

# If You Knew the Gift...



*By Andrew Comiskey*

*We consider why God keeps offering Himself in the difficult, divided aspects of our lives.*

So Jesus says to the Samaritan woman as she wonders why this strangely present and powerful Jewish man is engaging her kindly (Jn. 4: 9, 10). So it is with each of us as we consider why God keeps offering Himself—pure gift—in the difficult, divided aspects of our lives. Jesus continues to her and to us: ‘... He would give you living water.’ His mercy seeks the lowest ground in us. Water does that naturally. We can stop and drink it in or continue dully, disengaged, repelling the still small voice of love with the drone of shameful, accusing ones.

If you knew the gift...A few of us are scurrying around St. Thomas More parish, prepping for the upcoming Living Waters group. That means nailing down the team and shaking shrubs for saints with secrets who are not quite sure this is the season to expose the wound or sin. ‘Stay strong—look good’, tolerate the hurt or the compromise until its thinning walls collapse (Is. 30:10-14). How much more restful to be loved rather than to stave off shame for another year! ‘If you knew the gift...He would give you living water.’

On the eve of Desert Stream/Living Waters’ 40<sup>th</sup> year, not much at core has changed since that fall in 1980 when Annette and I would drive weekly from UCLA down Santa Monica Blvd. to West Hollywood for our first group. Strange and marvelous gathering that evolved into ‘Living Waters’—from buttoned down evangelicals to shirtless actors/exotic dancers who shared a desire to know this gift, this Jesus, more than dehumanizing habits. Holy fire burned deep in the core team and drove away wolves; the house we met in became a home church where the Word became flesh and invited many to His saving mercies. Some died peaceably, struck down by HIV but raised by Jesus. Others

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made their way down Santa Monica Blvd. to our Vineyard Church in West Los Angeles. It gratified me to see friends take their places on worship and outreach teams. We grew into the gift together.

Recently at our parish my pastor declared that this extraordinary band of Samaritans would no longer have to skulk about in basement meeting rooms like Nicodemus in the dark. He opened the sanctuary for our Living Waters group so we could be near Jesus in the altar and open to the stream flowing from the Man on the huge Cross who prevails over our gathering. Through the eyes of our hearts, we behold the waters of baptism streaming down from His side to make us new, His blood becoming our Source of life. Our placement before the altar declares: 'God has arranged the body to give greater honor to the parts that lack it' (1 Cor. 12:24).

What we lack He pours out in mercy! How can we not begin our time together thanking Him for what He has done to make us His own? Our worship of the Word fills His House with fragrance, like the woman who broke open a jar of perfume to honor Jesus (Mk. 14; Lk. 7). We are grateful. Our lives depend on His. The Holy Spirit rises from our praise to His heart and He pours out more of His Spirit upon us. The water levels are rising in the temple (Ez. 47). We adore this Gift who is 'living water.'

About 25 years ago, we moved from Los Angeles to Orange County at John Wimber's invitation. He presided over what was then the seat of the Vineyard movement. John who led many young leaders loved our expression

of 'living waters'; he knew sexual and relational vulnerabilities beset the most faithful. Finding a solid and safe place to be known is the only way forward—not in spite of the Church but through the Church. That was John's commitment and ours.

To restore the saints, group waters must be clean, and dynamic. One priest from Latvia remarked that he has done Living Waters year after year because 'it is LIVING.' That means full of faith—an openness to the God who lives in faithful, humbled ones who offer their gifts, one to another. After we worship Jesus in song, we hear from a witness or two who conveys some essential truth that is mapped out in the guidebook. That truth—one of twenty lessons honed over 40 years—comes alive through a lived experience of it, at once affliction and compassion that has transformed a life.

This is how we break the demonic silence shrouding our lives. A common enemy wants to shut us down, tempting us to doubt our gift to the body. Wrong. We overcome him by declaring what Jesus has done (Rev. 12:11) My greatest joy is beholding men and women progress into dynamic witnesses of almighty mercy. The good news of their lives sets captives free! Living Waters is not the Andrew Comiskey show. It's a display of many fountains—witnesses of 'living water'—who God is raising up around the world to ensure that the Church is a safe and powerful place in which to encounter the Gift.

After the witness of transformation, we then decide if we want a similar healing. Preaching first, then signs





and wonders. We decide. Do we respond to the Word by opening our broken lives to Him? The model is simple; we can choose to get out of our pews and allow team members to be led by the Spirit and impart healing to the wounded area we are submitting to God. Each willing participant thus has an opportunity to experience healing from a variety of men and women. Such cross-pollination is crucial. With discernment, we learn to welcome team members who help us respond to the Word. Sometimes we need help to welcome His gift where it is most needed.

Not long ago, I was so moved by a witness and the invitation to come forward that all I could do was lay flat on my stomach before the Crucified. It was as if I placed my mouth at the source of an unseen stream. A couple of team members came around quietly and prayed gently for me. Not too many words—just enough to confirm that God was touching me in a deep sweet way. Heaven comes to earth as we come to know the gift of living water.

But we are tricky people. We are not made to only pursue mystical experiences of blood and water and random inspired words. We need to make ourselves known to fellow members by revealing who we are in concrete, sometimes painful ways. In same-gender small groups, we discover that we know the gift and we do not know the gift. We struggle to look people in the eyes. Our hearts can welcome life and repel it, attach too quickly then lash out and dodge behind thick walls.

So for twenty weeks we open as best we can to the love that is there. We discover a depth of wisdom and mercy

that comes from God as we learn how to listen prayerfully to each other. We fight for each other's dignity. Through daily prayer for each other. Through daily sobriety check-ins. Through hundreds of encouragements and a couple corrections. We become the body of Christ, broken for each other. We become the gift, an expression of His living water.

After twenty weeks of 'water world', I am ready to be done for a while. We've gone hard together. We will resume in a few months, with many, I hope, coming back to help me out on the team. But something has shifted in me. I am more sensitive to Annette, more alive to how women suffer in a misogynistic world and how I contribute to her hurt. I am stronger too in my masculine presence due to the ground we guys took in the small group. I am less inclined to lust and more inclined to look out for another's good. I want that more than I want fantasy.

And I've renewed love for this Church. More than ever. She is good to her sons and daughters. She gives us what we need to know the Son, who is our freedom. I am not captive to broken Christians who compose the Church; I am drawing from her Source, the Son who grants us a share in helping others know the gift of living water. **DSM**



# Recollections

*Our four children grew up surrounded by the DSM community. These relationships were fun and intentionally relational: we opened ourselves to God and each other in pursuit of wholeness. My children became friends with many of the main and plain staff persons. Having often wondered what my kids' thought of this rather peculiar 'healing' community, I asked their opinion. Here's how each replied:*

## Greg's Story

I believe one could say that, without much overstatement, to Desert Stream I owe my very existence. That is, my dad came to experience the healing power of Jesus in his life as a lost and gay-identified college student in Southern California, married my mom and started a small group in Los Angeles, turned that into vocational healing ministry in 1980, and four years later, voila.

but genuine and authentic. I have seen my parents faithfully live out some of their most integral teachings, such as becoming a good gift to the other and finding strength in one's brokenness. Growing up, they argued loudly and loved deeply. He held her hand, affectionately embarrassed her in public, spoke to her as an equal partner, and strove to meet her needs.

I overheard many kitchen conversations of them hammering out difficult ministry-related issues in partnership. They have been completely faithful to each other in marriage. When my dad would travel all over the world for the ministry when I was a kid, sometimes for up to two and three weeks at a time, he called home almost every day to see how we were doing. In the meantime, my mom miraculously cared for four little kids on her own without seemingly breaking a sweat.

Desert Stream was a focal point of my childhood in many ways, but it's not like we discussed brokenness and sexual healing at the dinner table. My parents were just good parents – involved and present in our lives, continually encouraging and curious, and modelling faithful Christianity. And of course, I have been abundantly blessed by exposure to Desert Stream my whole life, through attending various conferences, hearing my parents teach, being around the ever-changing ministry staff (some of whom are like family), and, as a kid, travelling with my dad to places like British Columbia, France, England, and Switzerland.

However, if you're reading this, you likely have more practice with the actual work of the ministry than I, and I'm thankful for all of you. I believe as deeply as you that God will continue to use Desert Stream to proclaim Jesus' healing power to broken people for 40 more years and counting. That is in large part due to the steadfastness of my parents who, like the psalmist, have walked in integrity and trusted in the Lord without wavering. **DSM**

My three siblings and I are the fruit of God's deep and enduring work. When I think about my appreciation for Desert Stream, I will always first think about my parents' faithfulness over the years – their endurance, humility, openness to God, humor, and integrity. For example, I know my dad's heterosexuality as nothing



Left, Comiskey kids, Christmas 1990.  
Right, Greg and family, 2018



# Katie's Story

*The Gospel message to redeem brokenness had been weakened to palliative care.*

Due to the international reach of my parents' ministry, I have had the rare luxury to travel the world with my dad. From France to Australia, Venezuela to Bahrain, I have visited beautiful and diverse places. And while I cherish the memories of these travels, what really sticks with me is this: the power of God to redeem, fully and completely. These trips with my dad were not simply for pleasure but for ministry, often international Living Water trainings. While the places and people were diverse, the testimony of God was singular: the power of God to redeem, fully and completely.

I recall vividly the beautifully redeemed in churches all over the world who shared their stories of God's redemption—how the greatest areas of sin and brokenness had been cleansed and made new by the merciful love of the Father.

It is this I value most, the total and transformative power of the Gospel message: Jesus' commitment to heal and redeem completely, no matter how deep or grievous the

human brokenness. As a modern-day American Christian, however, this claim is almost counter-cultural. I remember sitting with friends at my seminary in Alabama, a bastion of Christian conservatism. A conversation arose about people who struggled with same-sex attraction, and my peers' consensus was clear: God will give those individuals the grace to live a celibate life and to endure the power of these illicit temptations.

My heart broke! Even among my most devout Christian friends, the power of the Gospel message to redeem brokenness had been weakened to palliative care. Yet as I shared with my friends my own personal testimony of God's redemption, the Lord strengthened my conviction. I believe unwaveringly in the power to Christ to redeem and heal in the most radical way: our Savior was not crucified and resurrected so his people could simply "grin and bear" their brokenness.

Growing up as a child of DSM, my life is literally a product of this redemptive work of God. My father and mother's life were transformed by the redemptive work of God, producing both a fruitful family and ministry. My brothers and I prove that God's redemptive work not only mends our wounds but restores and renews what was once marred by sin.

Paul writes in Romans 8:9 that "neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord". This love which is so close to us as to be inseparable is also redemptive. I am convinced that to know the Crucified Jesus intimately is also to know the power of that love to heal and sanctify our most ugly, painful areas of brokenness and sin. It is by no means an instant work whereby all our sinful tendencies are quickly forgotten. But it is a total one, where God's grace and mercy enables us to carry out His work of redemption in hope and steadfastness.

As such, grounded and buoyed by the transformative work of God, I am honored to serve at a local Living Waters group in Kansas City. It is a gift to continually witness the beauty of God's redemptive work in the people of my own community. While perhaps less exotic than my earlier globe-trotting days, God's redemptive work continues, a beautiful and necessary gift to His Church all over the world. **DSM**

*Below, Katie leads the pack, 1992*





# Nick's Story

Nearly all of who I hope to be as a Christian, husband and pastor has been shaped by my parents' work at DSM. I bear its imprint and hope to continue its legacy in the following ways:

**Focus:** Can you believe Andy and Annette started DSM 39 years ago? Do you know anyone in the Christian world who has stayed as faithful and worked as diligently to realize their vocation? It's one thing to extoll a "long obedience in the same direction"; embodying it is quite another. I think often about the untold number who trace their 'good enoughness' to involvement in DSM. I hope my life is characterized by the same focus and fruitfulness.

**Courage:** The work of DSM only gets harder. Ministering healing to the sexually and relationally broken was uncomfortable 15-years-ago. Now it's almost illegal. But my parents will not be deterred. Their confidence in the good news for broken image-bearers is stronger than their fear of derogatory labels. It's a courage that continues to amaze me and has (seemingly) never been in shorter supply.

**Balance:** My parents are fun. Our home was a place of laughter, amazing cooking and spirited debates about music, movies and literature. It's easy to tell a story about all the sacrifices my parents made to make the work of DSM possible. And there were surely sacrifices. But I was not one of them. And I always knew my siblings and I were my parents' first priorities. These notes are living proof! They found creative and effective ways of engaging with us as we navigated childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. If it was up to my Dad, we'd be having heart-to-heart conversations once a week! I strive to emulate them professionally, but it is even more important to me to be like them at home. They balance they struck was remarkable. **DSM**

Left, Christmas 1990.

Below, vacation in British Columbia, 1993





# Sam's Story

In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, my school put on a compulsory sex education lecture. What sex is, the dangers of unprotected sex, why you should wait to have sex –my 13-year-old mind was a bit overwhelmed. Still, I possessed a quiet confidence that none of my peers sensed. Sex, you see, was kind of the family business.

As a child of Andy and Annette Comiskey, and therefore Desert Stream, I was familiar with the idea that sexuality was complex, relational, and only sanctified in a marital bed. But should I comment? Should I do what I was prone to do in class and enthusiastically raise my hand and impart my bit of knowledge? As we watched cartoon videos of male and female genitalia, it didn't seem like I had an opportunity.

Until, that is, the lecturer drolly delivered the name of the STD's that awaited the promiscuous. When she reached "HIV," she asked if anyone there knew anyone that suffered from HIV. I couldn't have raised my hand any higher. The lecturer gave me a compassionate smile and half nod; I had permission to speak. In front of the entire 7<sup>th</sup> grade!

"Yeah, my Dad works with a lot of people that used to live a gay



lifestyle so I actually know a lot of people that have HIV or AIDS. It used to be a lot worse but now it's like most people like that can be really healthy."

"Ok..." the lecturer responded.

I looked away from the lecturer and to my peers. Would they be impressed by my unique experience?

My acquaintance, Tim, looked at me with abject confusion on his face. He whispered to me, seething with reproachful astonishment.

"Used to be gay? What?"

"What," another friend Michelle whispered, her eyes narrowed to incredulous slits, "are you talking about?"

The lecturer moved on, and luckily no one else mentioned my "gaffe." Walking home that day, I realized that, outside of our church and the Desert Stream staff activities (dinners, Oscar parties, staff retreats to Disneyland) I attended, this type of sexual transformation was not considered normal. To the secular world, it was a foreign concept.

As I trudged home, though, I felt no uncertainty. My formative childhood memories brim with adults I admired, people who were interesting, funny, kind, and relational adults. Many of them had a history of sexual brokenness and healing. The conviction I felt was clear and razor sharp –these adults, my parents, my life are not fake! Not false! Any idea indicating otherwise was simply ignorant, willful or otherwise.

There, in that moment, I was struck by the courage of these adults. Their lives and testimonies were living proof of the biblical truth the world was desperate to stifle. How beautifully transgressive! I made it home, my grateful heart effusive with admiration. **DSM**

Left, Vacation in Monterey, CA, 1999

Above, Sam's wedding 2015





# Standing in True Mercy:

## My Experience of 40 Years of Desert Stream Ministries

by Bonnie Glover Stalls, Ph.D.

In the early 1980s as a graduate student doing linguistic research in the Middle East, I met the Lord Jesus Christ and became a believer. But the revelation that God is alive and loves me enough to have died for me did not change my other separate identity as a lesbian—I had a history of relationships with women and could not deny that part of myself.

My attempts to find truth I could live with came up empty: there was no way forward in the blind condemnation of many at that time nor in the bending of scripture by others to include people like me. The non-denominational church I had

started to attend would surely call out my lifestyle and desires as sin if they knew. I thought I would always have to lead a secret double life, as though I were living alone inside a kind of bubble with no hope of escape.

Then one day over lunch a fellow grad student, also a believer, shared with me that he had been ministered to in a deep inner part of his life. This resonated with me in a way that nothing else had—maybe something deeper was also going on in me. There was a ministry at my church to those in sexual sin—Desert Stream—which I had heard about but dismissed as of no use to me (and maybe I could tell them a thing or two!).

Now I had to humble myself and reconsider. My first Desert Stream meeting was a source of immediate relief—others were struggling with these same issues! Then, in the course of many further Desert Stream meetings and counseling, anchored to the truth in Jesus, long-buried unresolved feelings about myself as a woman and my relationships with other women began to emerge. I went through the second ever official Living Waters group, and, in the shared freedom of acknowledged sexual brokenness, the primal pain at the root of all those feelings and desires was able to come out.

I began to feel less estranged from myself as a woman and found hope. The Lord was truly making a new way forward, and I was no longer trapped in the bubble—I had outgrown it.

I have now been married to my loving husband for 33 years, and we have two grown sons. It has been tremendously freeing in this latter half of my life to see people as they are and not to judge them principally any more through the lens of a 'gay' worldview, but instead to be able to interact with them as myself, a woman.

Over the past four decades, as I have continued to grow, from time to time I have dropped in to Desert Stream meetings held in my area and never failed to find there that same acceptance of brokenness and the same truth about the gift of our identities as men and women in Christ—a fountain from which to drink deeply.

Ten years ago, I was privileged to come full circle and participate in a Living Waters Training in the Middle East to those suffering from the same problems that I had faced. In an increasingly aggressively secular time when I see the chaos and confusion and deep inner pain of those who are struggling with these issues, I am in awe of what the Lord has done and is doing through this ministry as it continues to speak truth and equip the church to extend true mercy to those who are seeking it, not only in the United States but in many parts of the world. **DSM**



Above, Bonnie (center in red blouse) and Bahrain Living Waters Team, 2010



# A Transformed Life:

## My Experience of 40 Years of Desert Stream Ministries

By Jonathan Hunter

*"The Glory of God is a Person Fully Alive" – St. Irenaeus*

**I**t was 35 years ago to the date of this writing that I first ran into Andrew Comiskey in the lobby of a funky old movie theatre that hosted the Santa Monica Vineyard's Sunday services. It was an encounter that would change my life forever. After some frank conversation about my homosexual past and my solitary journey out of it, Andrew invited me to join the "18 Week Series" (*Living Waters*) already in progress, thinking it might be helpful. I recall musing to myself: O.K. But how many more people could there be in L.A. that have gone through what I have?!

**It's no exaggeration to say** that from the moment I walked through the door of that class, confronted with over 25 men and women like me, a whole new Kingdom-world opened up. Over the subsequent weeks of Spirit-filled teaching and healing, the joy of discovering my true identity in Christ became irrepressible good news I couldn't wait to share with others. An early recipient of my evangelical fervor was the brother of a former partner of mine who was recently diagnosed with AIDS. He would become the first of many that I visited, prayed with and contended for in LIFE.

**Not too long into this new calling** of mine, Andrew pointed out that God was forming a new ministry in those visits to AIDS patients. "What's a ministry?" was

my reply. Having previously been an actor/model for 15 years, I simply had no context for what he was even talking about. But, sure enough, within a year I would become part of the DSM staff (where I served for 20 years), overseeing its outreach AIDS Resource Ministry (ARM) which later became Embracing Life Ministries (ELM) a healing, equipping ministry in its own right.

**How the times have changed** since those early, scrappy days of ministry back in the eighties. That virulent, hopeless scourge of AIDS is now a treatable, manageable condition and yet the primary means of its transmission – sexual promiscuity – has increased exponentially. At such a critical

stage, with post-mod-ern identities in shards, the healing ministries of Desert Stream, in particular *Living Waters* have never been more relevant, vital, and essential for preparing the Bride for her Savior-Groom's Second Coming!

**The message of true transformation in Christ**– which is the essence of *Living Waters* – that first took root in me in 1984; that compelled me to reach out to the AIDS-affected; that was my assurance when I found was HIV+, is as compelling as ever! The Lord is so pleased in the offering initiated by the obedience of one man and has seen fit to advance Desert Stream and the restorative ministry of *Living Waters* in ways unimaginable 40 years ago!

God always wills that we be conformed to the image of His Son. Just so, countless men and women around the world are boldly and joyfully testifying to "Christ in me the hope of glory" because of Desert Stream's forty years of obedience and service to the Body of Christ. **DSM**



Above, DSM staff with Jonathan Hunter (bottom left), 2001

*The healing ministries of Desert Stream, in particular Living Waters have never been more relevant.*



# Witness

By Marco Casanova

The salvation of the world hinges on a “yes”. Not too long ago, the Lord had me on a course that I assumed was smooth sailing. Having been in the seminary for eight years, I was determined to follow through with ordination to the Catholic priesthood. Areas of broken sexuality guided my conscience to delay that ordination, but I was



Above, Marco teaching at a Living Waters Training, 2019

still determined to resume the priestly journey. Jesus of Nazareth called me much deeper than I was looking. He used the “yes” of one Andrew Comiskey. His “yes” shook my reality.

Six years into the seminary, I read Andrew’s book, “Strength in Weakness”.

Recommended by a professor, it shook me, because it encountered me where I had yet to go. It planted something in me.

In the delay period of ordination, a priest mentioned a “Living Waters” training. This nudged that small seed. It gave way for the Incarnate Jesus to crush that seed in me, changing the trajectory of my plan. I gave my life to Jesus *again*. This time, He wanted my plan. I gave it.

I rerouted my road to the priesthood. I wrestled with “what to do” after leaving, and

shakily gave thought to becoming a Desert Stream Ministries intern. Then something dropped in me; I wasted no time and moved to Kansas City. Andrew asked me to work closely with him on the revision of the Living Waters guidebook, this most essential offering of Desert Stream Ministries. Me, a near stranger to the ministry, now invited to help refine what guides persons around the globe into deeper wholeness! This whole experience seemed beyond me – wonderfully humbling. I had pursued my own plan for so many years. Now, I felt the Lord pursuing me and commissioning me for extraordinary purposes.

This revision was no hurried task. It called for a line-by-line marathon with these dense chapters. My lean acquaintance thickened through hard work. The Good News is demanding, but delightful. Chapter Eight, for example, describes the vulnerability of “desire” to false objects that eventually plea for a bended knee. Such sin creates not a refuge, but a tomb. What sobering good news! Crushing idols frees me to surrender more fully to Jesus, proclaiming that the creature lives not to complete me. “We become thankful for the half-full cup rather than curse the other’s emptiness” (Chapter 15). Being a witness is like running a marathon, often tempted by a slothful forfeiting of the arduous race. Jesus called me to embody this work of revision. Go deeper. “We who presume to be more ‘whole’ than we are cease to be pilgrims” (Chapter 20).

I realized something. Essentially, this guidebook is the fruit of a witness. It’s born out of Andrew’s encounter with Jesus and thousands he has served, guided by the minds and words of fellow witnesses who enlightened his path. People from St. John Paul II, Leanne Payne, Joseph Nicolosi, Karl Barth, Gerald May, Pope Emeritus Benedict, C.S. Lewis, and Christopher West are caught up in this procession of prophetic impartation. It stirred a desire in me to be caught up in this procession. It helped me to proceed in trust. It’s been the cheering force behind me, from which I’ve been thrust into this new phase of what I can now see as a decade-old training. I want to be a witness to Jesus too. I want to be caught up in this marathon, this procession of witnesses.

My “yes” is a participation in a bigger fiat. Mary’s “yes” in Nazareth, Jesus’ “yes” on Calvary, Andrew’s “yes” forty years ago...it shakes the world. Imagine what your “yes” can do. **DSM**



# Legacy

By Abbey Foard

*We will continue to go to the nations with joy and a sense of awe and wonder.*

In the middle of a humid Filipino April, high praises were lifted in 3 languages: English, Tagalog (native Philippine language) and Mandarin. We worshipped God with inspired spirits, glorifying Him for all He was doing during our weeklong training; our joy sprang from many nations gathering together—the Philippines, China, India, and the USA.

At our International Leaders' Summit in August 2019, leaders from all over the world shared about the Spirit-inspired labor of Living Waters in their countries. Leaders from the US came too and intermingled with the Internationals and hearts were knit between nations, from France to Lithuania, Thailand to New Zealand, Chile, Hong Kong and beyond.

At the end of June, a powerful and prophetic Polish team prostrated itself before the Lord, interceding and crying out to the Lord for healing in the land. Sexually abused individuals opened to God with profound need. Others asked God to touch the Church and make her pure and holy—a vessel worthy to continue to extend the mercy She first received. United, we asked God for His real presence.

In all the nations, God is on the move. We are privileged to enter into these lands for brief moments: trainings, conferences and celebrations like in France where decades-long national coordinator of Living Waters, Werner Loertscher, passed the torch to new leader Claude Reiss, now charged with

sowing 'living' seeds of life throughout the French-speaking world.

We will continue to go to the nations with joy and a sense of awe and wonder that God would use us to impart Living Waters abroad. Our international work reinvigorates the work we do in the United States and in the same way, the nations are invigorated by the gift we bring—the fruit of the Living Water in our own lives.

And when we see the example of ones like Werner, who knows what he stewards is valuable and seeks to ensure it continues for generations to come, we are reminded of the legacy we must continue to impart.

Whether we have the history of Andrew and Annette, who have faithfully done this work for 40 years, have been “in the water” for 12 years like I have, or are brand new, we know that Living Waters is about legacy. It is about coming into greater maturity and always (always!) imparting that to

others—fathers and mothers to sons and daughters. It is about the Kingdom come, in this day and in the generations beyond. Please pray for us as we continue to follow the Lord's leading and open doors. We seek to go only where He leads. **DSM**



*Above, Abbey teaching at a Living Waters Training, 2019*



# A Heart of Flesh

By Annette Comiskey

WHEN ANDY STARTED the West Hollywood support group in 1980 (that eventually became Living Waters), I admired the ones who attended. Same-sex attracted men and women were seeking God for healing in their admitted brokenness! But I saw them as “other” than me--in a condescending way, more broken.

During our first Living Waters pilot group in autumn 1981, the Lord challenged the limits of my love for people who weren't like me. He asked me if I would allow Him to change my heart. Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”, became the cry of my heart. The Lord transformed my heart of judgement to compassion; this has served me well for forty years.

But ministry is hard work. Blessings abound alongside many bumps. One of the most difficult things is when you accompany people for years in real progress, however slow, then they decide to return to their old ways and blame you for it!

I have learned to shake things off and keep moving forward. But my heart was becoming hardened. In truth, I judged these people and began to see them as enemies, not lost souls. It was easy to have compassion and mercy for persons pursuing chastity but hard to trust Jesus with wanderers and blamers.

This last year the Lord has challenged me again, but without me knowing it! Over the past several months I have experienced events that deeply wounded my heart. But unlike how I usually dealt with disappointments, I couldn't shake these off. I began to see how hurts impact our hearts in ways that do not quickly heal. I have never suffered from depression and though I still don't, I've experienced a profound sadness that has helped me understand how someone could be tempted to end their life.

One incident stayed with me for months; I relived it time and time again. I realized how deeply trauma lodges in our hearts and this has given me great empathy for those who suffer forms of PTSD.

Almost every morning my prayer was asking the Lord to lift the sadness, fear and hurt I was experiencing. But He didn't. I started asking Him why he was keeping me in a place of grief. The answer came in one word: mercy.

My aching heart needed mercy. The Lord knew I needed kindness, not a pep talk. Where I was angry at myself for not moving on from hurt and pain, the Lord was wanting to show me compassion. I had lost sight of how His mercy had healed the hurt of sexual abuse. His forgiveness had released me from how I had sinned against others.

As I look ahead to future service, I know Jesus is calling me to be a merciful witness. He will help me to not judge others by their actions and choices but to understand them as desperately needing the kindness of God and to trust Him for their healing, however He imparts it. **DSM**



## 2019 Year End Report

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## Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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