 Soon by sight to ever know.

#### *Refrain*

You, O font of life eternal,  
 You, the source of endless joy  
 Face to face with love forever  
 "Gloria" will angels cry,  
 "Glory" will our hearts reply  
 "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord."

Lives we've offered, brought before you  
 As all heaven's hosts adore  
 Theirs with heavenly incense burning  
 Eyes to shroud your holy throne  
 Countless saints robed white in splendor  
 Washed in blood of spotless Lamb  
 Never more to thirst or hunger  
 Never more to understand.

#### *Refrain*

Every tear wiped by the Father  
 Every nation's tumult quelled  
 Lord of sea and crash of thunder  
 By his will creation stilled  
 Heaven's host then brought to silence  
 At the Lamb enthroned above  
 Then will we the silence shatter  
 Worshipping the Face of Love.

I invite you to reflect on the words of the song, 'Rise O People'. This song is an effort to raise our awareness of what we do when we gather together for praise and worship. By combining various scriptural references to heaven, this song raises our hope for the promises of God and for the eternal, beatific vision when we will see God face to face and enjoy him forever.

Verse 1 highlights the tremendous mantle of praise God has given us now as a people and the hope of heaven that this praise stirs in us.

Verse 2 emphasizes the fact that heaven's worship is rendered present to us as we enter here and now.

Verse 3 describes Augustine's vision at the window at Ostia (from Augustine's Confessions Book 2, chapter 11).

When Christ brings all of creation into submission and silence before him, then we, and all the heavenly host, will shatter this silence with praise, in an attitude of reverent wonder and awe.

As we worship in Spirit and truth, we enter heaven and heaven enters us. God becomes more present on earth, a world so needy and so dark. Worship is certainly God's due, but it is also our tremendous privilege — and the world is poorer if we fail to offer it.

[The song *Rise O People, Called to Worship* is included in a Music CD entitled, "Trust Him", produced by [In His Presence](#). The CD and sheet music can be ordered from [Tabor House](#) or from [In His Presence](#).]

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illustration by [Jamie Treadwell](#)

## ***Feast or Famine?***

### ***Part II: How should we celebrate?***

**by Bernhard Stock**

*Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said:  
 “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Let my people go,  
 that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.”  
 (Exodus 5:1)*

#### ***A feast in the wilderness***

Isn't this amazing? The Israelites have been an occupied people for 400 years in Egypt and now they ask Pharaoh to let them go so they can hold a feast to the Lord! When God was about to set his people free from slavery, he told them to prepare a feast!

As we saw in Part I, scripture teaches us that genuine feasting has its origin in God – it has eternal roots. The Book of Genesis tells us that when God created the universe, he interrupted his work on the seventh day, the Sabbath, and established a feast. All major feasts in the Jewish and Christian tradition have at their root something which God did – he delivered his people from Egypt, he gave the commandments, he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus, who died for our sins and then rose again to bring us new, unending life with him.

What can we learn from the scriptures about how to celebrate well, especially as families? In the Exodus account of the Passover, we can see a model or pattern for how God wanted his people to celebrate. The Passover (or Seder), which is celebrated every year in Jewish homes, is known in Jewish tradition as the feast of all feasts because it celebrates God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. I want to pick out three important elements for

our consideration about feasts: commemorating, giving thanks, and celebrating.

### *We feast to commemorate*

God instructed the Israelites to commemorate – to remember, recall to mind, and recount by retelling the story of the first exodus when God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt. Why do we come together, as families and community, for feasts? First to commemorate. We need to remind ourselves of the eternal reason for celebration; we have to “tell the story” – his story – and point it out to one another.

And it can be really helpful to tell it. In our community (the Bread of Life in Munich), we celebrate a big Christian passover seder every year. And at this celebration, we ask someone to “tell the story” – the story of our deliverance, our exodus, in a new and fresh way. Over the years, we have discovered more and more about the exodus, since each storyteller has his different version of it. And then, we ask someone to tell the story of our community during the last year – what God has done with us.

As a community we encourage all of our families to regularly have a Lord’s Day celebration meal in their homes on Saturday evening as a way of preparing ourselves to mark Sunday as the Lord’s Day – a day set-apart, sundown to sundown, to rest from our normal work and activities so we can honor the Lord in a special way and worship together. In the Lord’s Day celebration meal we can tell each other the stories of what God has done for us in the last week, or so. And of course, whenever the gospel is read in a celebration, it is also “telling the story”: Remember, O people of God, what great things he has done for each one of us!

When we remind ourselves of the deeds of the Lord, we should think of ourselves as participating in it again, since as Jewish tradition says, “if you don’t consider yourself as being part of it, you are not celebrating well.” This also gives us a guideline for our emotions: they should not be an expression of our personal mood, but rather an appropriate answer to the “eternal reason” of our celebration: awe in the presence of God, joy about the work of salvation, mourning for sin, attentive while hearing about his deeds (see Nehemiah 8:9-10).

### *We feast to give thanks*

Secondly, we should give thanks. Since the origin for a real celebration is not in ourselves or in something we did or achieved, it is only appropriate to give thanks and honor to the “originator,” the Lord. This is true even if we are celebrating a birthday and honoring a person, since the person could do nothing about being born, and not exist except with God’s help. So it’s appropriate also to honor not only the people, but also their parents and the Lord, who brought them into existence, and made them the wonderful people they are now. This will also keep us from sliding into a “cult of personality”, which is actually a perversion of a real celebration.

### *We feast to celebrate*

And last, of course we celebrate. Many things can work together to make a good and joyful celebration: clothing, decoration, music, arts, a good meal, dance, fellowship, talking with one another. These look different at a big occasion, than they do at a small one; but they should always strive to foster a culture of celebrating. To celebrate well, we need good preparation, good order, a sense for what is real beauty, and also discernment: for instance, dancing before the Lord (as David did before the ark of the covenant) is one thing and dancing around a golden calf is something altogether different.

When the Queen of Sheba, who did not believe in the one God, visited King Solomon, she was impressed: by the food, the clothing of his servants, the way they served, the order at the table (2 Chronicles 9:3) – she was impressed by the way he knew how to celebrate! And she ascribed Solomon’s wisdom to his God. If Solomon’s court is so wonderful, he must have a wonderful God! Could others say this about us?

### *Observing the Lord’s Day*

As an example for celebration, let’s look at the Lord’s Day. In a traditional society (like the one I grew up in northern Bavaria), the Lord’s Day started on Saturday afternoon. Everything was cleaned, the children had their

baths, and normal work ceased until Sunday evening. People really rested – no chores around the house, no washing the car, especially no shopping, and no other work. Sunday was genuinely a day of rest, a glorious interruption. And the reason for this was obvious as we all went to our respective church services on Sunday mornings. The “eternal reason” was clearly the center of the whole feast. And, of course, within the church service or liturgy, we remembered the deeds of the Lord, and we gave thanks to him. Afterwards, there was a special family meal, people wore special clothes, and there was a solemn but not stiff atmosphere, and there was fellowship with the whole family – a real celebration.

In our communities, we have the great blessing of renewing the culture of the Lord’s Day, starting it with our Lord’s Day celebration on the eve of Sunday.

Observing the Lord’s Day and celebrating it well are not only “good things”. They are vital. Scholars say that Judaism owes its survival through the centuries, and all the persecutions – and in the diaspora without a temple for almost two thousand years – to the Jews’ faithful and continuing observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath celebration in families, and then the meeting in the synagogue and the strict adherence to keeping a day of rest.

We could also have a look at other celebrations during the year: the big feasts of our salvation (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), celebrations in our communities, and personal occasions (anniversaries, birthdays, etc.). As we learn to celebrate these well, we are only anticipating the one, ultimate, and eternal celebration: the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Revelations 21) which is pointed to throughout the scriptures:

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.*  
(Isaiah 25:6-8)

[Bernhard Stock, a gifted teacher and a founding leader of [Brot des Lebens](#) (Bread of Life Community) in Munich, Germany, is actively involved in community building work for the European region of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). To read [Part I](#) of this series, see the [October 2007 Issue](#).]

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## Gifts and Graces

### *Part II: Gifts and Graces We Can Expect*

by Steve Clark

[One Day Clearly](#), painting by John Robinson

#### *Gifts are the result of the Holy Spirit working in us*

Scripture speaks about gifts and graces that come from God, to use the traditional English translations. The two words seem to be rough synonyms, although some teachers distinguish between them. They are used to speak about what God does inside of us when he takes us into relationship with himself and fills us with his Spirit. They are called gifts or graces (favors), because they are not something we can earn or acquire by our own efforts, like the skill attested by a medical degree, but are the result of the Holy Spirit working in us “as he wills.”

On the other hand, gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are not like modern birthday gifts but are more like birthday gifts used to be. I remember that when I was a child, I received toys or something similar from most people, but I could always count on my aunt, who was a somewhat old-fashioned person, to provide me with some clothing or something else “useful.” My parents seemed happier with her gift than I was.

God’s gifts, at least for the most part, are not given to us to enjoy or use for whatever we want. I once visited a park that had belonged to a duke in England. They showed us where “the lion” had been kept, a place surrounded by a strong fence. Some tribal chief in Africa had apparently sent the duke a lion as a gift. The gift, however, had a mind of its own, so there were only a very limited number of things the duke could do with him. God’s gifts are more like having a lion than having a gift certificate — they have “a mind of their own,” so to speak. We can only make use of them if we cooperate with the way they function.

The word gifts can also be misleading in another way. When we think of a gift, we think of something we can take and carry off and still make use of when the giver is gone. But the gifts of the Spirit, especially the charismatic gifts

or spiritual gifts, do not function apart from the giver himself. They are ways to receive the action of the Spirit working in and through us to accomplish some purpose that we can only serve.

### ***Manifestations of the Spirit***

On the other hand, a gift of the Spirit is not exactly the same thing as a particular action of the Spirit or a working of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discussed “spiritual things” (a phrase the RSV translates as “spiritual gifts”) like the gifts of tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, which he described as “manifestations of the Spirit” (verse 7). He discussed them in order to put them into a context that would allow the Corinthians to understand how to respond to them well.

In verses 4-6 he began to speak directly of these gifts: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.” Paul here uses three terms: gifts, services, and workings. The last word is difficult to translate but is sometimes rendered “operation” or “inspiration.” It is used to describe the fact that God at times works through us (operates through us) to get something to happen.

These three words all refer to the same set of things, but they have three somewhat different meanings. When people are “healers,” God works through them to heal, and so the healing that occurs is a work of God. At the same time, by praying for people, healers are performing a service. But also they have been given a gift that enables them to receive the workings of God that allow them to perform their service.

Having a “gift” can be distinguished from experiencing or cooperating with a “working,” as being a prophet or having the gift to be a prophet can be distinguished from giving a prophecy. The working is God’s action, God’s doing something through us. The gift is God’s having enabled us to receive his working on a regular basis. God seems willing to work through a great variety of people to heal at different times. But if we speak of someone as having the gift of healing, we mean more than that. We mean that that person can somehow tap into the working of God in a regular way and so can get more regular results than someone who just prays over another person and sees a healing.

We can, then, see the gifts and graces of the Spirit as equipping us or “programming” us, making us “spiritual receptors.” To use an analogy, the internet can send music. But if we do not have an application or program on our computer that is capable of receiving what is sent, we will never hear that music. When the Holy Spirit gives us gifts, he does something like program us—that is, change us spiritually inside—so that we can receive what he does, his “workings,” in an ongoing way.

### ***Part III will continue in next month’s issue.***

[Steve Clark is President of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). [Part I](#) of this series appeared in the [October 2007 Issue](#). This article is adapted from the book [Charismatic Spirituality: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and Practice](#), copyright © 2004 by Stephen B. Clark and published by [Servant Books](#), a division of Saint Anthony Messenger Press. Used with permission.]

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photo by [Wojtek Soleki](#)

*“For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day” (Luke 17:24).*

## The Sign of Jesus’ Return in Glory

### *Reading signs of the Lord's return*

How good are you at reading signs? The people of Jesus’ time expected that the coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by extraordinary signs and wonders. Jesus’ first coming was clouded in mystery and wonderment: a son of David born in a cave at Bethlehem; magi from the East guided by a star to worship the newborn king of Israel; a carpenter miracle-worker who gave sight to the blind and raised the dead; a suffering servant who bore the sins of many upon a cross; a risen Lord who stormed the gates of Hell to release its captives.

Jesus on a number of occasions prophesied that he would return again at the end of the world to finish the work he came to accomplish through his death and resurrection.

25 “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:25-28)



sunset over the Georgian Bay, Ontario, Canada, by Don Schwager

### ***The Day of the Lord***

The image of the “Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” is taken from the vision of the prophet Daniel (see Daniel 7:13-14). Daniel’s vision is a royal investiture of a human king before God’s throne. This king, whose authority comes from God, is given worldwide dominion and power which lasts forever. The Jews of Jesus’ day were looking for a Messianic king who would free them from foreign oppression. Jesus tells them that when he returns he will establish a universal kingdom of peace, righteousness, and justice for all.

When the Pharisees asked what sign would indicate the coming of God’s kingdom, Jesus exclaimed: “For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day” (Luke 17:24). The prophets on numerous occasions pointed to the Day of the Lord when God’s Anointed One would come with great power and glory. “Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near” (Amos 2:1).

Why did Jesus associate lightning with the "Day of the Lord"? In the arid climate of Palestine, storms were infrequent and seasonal. They appeared suddenly and unexpectedly, seemingly out of nowhere, covering everything in thick darkness. With little or no warning lightning filled the sky with its piercing flashes of flaming light. Its power struck terror and awe in those who tried to flee from its presence.

Jesus warned the Pharisees that the "Son of man" would come in like manner, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, on the clouds of heaven to bring God's judgment on the "Day of the Lord". No special sign will be needed to announce his appearance. Nor will his presence and power be veiled or hidden, but all will recognize him as clearly as the lightning in the sky.

While we do not know the time of his return, we will not mistake it when it happens. It will be apparent to all, both believers and non-believers as well. When the Pharisees asked Jesus what sign would indicate the "Day of the Lord", Jesus replied that only one sign would point to that day and that sign was Jesus himself.

### ***The presence of God's kingdom***

Jesus surprised the Jews of his time by announcing that God's kingdom was already present among them in his very person — the Son of God sent from the Father to redeem the world from sin and destruction (Luke 17:20-25). In Jesus we see the power and the glory of God's kingdom. His power overthrew the powers of darkness and sin. Jesus knew that the only way to victory was through the cross. On that cross he defeated death and cancelled the debt of sin for us. The victory of his cross opens the way for us to become citizens of God's kingdom. Do you seek the coming of God's kingdom with joyful hope?

"Lord Jesus Christ, may your kingdom come and my your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Be the Ruler of

my heart and the Master of my life that I may always live in the freedom of your love and truth."

[Don Schwager is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#) and author of the [Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations](#) website.]

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## Keeping Faith Alive for Community Kids

*Passing on a God-centered way of life that honors God and offers a Christian witness to many others*

By Dr. John Yocum

photos by David Steingruber

How do we pass on our Christian faith and help young people grow to mature Christian adulthood? Creating environments that build strong formative relationships between adults and younger people, and healthy peer relationships, are a must if we want faith to take root and grow in fertile soil. Dr. John Yocum, an elder in the [Servants of the Word](#), teaches theology at the Loyola School of Theology in Manila, Philippines, has many years of pastoral experience working with young people in North America, Europe, and Asia. While this article is primarily addressed to parents and youth workers in the Sword of the Spirit, it offers a perspective that can be helpful for all Christian parents and youth workers who strive to pass on their faith to the younger generation.

### *A complex mystery?*

This was a scary article to write. Usually I write on simple topics, like the Trinity or the relation between divine and human action in the sacraments. But “community kids”? Now there’s a complex mystery.

What do I know, after all? I wasn’t born or raised in a community. I gave my life to the Lord when I was 18 and then joined a community after my first year of college. On the other hand, I’m also not a “community parent” — or any other kind.

But, on the third hand (see: this is getting awkward already), I have been around young people my whole adult life — as a youth worker, University Christian Outreach worker, graduate student, and university teacher. And since my peers started becoming parents themselves, around 15 years or so ago, I’ve spent a lot of time with community families, enjoying that privileged access to both parents and kids that belongs to our community youth program.

I think it’s easier for an “outsider” to understand what it’s like to be a parent in a community than it is to understand what it’s like to be a boy or girl, man or woman, who is actually raised in a community. So, I took the precaution of

asking a few questions and running my thoughts by a few genuine “community kids,” as well as youth workers which helped.



### *A different world*

The first thing to say about community kids these days is that they grow up in a different world than we over-thirties did. How different is the world of a young person today? Really different. The changes I’ll note here often (not always) touch community kids less directly than other kids, but they shape the whole atmosphere they live in:

- **The Web:** I read a novel recently that centers on the life of some high school kids. Here’s a quote from one of the characters, chosen because it’s a good description of the impact of the internet on kids today, everywhere. “We’ve got about as much freedom and liberation as anyone can stand. I’ve had a computer in my bedroom since I was seven years old. I’ve had access to basically all the information in the world since I was twelve – not in a library but right at my fingertips. At the slightest whim, I can view images of just about anything that piques my curiosity. And I have. But am I better for it?”
- **Sex and modesty:** Most kids have seen simulated sexual activity on the screen by the time they’re in high school. They’ve read about it — or heard it sung about and talked about — almost daily all their lives. Many, many more kids are sexually active than 20 years ago; but beyond that, modesty in speech, dress, and attitude has eroded almost out of existence. A few years ago, a conservative Jew wrote a book with a title that sums up the change: *Doesn’t Anyone Blush Anymore?*
- **Stuff:** Few kids these days talk about money; but they definitely want lots of stuff, like nice phones, iPods (or, now, iPhones) and computers with Vista. They often unconsciously expect to have as much “stuff” starting out, say, in married life, as their parents did in middle-age. This is the marketing age. The marketers create “needs” and by the time middle-class kids finish college, they have collected a lot of needs. They spend a lot of time on their stuff, using it, or thinking about it. The dreams of poorer kids center on the same stuff.
- **Cynicism:** This is the “Yeah, right...” generation: slow to believe politicians, bishops, teachers, or parents when they talk in terms of ideals and dreams. The media have fed them with a steady diet of scandals, exposés, and unveiled feet of clay. “Show me the money.”

Community kids struggle with all those influences. And the sharp contrast between community life and life in the world around them makes for another struggle. As a couple of kids in our community youth program said to me

recently, “It’s just hard to be so different.” They can find it doubly difficult if they think they’re expected to be models. As one of our teenagers said to me, “We’re not that much better than other kids.”



### *A different entrance to community life*

They’re different from their parents too. Most of their parents had a conversion experience sometime in their youth or in early adulthood. They made a choice, took a stand, gave themselves eagerly to the Lord, and eventually joined a covenant community. (Some of us really old folks even sang about it in classics like “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.”)

Most of us came into community as a result of a powerful encounter with the Lord and with covenant community, but community kids are born into or pulled into community life because it’s their parents’ thing first. They’re in a community before they’ve made a choice, by virtue of family ties, not as a result of a life-changing experience. Their spiritual decisions are less sharply defined, and sometimes, for better or worse, they’re not even consciously made.

For adult members of the community, the series of community courses was life-forming and foundational. Most community kids hear a lot about community teaching. But they haven’t necessarily heard the teaching — including its rationale, qualifications, applications — just the conclusions, especially the dos and don’ts. They can get a little jaded; The Bare Naked Ladies’ song, “I’ve Heard it All Before” could be a community kids’ anthem.



### *A few thoughts*

The Lord has given us a great gift, a great privilege, and an important mission: Passing on a God-centered way of life that honors God and offers a witness to many, many people. Our kids are our heirs. Here are a few thoughts on passing on our inheritance.

- Be community: Pray together. Celebrate the Lord's Day together as a family and with other Christian friends. Attend community gatherings together. Community has to start in the home. But it only starts there: Send your kids to the community youth program, summer camps, mission trips, and when they reach university age to University Christian Outreach. Give them a chance to let their parents' community be "our community" from their earliest years.
- Be communicative: It's probably the case that most of our kids need more teaching, not less. A lot of it, though, should be "dialogical," especially as they grow into and through adolescence. It should come in conversations, in give-and-take. Most of our kids need more talk, but not necessarily more talks. They need to talk first of all with their parents, but also with youth workers, community "aunts and uncles", and community leaders. We need to listen, as well as talk; we need to talk because we've listened. As they grow older, we need to help them understand not just how, but why we do this or that, and why it's good.
- Be confident in helping them — and letting them — make it their own. At some point, our kids need the room to fly solo; to spread their wings and find their adult identity in our life and mission. As our kids get older, we need to give them that space. Our community formation program is designed for the transition from youth to adulthood. Kairos can offer our college students a place of discipleship in outreach. For a great number of kids a "gap year" — a year of service in another Sword of the Spirit community — has given them a "buy-in" to this adventure as truly their own.
- Last thought: We're now at the stage in our history when "community kids" are becoming community adults and "community parents." Increasingly there are men and women among us who have made the transition to adulthood within our community, and I look forward to seeing us grow from their acquired wisdom.

[This article was originally published in [True North Magazine](#), a publication of the [Ligaya ng Paginooon](#) Community in Manila, Philippines. Used with permission.]

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## ***Child-Centered Parenting***

**by Paul Dinolfo**

illustration by [Michael O'Brien](#)

Who said it would be easy raising children in the modern world? Paul Dinolfo offers some important insights, based on scriptural principles and pastoral wisdom for parents today. Paul is the senior coordinator of the Work of Christ community in Lansing, Michigan, USA. The following article is excerpted from Paul's recent booklet entitled, [Child-Centered Parenting and Family Life](#). While the booklet is primarily addressed to parents in the Sword of the Spirit communities, his insights are beneficial for all Christian parents who want to raise their children to be strong faith-filled Christians. Paul writes in the introduction: "The purpose of this booklet is to cast light on some of the problems that can develop when our priorities lack the proper balance, giving particular attention to a special challenge of our modern age: child-centered parenting. We will discuss ways to address these problems, both as parents and as communities."

### ***Conflicting attitudes towards children***

There appears to be two growing, contradictory attitudes towards children in contemporary western society. On the one hand, an alarming number of parents are abandoning, neglecting, or abusing their children. On the other hand, there are also a growing number of parents who are becoming overly absorbed in the lives of their children. While these parents are certainly well intentioned, it is wise to ask: Is this approach really good for the children?

These well-meaning parents believe that they should involve their children in an ever-expanding list of organized activities and programs. In addition, these parents believe that it is very important that they are also involved, albeit as spectators, in all their children's activities. As a result, family life increasingly revolves around and is shaped by the activities of the children. Traditional family patterns such as having dinner together, family devotions, family night, and family chores take a back seat. After all, there is only so much time. Family patterns become a low priority and, ultimately, dispensable. The family's involvement in other stable relational groupings (e.g. extended family, neighborhood community, church community) also tends to suffer, as this flurry of activity leaves little room for much beyond work and the children's activities.

This modern development is in contrast to all of human history prior to the last few decades in which:

- children organized all or most of their own non-school activities
- children were trained by their parents and teachers to integrate into adult environments
- family patterns were a priority
- the family was normally integrated as a family into larger stable relational groupings (e.g. extended family, tribe, church community, village or neighborhood community)

Today, many young people do not know how to relate well to adults and how to act in adult environments. Family structure, especially extended family structure, continues to weaken and decline; and natural community is almost non-existent. This is not good for adults or children, or for the family as a whole.

### *A significant shift in pastoral priorities*

Finally, there has been a significant shift in parental priorities. Traditionally, Christian parents have focused primarily on the character formation of their children. They believed that good character was the key to success in life. While most parents today give lip service to the importance of character, the truth is that their actions indicate a different set of priorities. Their actions would indicate that they actually believe academics, sports, talent, popularity and proximate happiness (not character) are the keys to success in life.

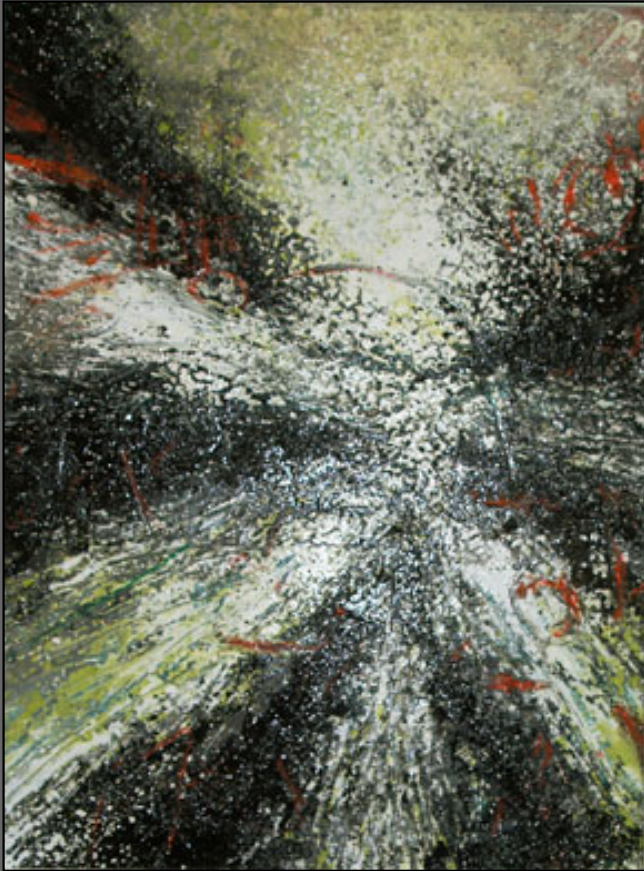
The Bible paints a radically different picture: that true happiness flows from good character and serving others. “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.” (Luke 17:33)

### **Strategies for Parents**

1. Be aware of the problem. Simply knowing the problems associated with child-centered parenting should help us to avoid it in practice.
2. Be open and accountable. We in the Sword of the Spirit have a wonderful resource in our men’s and women’s groups. In these small groups we can discuss our parenting approach and get the perspective of Christian brothers and sisters who know us and our children well.
3. Attend and review community teaching on parenting and family life.
4. Keep focused on our mission as a people: a mission that includes our children.
5. Look for ways children can serve in the home and beyond. It is good for children to have regular chores. It helps them grow in responsibility and faithfulness; it gives them a sense of place and accomplishment. It is also good for them to serve outside the family home, for example visiting elderly relatives and doing chores for neighbors with special needs. Develop your children’s talents and abilities with an eye for future service in the community.
6. Look for mature parents in your community, parents who have raised children who are righteous, responsible, faithful, and motivated. Ask them what they did and discuss your approach with them.
7. Live in community neighborhood clusters. Choose schools or home-school networks that include other community families.
8. Evaluate family decisions, especially those that consume significant time, money, and resources, with all family priorities in mind.

[The booklet, [Child-Centered Parenting and Family Life](#) can be ordered from [Tabor House Publications](#).]

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One Day Clearly

## One Day Clearly

On earth we see God in a fragmented way, but we are the fragments, Jesus' hands and feet. The more we lay down our lives for God and those around us, the more the fragments come together, and one day heaven will come to earth.

### About the Artist:

John Robinson grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is 20 years old and is currently a student at the University of Ulster art college in Belfast. He is a member of Charis Community and an evangelistic university student outreach group called TEC (Together Encounter Christ). John says, "These are an amazing bunch of people who are sold out for God, and he is stirring something exciting up among us, so stay tuned!"

"At the present time I am primarily painting. The work I have developed this year is largely about experimenting with technique in painting; colour, composition, texture.

The paintings do not tell stories, but they do create a sense of 'place'. My visual research for these paintings is to experience a place; a beach, a field, a forest, and to then try and depict something of what it felt like to be in that place. I believe the natural world can powerfully prevoke feeling and can take hold of all our senses if we let it, so I use the natural world as a logical starting point. Hopefully when people look at my paintings they will not just see but also feel."



Release



Picture of a Wave



Soak



Rolling Bright

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[Pilgrims wait for dawn on Mount Sinai, Egypt, by Don Schwager]

## ***Anna's Heir***

***poem by Jeanne Kun***

I stand, Lord, keeping eager watch  
as Anna did in distant times before me,  
filling the full measure of her years  
secluded in the temple  
in adoring expectation.  
Now I am heir to her post,  
a sentinel  
still waiting through the long darkness  
for the dawn of your return.

All my longing is for you, O Lord,  
as I stand poised on tiptoe,  
straining with my whole being  
to catch that first glimpse of you.

Shatter the darkness  
(oft times threatening to close in and surround us)

with that fierce and burning brightness  
of your splendor and your beauty.

Then I shall follow Anna's suit  
and raise my voice to you in glad thanks  
and tell of your redemption  
to all who've yearned so long for you.

[Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Copyright © 2001-2007 by Jeanne Kun. Used with permission.]

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