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Fighting For a Fruitful Church

BY ANDREW COMISKEY



'Jesus' crucified flesh reveals the unbreakable bond between freedom and truth, just as His resurrection from the dead is the supreme exaltation of the fruitfulness and saving power of a freedom lived out in the truth.' *John Paul II*

An informal group of conservative Christian lawyers gathered to discuss 'gay marriage.' They marveled at the speed with which many US states have embraced it (17 and counting as of May 2014), a reflection on the majority of Americans who now favor such unions. All but one of the seven had changed their minds about 'gay marriage'; they embraced it because the country had. The dissenting voice could not shake his conviction that the truth about marriage had not changed, and that somehow, human freedom hinged on that truth.

Christians in droves are exchanging their truth for convenience: better to switch than fight. That defines the essence of deception.

The Father of lies does not operate obviously. Rather, he prevails through 'sycophants who bow before the anonymous power of changing moods and current fashion.' (Pope Emeritus Benedict) We must rouse our fellow Christians from this stupor and revive once more our understanding of sexuality—what it means to be human—and the liberating power of the Gospel itself.

That loss of understanding is exemplified by a bright evangelical pastor in Detroit, Ken Wilson, who just wrote a book on his evolution from conservative pastor to champion of the LGBT set. Citing changing views on divorce and remarriage, as well as the assumption that gender identity 'diversity' is not broken-

ness, Wilson leads a new wave of pastors who contend that to be evangelical means only inclusion and never repentance. I do not recall the 'r' word being used in his book.

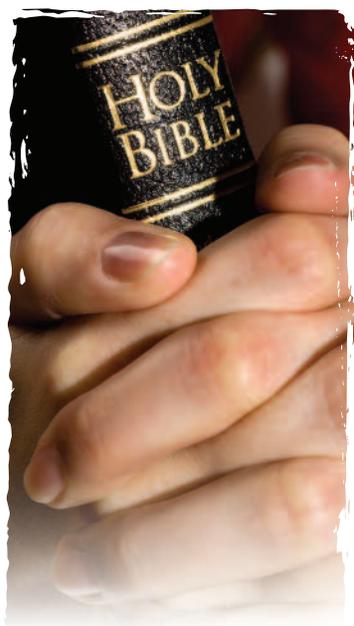
Granted, excluding the broken from God's house due to fear and ignorance requires a repentance all its own. But the Kingdom of Christ without His Cross fails to bring freedom; it ceases to be His Kingdom at all. Wilson is doubtlessly well-intentioned. Yet in hoping to heal the obvious wound (rejection), Wilson ignores wounds at the core of fractured sexual identities. So he opens God's house to the broken but provides no apt diagnosis or hospital; like the world, he

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"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20





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Fighting for a Fruitful Church

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agrees that ‘the only problem with homosexual practice is the one you have with it.’

Christians like Wilson who accommodate homosexual practice split authentic Christian spirituality from broken sexuality, a heresy that St. Paul challenges in 1Corinthians 6: 12-20. There he reminded the divided Corinthians that Jesus’ blood and Spirit render each human ‘temple’ God’s own. The Gospel lays claim to the body; that body then becomes the vehicle through which God manifests His very presence.

Only the real Jesus, radiant with Life, His wounds yet visible, has authority to restore that body to its original design. Put another way, only His radical love can liberate one from the myriad defenses that compose LGBT ‘selves’. Only He can lead us into the freedom of authentic personhood.

Manifesting Jesus and His freedom is the business of the Church. That is the Kingdom of God. And it necessitates clarifying our vision of what God intends for our humanity. How else can we rouse our fellows to redemption? Without a true view of humanity, we risk losing the Gospel and its power to transform the afflicted.

Let us rouse ourselves with these three keys to authentic personhood:

1 Chastity: we must reclaim a vision of purity for all Christians, regardless of how addicted we have become to sensual illusions. They are just that—illusions, unrealities that can never satisfy us. How stern and splendid Reality is: Jesus’ call to love others fully

clothed because we have grasped His heart for another’s dignity and value. Catholic blogger Heather King says it best: ‘We try to be pure because someone else needs us to be pure. Someone in pain needs us to refrain from using another, whether in reality or fantasy, to anesthetize our own pain. Maybe that person is standing in front of us in the grocery line with three screaming kids. Maybe that person is our spouse.’ Chastity must be a baseline reality for all Christians, and our struggles to achieve that goal must be confessed until we have integrated the gift of our bodily longings.

2 Faithfulness: we must cast a vision for how Christians can develop trusting, long-standing friendships with both genders. That necessitates chastity, active self-giving, and recognizing another’s needs while realizing that no one person can meet all those needs. That applies to close same-gender relationships but must also include openness to the opposite-gender. Each bears His image in learning to bear with this other’s difference from oneself. Gender wounds, insecurities, and defenses arise here and can be worked through in trustworthy relationships within the Body.

3 Fruitfulness: each of us is called to engender new life in our friendships but the bodily call to be fruitful must be reserved for chaste, faithful communion between husband and wife. That is the optimal context in which the fruit of sexual love—children—can receive the benefit of male and female self-giving. We as the Church must help prepare parents-to-be to be open to Life and to welcome that Life. At

the same time, we must love single-parent families and the divorced generously. But we do not alter our vision of God’s best for humanity due to moral failure and hardness of heart; we extend mercy but do not change the boundary lines. Altering our vision of God’s best for humanity encroaches on the dignity of everyone, including future generations.

Perhaps you are getting a clue as to why these truths of beautiful Jesus have not prevailed in our western culture. Simply put, His Church has not practiced what she preaches. Her members are not particularly chaste or faithful or fruitful. Sure, she has it in her Bible and in her moral traditions. But she has not sown this objective truth deeply and convincingly in her members. The result? We the Church have insufficient authority to stave off the world and its values.

It might be helpful here to understand the difference between an ethic and an ethos. An ethic involves an objective moral truth, e.g. chastity and reserving sex for marriage; an ethos describes the subjective, personal experience of, for example, chastity: how we might actually become pure and live out the good gift of sexuality.

Conservatives preach the ethic stridently but often fail to engage the people with a meaningful ethos. So we have hordes of Christians who know the rules but have never been invited into a living relationship with Jesus and His Church that enables us to realize the ethic. Thus the ethical ‘truth’ becomes a shameful prison that one endures in a tormented double-life or escapes by leaving the Church.

We have an urgent need in the Church today for its leaders—lay

and ordained—to make every effort to unite our ethic with a dynamic, redemptive ethos. We must talk about it, gather around it, and discover together how Jesus reconciles us to His best for our humanity. Redeemed sexuality is all about fruitfulness. In order for us to be a fruitful Church, we must together ‘lay aside fruitless deeds of darkness’ (Eph. 5:11). With powerful mercy, ever present in those who humble themselves, we can rise together on trembling legs and journey to fruitfulness.

Please enjoy the stories included here on lay leaders who are doing their part to make their churches fruitful. In harmony with pastors, they are helping to unify a solid sexual ethic with a merciful ethos for broken members. That creates fruitfulness. Their churches manifest an authority that enables them to stand mercifully but firmly in the face of immorality as they hold out the Word of Life. (Phil. 2:16)

Just the opposite occurs in churches that embrace homosexual practice. They manifest a spirit of death. Invoking Jesus’ Name, these false prophets confirm a distorted view of humanity which robs the Gospel of its power. In truth, the Church that embraces homosexuality indicates that she is already losing the essence of the Gospel. Not surprisingly, every denomination that embraces gay clergy and unions declines in numbers and influence. Historically, the ‘gay’ church has been rendered as fruitless as homosexual unions.

We must repent unto action. We know the moral truth. Let us be provoked by another truth—the stunning moral compromise at work in the world and worldly Church. We must do more than out-shout the deceived. We must proactively make a way for the

sexually broken to repent unto life-giving expressions of Mercy in our midst. The congregation which shuns responsibility for her broken disregards her God and strengthens the enemy of our souls.

ACTION:

- 1 **Ache:** Let Jesus’ heart for the wholeness and holiness of His creation become ours. Let the devastation evident in the indifferent and compromised Church grip our hearts. Let dread be as a weight that brings us to our knees. There we cry: ‘Jesus have mercy on us; let that mercy be evident in our churches for our broken ones.’
- 2 **Compassion:** Scripture says that Jesus ached with compassion for the sin-weary and deceived. (Matt. 9:36; John 11:33,38) He then acted powerfully to break sin’s grip of death and restore them to fruitfulness. He calls us to do the same. (Matt. 9: 38) Will you be His worker in the harvest field?
- 3 **Truth:** Jesus always reclaimed afflicted ones according to who (s)he actually was; He called into being the man or woman of His design from the disease or demonization at hand. Toward the gender confused, we act in love based on a genuine anthropology—on who God made us all to be, dignified and beautiful bearers of His image, male and female. (Gen. 1: 26, 27)
- 4 **Intimacy:** We know that gender and sexual distortions run deep and can take years to heal. In that way, we persevere in love for our broken, and invite them into the truth that has become our freedom—every wound, every gap, every stumble en route to

becoming who we are is a holy occasion for encounter with our Beloved. We the Church must become that occasion of Mercy for the broken. We model and manifest the truth that grace matures in us through honest admission of weakness. (2Cor. 12: 9, 10)

- 5 **One Body:** We know that God works beyond the limits of our own congregation and its traditions. Brokenness can be the great leveler of denominational divides. Before the one Cross we box down in our brokenness together and raise to become a living temple. (Eph. 2:21,22) I pray for a day when the essential best of both Protestant and Catholic traditions is evident in our Living Waters groups. May all who enter those waters be cleansed of pride (‘we know best’) and presumption (‘and we know your errors’).
- 6 **New Life:** May new initiatives spring up from the new life we discover in Jesus Christ through His Body. Taking our cues and courage from Mary herself, we can respond to the Father who bids us to do our part: ‘I am your servant. Let it be to me as You have said.’ (Luke 1: 38) Mary, like us, exemplifies the fruitfulness of saying ‘yes.’ May we make every effort to make the Church a fruitful place, full of mercy, founded on truth.

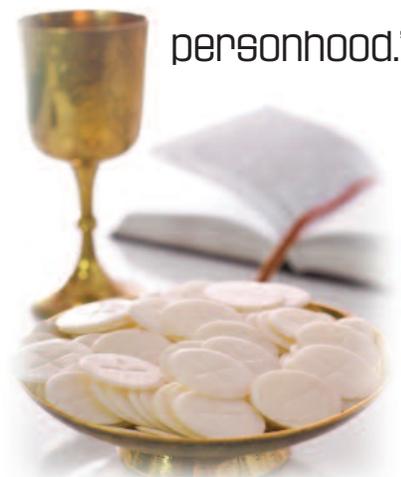
‘The Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in His sanctuary...He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and He has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.’ (Ezra 9: 8, 9) 



“...only His radiant love can liberate

one from the myriad defenses that compose LGBT ‘selves’,

Only He can lead us into the freedom of authentic personhood.”



Defend Your Hope



BY MATT DOBSHUETZ

Soon after I started a Living Waters in my church I had a dream. I was sitting across from a young lesbian woman with short blond hair and a green army jacket. We were at a coffee shop in the middle of a deep conversation. It was not hostile; in fact, the woman was incredibly authentic and honest. I knew we were soon going to discuss homosexuality. I remember her looking at me intently with her eyes as if she was saying: "What do you say to me?"

I immediately woke up and this verse came to me. "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1 P 3:15)

God's word spoke directly to me. In the dream, I was feeling anxious as the conversation got more intense. Would I say something wrong? Would I sound like a bigot or a homophobic Christian? Would she feel rejected by me if I described God's boundaries for our sexuality?

This verse brought me comfort. My primary responsibility as a Christian is honoring Christ and defending the hope that is within me, not crafting a political argument or a religious defense. I should be prepared to answer about Jesus and the reason for my hope. And I am to do it with great care and respect.

My hope comes from the freedom I have experienced from a lifelong pornography addiction. Underneath the pornography struggle was a lie that I believed that I was "unlovable." This mistaken belief never came to the surface in the swirl of my affair with pornography. But when my

addiction was discovered by my wife, it was like a light was turned on in a darkened room. At once all the hiddenness was exposed.

I remember how lost I felt at church before. I was like a 2nd-class Christian watching others worship or receive from the Lord. I walked in each week weighed down with the shame from my sexual sin and my "unlovable" self. I could not share communion. I could not sing some of the songs. I had no resurrection in my life. I was numb and cutoff.

In those early years, after my exposure, Jesus began to get into that part of me that felt unlovable. He surrounded me with community and removed my shame. He gently called me to trust him more. Today the porn is long gone but He is still at work in me.

This past Easter, I looked around at the people in our church. I saw Living Waters' alums on stage in the band and choir, in the rows around me, serving communion, taking the offering, running sound, serving bagels and coffee, teaching Sunday School, on the small group leader board, at the welcome center, and running security.

I remembered many of them when they first came to Living Waters, beaten up, wounded, living in shame and mistaken beliefs. They carried in with them the weight of sexual sins, both their own and those that were committed against them. They needed to encounter Jesus and the hope of His rescue.

Jesus says in John 15:16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

"I chose you" is a powerful reminder of Jesus and his active role in calling us. He has a plan for us and a purpose for our healing. In my own life, my most painful chapter has been turned into an appointment to help others and share my hope. On Easter, I saw the reality of the fruit that remains. Many group members, even 8-9 years out of LW, are still going for it. They are good gifts to the church.

In Chicago, we experienced many of the recent culture shifts earlier than the rest of the country. You might feel concerned or anxious over how things are

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1 Pet. 3:15

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

Dismayed, Determined



BY MORGAN DAVIS

My heart broke as my new, young pastor told me that Living Waters was no longer welcome in my church. This was my church body for over 20 years: the place where my wife and I walked the narrow path of restoration and hope. In one moment I realized this community had become hostile to the reality of Jesus' resurrection power to reclaim our broken identities, sexual or otherwise.

Living Waters had been an integral part of the historic fabric of this church, a beacon of light in the dark places of our city. For over a decade we celebrated conference after conference, group after group—Living Waters, CrossCurrent and Falling Forward—giving rise to many stories of restored lives. In one conversation the future hope of healing was wiped away in my community; for the first time in my life, I no longer felt safe in the church...my church.

Needless to say we cried out for Jesus' help. Where would we worship and serve? Is there a clear voice in our dear city proclaiming the full gospel of Christ crucified?

Last week I received a call from a co-laborer in Christ of many years ago. "Josh" was at the end of his rope; he was desperate and ready to leave his marriage of 13 years and 4 young children. He was convinced he was gay and beyond the reach of God's restorative hand. His hope was gone and his church community mute, unable to give account for Jesus' power to reclaim what is rightfully His. This man had served the body of Christ for 25 years and yet, leaving all righteousness behind was an option for him.

His closest church community and family were confused and living in a fog. The prevailing voices in his life were not pointing to hope in Christ but rather resignation to the broken image growing inside his deceived heart. Even his wife was prepared to "support him" in his gayness, if he really was gay. Again, my heart broke for this dear man. Without a clear voice in the body of Christ, his heart wandered in silence for years until now he was ready to give up and hand his life over to ways of this world. Jesus, have mercy on us, Your church.

In the midst of stories like these my wife and I remain focused on the Giver of life. Jesus has not abandoned us nor has His voice been muted. Faithful ones, a holy remnant if you will, continue to gather and worship. We fall forward at His cross and proclaim our need for a Savior. We are His church. Praise His name!

Karen and I (and many others from our Living Waters team) have landed in a strong mature church body. The proclamation of Jesus is grounded in the reality of our humanity reflected in the *Imago Dei*, which is the DNA of Living Waters. This voice is clear and the young and old

are coming. They need to know there is a Savior who is able to reclaim broken lives. This community is welcoming us: the prophetic, healing ministry of Living Waters.

Though this year has been fraught with disorienting circumstances, they are only that...*circumstances*. They are not able to define or confine our voice for those seeking help. Greater still is His love and His grace for His people. We remain steadfast in the belief that Jesus makes a way for us...a narrow path that leads to life, His life.

We begin our pilot LW group in June with the hope of offering this ministry to the greater Portland area in October. Please pray for us. 🙏

Morgan, his wife Karen and their children live in Portland Oregon. As well as serving in his local church, Morgan is also a member of the Desert Stream Board of Directors.



"Faithful ones, a holy remnant if you will, continue to gather and worship We fall forward at His cross and proclaim our need for a savior."

Porn Addicts to Priests



BY PETER KOCKLEMAN

Jesus' plan for humanity was such that our lives would be so radically transformed by His love that out of barren bushes juicy fruit would grow. Unfortunately most Christ-followers produce much greater quantities of fertilizer than fruit. The good works prepared in advance are reduced to attending church or joining the weekend set-up squad.

But drinking deeply during Sunday services and sharing the work necessary to keep church running was not foremost in His mind when he called us to take up His work laid out in Isaiah 61. His life must become the blueprint of ours. If our programs are not setting the captives free then we must question whether we truly believe Jesus' promise that "greater works than these" we will do.

Our ministry success in Silicon Valley in freeing the captives for better or for worse hinged on my level of faith whether God would really show up when I prayed, "Come Holy Spirit". You see, for the first seven years of running a Falling Forward program I was extremely hesitant to take men into listening prayer if I didn't have a feeling of his presence which I seldom did.

Push came to shove one weekend when we led our 8th Boot Camp, a two-day men's retreat where we use the name, format, and materials laid out by John Eldridge in order to heal men so they can be fully alive. Based on the book *Wild at Heart*, a Boot Camp is a journey to the center of a man's wounded heart culminating in a large-group ministry time that is the most significant part of the entire weekend. I had

become progressively bolder with each retreat but this time was different as I begin to live out the meaning behind the scripture that declared without faith it was impossible to please God.

So during this particular ministry time I eliminated my usual meek prayer requests and led out in the spirit of what is modeled at the Desert Stream/Living Waters Leadership Training (DSM/LWLT). Filled with faith that God would show up for his sons, I led a ministry time that was unprecedented. We engaged all 110 participants into the ministry time with those who had overcome their own sexual brokenness joining the leaders in laying on hands and praying for those who desperately needed the Father's healing balm. The ministry time reached a crescendo when we prayed for the physical healing and restoration of those who were terminally ill. One recipient of that weekend has out-lived his doctor's prediction by two years!

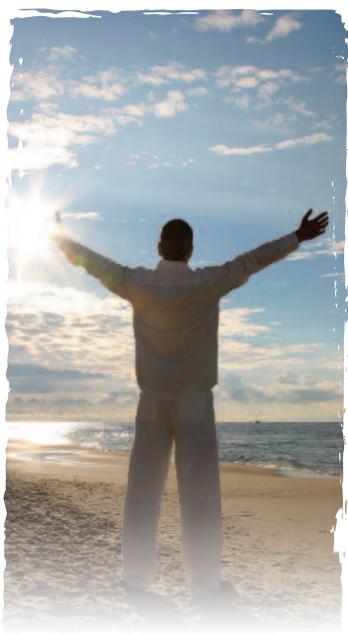
Our 10 years of faithfully offering Desert Stream's programs in our church has resulted in the following fruit in the Silicon Valley area:

- A new Falling Forward program has been launched at South Bay church in San Jose. We provided two of our leaders to coordinate at one of

the fastest growing churches in our region. This same church routinely fills our Boot Camps 30% of the way with their members.

- As the Northern California Regional Coordinator I have been blessed to be one of the speakers at the two San Francisco Bay area Iron Sharpens Iron conferences put on by The Men's Ministry Catalyst. The men get to experience a sexual addiction teaching similar to DSM/LWLT. This has made the name of Desert Stream Ministries more widely known as a powerful source of hope and truth.
- For two years now a number of Falling Forward and Boot Camp leaders have ministered weekly at a Christian drug rehabilitation center. From 4 to 8 leaders show up weekly during lunch to preach and pray for the residents of City Team Ministries in San Jose. What has become so apparent to us is the depth and pervasiveness of sexual and relation brokenness in the lives of drug addicts. The men will overcome their drug problems at the live-in program but without listening prayer to unlock and free the men from the shameful details of their

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"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me..."

ISA. 61:1,2

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives...

Toils of the New Soil



BY MAITE MORA-RODRIGUEZ

This year we birthed our first Living Waters group in a U.S. Catholic parish. It has been at once sobering and invigorating. When we started to prepare last year, we were excited. We gathered a group of experience leaders and began to announce the group in a variety of quiet ways. Applications started arriving: some from people aware of the ministry, others completely new to our healing world. That gave us a good mixture of seed for our new soil.

I used the word sobering at the beginning because it gave us the opportunity to see the import of Living Waters, never more relevant after 30 years! I witnessed the adult who was never fathered receiving the Father's love for the first time, the couple welcoming deep healing in their marriage, the woman who worked hard to be faithful to God and her marriage after having an illicit same-gender relationship, the man overcoming Internet porn addiction, the son establishing independence from parents...

Very normal: the ache in our hearts for wholeness, holiness, love, truth, intimacy, and communion. Aren't we all searching for these gifts?

We met on the ground of the Cross with our needs, week after week, seeking what only God could give. Our different denominations did not matter. Yes there were prejudices but God prevailed over them and unified us as One Body. That invigorated us; we lived Jesus' words to the Father: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one." (JN 17:11)

We as leaders have been challenged by our impatience; we had to remind ourselves that it is God's job, not ours, to encounter our members. As we surrendered our striving, we witnessed God's surprising action in the lives of the participants. As I recall their faces the first night and see them now I perceive something different--the veils have dropped from their faces. They have learned to be real with God and each other with pain, past and present.

Are they completely healed? NO! But they are more aware of themselves in a way that equips them to proceed into the community; they are better equipped to handle life and their emotions in a balanced way. They now acknowledge that they are good gifts and desire to find ways to give themselves to their communities. They want to bear fruit that remains.

These are the toils of new soil, the same hard work that each Living Waters leader experiences as (s)he prayerfully prepares

for the first or fortieth group. We break the ground of fear with tools of love; we water that ground with prayer and perseverance. We tend the ground with compassion and truth. We do so knowing that the owner of the land wants us to be One Body. Then we bring the fruit of our toils to Him so that He will ripen and multiply them.

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field." (Mt 9: 36-38) 🌱

Maite is a staff member at Desert Stream/Living Waters. Among her duties, Maite is the assistant coordinator of Aguas Vivas.



"We break the ground of fear with tools of love; we water that ground with prayer and perseverance. We tend the ground with compassion and truth."

JOHN 17:11

"Our different denominations did not matter. ...That invigorated us; we lived Jesus' words to the Father: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one."

Corporate Corner



BY ANNETTE COMISKEY

This May we went live with a completely new website! Our address is the same, www.desertstream.org, but the rest is new. A team of people have been working diligently

on this for many months. I want to thank Stoney Noel, his team at Epic Life Creative, Eric Spady and most particularly, Nate Allen. Though it has been a collaborative effort, Nate went above and beyond what we expected of him!

We are all very proud of the new site—please visit it and see. Not only is there a whole new look there are other new features. We have particularly deepened the video offerings and free resources. I know that there will be bumps along the way as we finalize the transition from the old site to the new site. But we are all excited about how this new site will better serve the needs of those who are looking

for information, resources and many other offerings.

This summer also brings new growth in other parts of Desert Stream/Living Waters. We have two new interns starting this summer. We are also sponsoring our 2nd Aguas Vivas training in Mexico this July. Andrew, along with many of Desert Stream/Living Waters staff will be a part of Restored Hope Network's annual

conference in Portland. Andrew is also a part of Courage Annual Conference and Theology of the Body Congress both meeting this July in Philadelphia.

We are excited for the new avenues that are opening up for the good word of transformation to be shared through the website and new churches and ministries. 

Porn Addicts to Priests

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pasts the men are destined to relapse. But God is working wonders weaving these being-healed men into our companies, our men's groups, and our Falling Forward programs.

- Finally our twice per year Wild at Heart Boot Camps we have been putting on for the last 7 years have steadily grown. The 200-men venue we consistently fill has a waiting list with hungry men crashing the conference and sleeping on the floors just to experience the Father's healing presence. This one incredibly-fruitful ministry which draws men from over 30 churches all over Califor-

nia was started by 3 porn addicts transformed by Jesus Christ through the ministry programs of Desert Stream.

From porn addicts to priests: Who knew? 

Peter, his wife Nikki and their sons live in Northern California. Peter also serves as a Living Waters Regional Coordinator for Northern California.



Defend Your Hope

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going in your area. But one thing I have learned: despite our permissive freedoms and changing culture, people are still desperate for hope. They are coming each week to our churches and need to encounter Jesus. They are asking: "What do you say to me?" Be prepared to defend your hope. 

Matt and his wife Janice live in Evanston, IL and have two sons. Matt co-leads Living Waters in his local church and hosts a weekly podcast called, Pornfree Radio.

2014

MID-YEAR REPORT

Publisher/Editor
Andrew Comiskey

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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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