



Published by Desert Stream Ministries

Twenty-Eight Years of Healing, Equipping, and Proclaiming.

Rebuilding God's House *for the Life of the World*

By Andrew Comiskey



Andrew Comiskey

I love the local church. I discovered early on as a broken addictive Christian that without the body I was a dead duck. Eating God—communion with Himself and the saints—was the only way to live! Without holy meals, I knew I could sicken on the garbage of the world and die.

I discovered my purpose in life as I said yes to God and sought to build up His bride. In gratitude, I wanted to bless her as she had blessed me through the saints.

And I realized something else: the Church is the hope of the world. Jesus, referring to the heavenly meal which is His body (John 6:51), said: "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." God wants us to give away what we have been given. Communion with Himself and one another is for more than just our peace and sobriety. It's for them, the world.

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"Be strong, all you people of the land," declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'"

Haggai 4b - 5

He feeds his broken ones & gives them

Rebuilding God's House...

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We are the broken, being healed body: a real meal, a holy offering we extend to every suffering soul who longs to make the great exchange: dehumanizing desires and relational patterns for the dignity and fulfillment only Jesus can give.

This exchange occurs through His body! The Church is a place of His Presence, the place where He dwells and offers Himself over and over again as the meal that can feed us forever. Yes the whole earth is full of His glory but His glory is intensified, magnified if you will, when we gather in His Name.

We must be particular here and join one church. Many concede to the 'Church Universal' but never commit to one place in particular. We deceive ourselves here. We need to commit to a particular vision and submit rightfully to a particular set of saints who are committed to helping us grow up. They do this by provoking our unhealed areas, and also by provoking us to realize our gifts and by building up the local church.

Why? Because God is a realist. He wants us to grow in love with people. We cannot do that with an ever-changing sea of Christian faces. Love demands trust and sacrifice and both can only be established by gathering regularly with the same imperfect set of people.

Mystical ideas of the ideal community can ruin us to this truth: God's greatest call on our lives is to learn to love. That occurs first and foremost with the lumpy, temperamental saint sitting right next to us on the pew of our local church.

Then we can gather together and offer ourselves as a piece of heavenly bread to the world. That's what we have been doing this year in our local church. Through CrossCurrent and Living Waters, we have sought to be a meal for others.

That's been costly. Gathering is tough to do. Especially in times of personal distress, we



Self-protective churches have shut the doors of the 'ark'...

In our insulated small-mindedness, we become guilty of a sin greater than perversion—self-preservation.

as healers tend to want to avoid the gathering and create a safe place for ourselves.

We get overwhelmed and can feel out of control in our civilian lives. Then the body and her call to the world can become one more demand, more a place of conflict than peace and purpose. We may then prioritize according to our comfort and place 'gathering' at the bottom rather than at the top of our list.

But self-preservation is costly too! Think of the meals that are killing those who don't know that Jesus offers the real meal. Think about the sexual and relational holocaust people find themselves in today.

Internet pornography has enslaved over

one-third of teenagers in our culture. A generation has been bombarded by false images that have power to distort normal desire into perverse and exaggerated passions. Virtual sex is the fastest growing addiction in the world today. A generation is lost in cyber-space—ashamed, silent, bound.

Promiscuity flourishes among young adults. Your average college student has 10 partners during the 4-year run. One in four female teens has a sexually-transmitted disease. It's common today for friends have sex with friends for the sensation of it, without thought of romance, let alone commitment.

Maybe it's the culture of divorce they have grown up in. We live in an age where splitting up is the most common solution to marital problems. Kids learn early to distrust the commitments parents make. In turn, children of divorce are hobbled in their capacity to make good choices and commitments themselves.

Narcissism, or an inability to give oneself genuinely to another, has reached an all-time high. Now college students are twice as likely as students 25 years ago to form unfaithful relationships marked by violence, dishonesty, and manipulation.

On that ground, homosexuality emerges as something hip, sexy, and cool. In the last decade, lesbian unions multiplied 14X in the USA; male behavior, 4X. The Internet has opened up a gay superhighway: gay porn sites and chat rooms were visited 20 million times in 2004.

Throughout the west, courts and legislatures are falling prey to the lie that homosexuality is like ethnicity—a sacred, unchangeable personal civil right that deserves full marriage and family benefits on par with heterosexuals. In today's culture, the only problem with homosexuality is the one you have with it.

Not surprisingly, people are now changing their bodies to fit their self-image. A woman in Oregon surgically assumed male body parts. Sue became Jim then

a fighting chance to arise into wholeness

announced she was pregnant. So a transgender man just became the mother of a little girl.

Where is the way out? We gather, we eat God, we commune together, and open up the meal to others. And the seekers come...

Recently, a weary group of healers (me included) gathered for an open Cross-Current group. I did not want to do it. Some of my peers felt the same. But each week, God sent another survivor of the holocaust who wanted a real meal: a woman seduced into lesbianism, a young man with same-sex attraction about to start University, a couple in marital crisis, an abused woman on the verge of a breakdown, sex addicts, the list goes on. We gathered, and God multiplied our offering. He fed His broken ones and gave them a fighting chance to arise into wholeness.

The prophet Haggai understood the priority of gathering, of coming together to rebuild the God's house. He was a Jew who had been in captivity under foreign hands. As a freed slave, Haggai received God's call to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Haggai was not unlike St. Francis. Francis was a rich party kid, a nominal Christian at best. Yet God called him out of debauchery and into radical service to rebuild the Church. The Church of the 13th century was in gross disrepair due to political battles, economic crises, and compromise among the clergy.

In the early months of his conversion, Francis stumbled upon a broken down church. "San Damiano" had all but an altar and crucifix in tact. While praying before the cross in the desolate sanctuary, he heard Christ speak from it: "Francis, go and repair my house, which you can see is all being destroyed."

Is God's house in disrepair today?

Consider the disorder of bad religion. Self-protective churches have shut the doors of the 'ark'. While awaiting the

rains, they participate in a premature judgment of the lost. As such, they heap judgment upon themselves. As if we in our petty traditional sins are not in need of the same blood to cleanse us of bad religion! In our insulated small-mindedness, we become guilty of a sin greater than perversion—self-preservation.

Saving our lives, we lose them. And the lost go hungry. No mercy, no meal. We need to hear again Jesus' words spoken to the Church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-18.

Other churches react to bad religion by embracing sexual and relational brokenness. Thinking themselves just, they are actually withholding the real meal from the dying.

Beware of new strains of the old liberalism in some of the 'emergent church'. Going to great lengths to offend no-one, they mute hard truths and thus leave room for falsehood. These are the ones like the Church at Thyatira who have tolerated teachings that lead Christians into sexual immorality. Jesus says that those who par-

ticipate in this heresy will suffer intensely... (Rev. 2: 18-25)

We need to follow Francis back to the desolate sanctuary. Like him, we can gather with other being-healed ones and create a meal for the poor. Haggai knew this. He was looking for builders who would come alongside of him and help him rebuild the temple. They were reluctant to do so.

Subject to merciless political and economic realities, they were inclined to withhold their offering from the temple. They were tired. And uninspired. Years of exile had taken a toll on their spirits. Maybe they had lost hope for the glorious realities of God's house.

Still Haggai implores them: "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house remains in ruins?" (1:4)

Back to self-preservation. Like us in our overwhelmed states, the Hebrews chose to invest in what they could control—their own paneled houses.

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We gather, we eat God, we commune together, and open up the meal to others. And the seekers come...

Rebuilding God's House...

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Haggai challenges that decision. He wonders: "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home I blew away. Why? Because of my house, which remains in ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house." (Hag. 1:9)

So let's reconsider how much we are investing in the house of our own design. Perhaps your local church needs the paneling only you can offer her. My encouragement? Build God's house first, then everything else will be added to you...Matthew 6:33: The local church is the best approximation of God's Kingdom on the earth today; it is the gathering place where the hungry get fed, and go from death to life.

We need our vision restored of God's house, to see it as God does. Haggai acknowledged this when he pointed out the broken down temple to the workers: "Who of you is left who saw this house in

her former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to look like nothing?" (Hag.2:3)

We need renewed vision to behold the body and her potential to heal the broken.

That occurs as we consider our own stories: our personal 'exiles' and the emptiness that we were rescued from by God's grace and house. As Moses said to the Israelites, "Love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt." (Deut. 10:19)

Mercy motivates us to gather. And God empowers us. Haggai 2: 4 and 5 reads: "But now be strong all you people in the land," declares the Lord, "and work. For I am with you," declares the Lord Almighty. "This is what I covenanted with you when I brought you out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

The very purpose for our season in Egypt? To gather and rebuild God's house. For the hungry. To become the bread that feeds

the world and rescues them from death.

We must make a decision to gather and build and feed. But our choice is not empowered by sheer force of our will and energies: We do so out of the greater Presence that resides in the place where we build.

We labor in His Presence and gather. And we are refreshed. We are built up and God uses us to build her up, His house, His bride.

We get rich when we work to make her rich. Haggai inspired his workers with this truth about the house they were rebuilding: "I will fill this house with my glory," declares the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace.'" (vs. 7-9)

That peace refers to an all around prosperity for those who gather, builders and broken ones alike. That Hebrew word for peace includes spiritual calm, mental and moral and relational well-being, as well as material blessing.

Most are starved for all of the above. Jesus is able to feed His broken ones. He does so as we gather one humble group at a time in the context of the local church. I was amazed at our simple 8 weeks in CrossCurrent. In a brief period of time, God reclaimed lives: He exchanged rags for spiritual riches, poisons for precious meals.

Through us! We gain our lives when we lose them in His service. Forget self-preservation and paneled houses—they can rob us of real life. I want to be where God is, and He is found extraordinarily in His House. When we invest there, He blesses us richly and unexpectedly.

Renew our vision, O God, for Your House. Make us truly rich as we rebuild her; may our glorious offering give life to the world. **DSM**



The Church is a place of His Presence, the place where He dwells and offers Himself over and over again as the meal that can feed us forever.

The Trouble *with Paneled Houses*

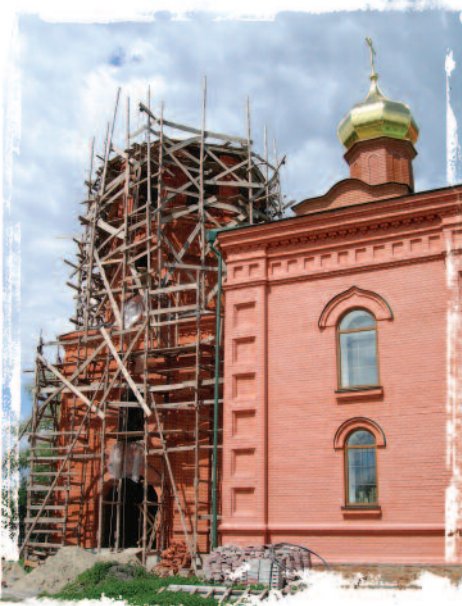
“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” **HAGGAI 1:4**



By Mike Nobrega

This last year has been a little rough – family disappointments, marital crises around me, my brother diagnosed with a very serious cancer. All drained me emotionally. Since my brother and I work together, his illness also affects my work load at a time in life in which I was hoping it would be easing up a bit. I felt my world was unraveling.

Talking and reasoning to myself, I started coming up with all kinds of justifications to drift away from doing Desert Stream groups. “I’ve given it about 15 years and starting over again in a new church is a younger person’s game”. “Life is full of seasons – maybe the Desert Stream ‘season’ is over.” And finally - “With all the change and work demands, I’ve got to conserve myself – guard my life and energy – by taking it easy.”



I made assumptions about what I needed and how to best preserve my life. My focus wasn't on rest but on retreating within myself, mostly because of emotional weight. Under a misapplication of setting “good boundaries”, I was building walls of self-protection.

At what I anticipated could be the last CrossCurrent meeting I would be leading for a while, I was reminded of what I had been telling LW applicants over the years. While it blesses me to be part of helping others in their healing journey, much of my reason for leading LW was to become more secure and grounded in what He is doing in me personally. Though the seeds of His good work in me were bearing fruit for others, I benefited with an expanse of roots which secured me in life-giving soil.

The scripture jumped in my mind, Mark 8:35: “If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life.” I was desperately trying to save and preserve my life, but my sense of well-being was

I made assumptions about what I needed and how to best preserve my life... Under a misapplication of setting “good boundaries”, I was building walls of self-protection.

elusive, the thirst for “true life” unquenched. The Lord spoke to my heart that for me to hold back in self-protection would be setting myself adrift, riding a potentially carnal current.

The fresh revelation that “losing my life” would actually feed my own life transformed my feelings. I experienced a new energy and perspective - a deeper truth than my own of “self-protection”. If I surrendered as a seed then I could bear fruit for others while continuing to draw life. The ‘weight’ of ministry was replaced by the reassurance of His care. In losing my life to serve others, I am finding new life. **DSM**

Home *Again*

By Pamela King

As a young believer in a faith-filled family, my early relationships were developed within my home church. However, during junior high, after being betrayed by some of these significant relationships, I withdrew, and from then on, pursued friendships outside the church.



Pamela King

As one would expect, this led me to make some unhealthy and sinful choices during high school and even into my college years. I finally had enough of the world! I renewed my earlier commitment to Christ, and soon became involved in a growing and relevant movement within the body of Christ.

Even so, my defensive walls were thick. Although I developed a couple key friendships, I approached each new acquaintance with the suspicion that they may damage my wounded self. I carried around a lot of shame related to my past sinful choices, which influenced how I saw my heavenly Father — already distorted based upon the rejection I felt from my earthly father.

I believed my value was based upon my ability to perform adequately as a Christian, and therefore, I did not have a personal understanding of the sufficiency of Christ's work on the Cross. From a detached, walled-off place, I observed oth-

ers and believed the lie that everyone else had God's approval based upon what I thought to be their seamless ability to receive His grace.

Over the years, I'd had members of ministry teams pray for me, but had only shared bits and pieces of my shame. Progress was slow. Friends who knew of my self-reproach puzzled over why I struggled with so much insecurity. Yet even their acceptance of me did not set me free from that shame.

In God's mercy, I was encouraged to become involved in the Living Waters program in 1996. There I experienced God in a new way, and began to be set free. The women in my small group ministered God's forgiveness and acceptance; I found that they did not reject me, even as I became truly known by others in my brokenness! They spoke words of knowledge regarding God's love for me and pointed me to the Cross, where my true self as a child of God became reestablished. This new understanding of my true self in Christ grew as I received and accepted an accurate reflection of how He saw me.

Following 4 years of involvement with Living Waters, I returned to graduate school. I started off with confidence in

It was as if my heavenly Father, who saw this hunger in my heart for connection with His people, had come running toward me to welcome my return.

what Christ had accomplished in me, which initially enabled me to face the many who challenged my true self with their own false interpretations. However, because I worked full time while attending school, I was left with little time to engage in the necessary relationships within the body of Christ.

As my isolation grew, I began to struggle with familiar self-doubts. God showed me that in isolating myself, I had limited my partaking of the gifts that His body offered to equip me to confront the spiritual warfare at hand. That made me susceptible to old weaknesses. By the time I graduated, I was floundering, questioning everything I had ever experienced in my walk with the Lord. I Peter 5:8 says that the enemy seeks to devour us, and I found this to be true as I was cut off from the nourishment I had

A photograph of a woman with her arms raised in a landscape. She is wearing a light blue top and white shorts. The background shows a vast, open landscape with mountains in the distance under a cloudy sky.

In God's mercy,

I was encouraged to become involved in the Living Waters program (in my local church) in 1996.

There **I experienced God** in a new way, and began to be set free.

begun to receive from being in right relationship with God's people.

The next few years marked an upward journey to rebuild these relationships. Two factors entered into making this task more difficult. My new career kept me very busy. And over the years, most of my close friends had married and begun to raise children, which left them limited time to spend with me. Looking back, I wish I had not allowed the rupture in these relationships to occur, because the restoration process was all the harder. It highlighted for me the importance in continuing to build healthy relationships within the body of Christ.

Throughout this time of struggle, I knew I needed to fully reengage with the Body of Christ. I had not been involved in Desert Stream for 7 years by this time, but had a desire to start back at the point where I had received the healing that had set my true self free. As I was awaiting a flight in the airport of another city, I was praying that God would open a path that would allow me to become recommitted to the vision He had established for my life.

I think I experienced a level of what the prodigal son might have experienced that day when, as I was making this commitment in my heart, Andy walked through the airport. It was as if my heavenly Father, who saw this hunger in my heart for connection with His people, had come running toward me to welcome my return.

Looking back over the past year, I marvel at how God has taken me from the time of rejection and disillusionment in my early teens—feeling unaccepted within the Body of Christ, and consequently, unaccepted by God—to a place where I can participate fully within His body. I have realized that my spiritual offering is needed and valued by others, and also know that being in relationship with others augments my own spiritual growth. In this, I recognize our interdependence with each other, and know that this begins with our dependence on Christ. **DSM**

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NEW RELEASES

Introducing a New Resource from Desert Stream Press!

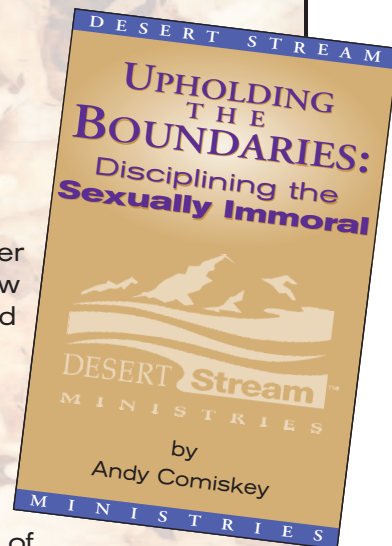
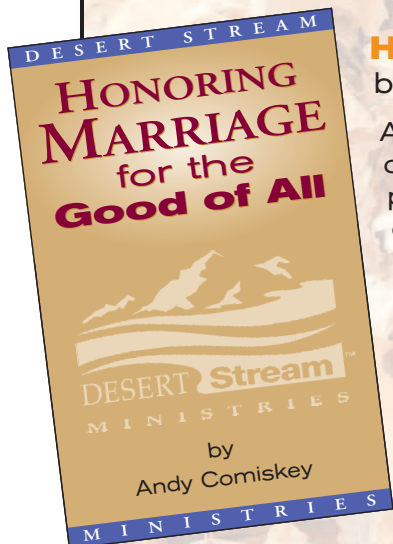
Honoring Marriage for the Good of All by Andy Comiskey

A 40-day devotional geared towards understanding the power of God's image in humanity. The booklet also explores how prayer can help restore that image in us, our marriages, and our nations.

Upholding the Boundaries: Disciplining the Sexually Immoral by Andy Comiskey

This booklet explores the many aspects of sexual sin and its impact on individuals, relationships, communities and churches. He also addresses the harmful effect of a lack of discipline for the sexually immoral. The way to discipline through grace and truth is explored along with ways to implement those truths in your communities and churches.

AVAILABLE NOW AT WWW.DESERTSTREAM.ORG



Corporate Corner



By Annette Comiskey

This has been a fruitful season for Desert Stream. We spend a few days each September looking back at our past year and planning for

the upcoming year (our business year runs from September – August). We look at both what worked and what didn't and then try and plan accordingly for the new year ahead.

Here are some of the highlights of the past year:

- **Increase of groups in the U.S.**— we have seen over 18 new groups start this past year.
- **Leader's Summit**—This July many of our US leaders gathered in KC for three days of fellowship, prayer and strategy. It was amazing to see the quality of leaders we have as both regional and local group coordinators.

■ **LW Training**—We have seen (and it continues for the upcoming training) a trend towards churches sending groups of leaders rather than the usual 1 leader being trained.

■ **Regional Growth**—Andy and Dean travelled to many of the US regions this year. We have seen deepening commitment in many regions, particularly in the mid-west and northwest. We have also seen renewed commitment in the California.

■ **Intercession**—Ann Armstrong has done a great job consolidating our intercessory prayer times. She is in frequent contact with both our international and nation leaders. We have one morning a week dedicated to International intercession, one morning a week for USA intercession. Based on the requests of our leaders we are able to pray for their specific needs.

We are also looking forward to the year ahead. More details in upcoming newsletters!



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DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES
PUBLISHES THE FOLLOWING:

Newsletter (Spring and Fall)
Mid-Year Report (Summer)
Year-End Report (Winter)

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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L E A D E R S H I P



Training Seminar For:

Living Waters, CrossCurrent, Salt and The River

September 26 – October 2, 2009
Heartland Presbyterian Conference Center
Kansas City, Missouri

For more information contact Dean Greer:
dgreer@desertstream.org

This will be the only training in 2009!
Register Early!

T R A I N I N G S E M I N A R