

Advancing the Kingdom through Art

By Diana Thomas



The best things we can know in life come out of knowing *who we are in Christ* and what direction living in that identity will take us. The Bible tells us we are God's beloved handiwork (Poiema) created for good works since before we were born, but it still takes us a good long while to discover what all this means. It takes day to day communication with God and the Spirit to learn how to live the kind of abundant life Jesus paid so dearly to give us.

Looking back to my innocent and unhindered childhood thoughts about what I liked to do and what I wanted to be when I grew up held clues to an early picture of who I was designed to be. I hadn't had time to have harmful labels attached to me yet, nor to let my misconceptions develop into negative self images. As far back as third grade, I knew I liked to draw and write. In school I would make tiny books about 2.5 inches square out of colored paper, illustrating them and stapling the sides then giving them to my friends. My third grade teacher noticed my budding drawing skills and asked me to help her make seasonal bulletin boards in the classroom. I became known as that girl who could "draw good."

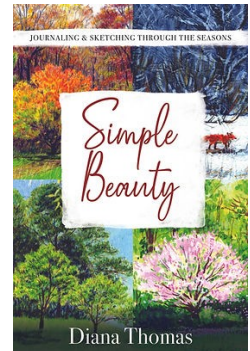
My dad was a graphic designer and artist, so I always had the materials and encouragement needed to propel me forward through high school art classes, then to the Art Institute of

Pittsburgh and on into a variety of art based careers.

The writing part of me developed much slower. It surfaced again in earnest when I was going through some difficult life changes in my forties. Being an overly busy mom with perfectionist tendencies I first began journal writing as a way to quiet and focus my mind in prayer and meditate on what I was learning as I went deeper into my Christian walk. Being still with and listening to God became in time a necessity for my heart, mind and soul.

I also realized that the movement of a pen on the page each morning was a soothing and healing process not unlike the way I felt when creating a piece of art. Before I knew it I had become a "journal junkie" regularly sketching and writing in differently themed journals; nature notes, day to day life, travel, and my garden. Interestingly the sketching also became an integral part of my "prayer time."

In his perfect timing God began to orchestrate introductions and events that helped me see what he had been doing all along. I had twenty five years of writings and art pieces that could be pulled together and shaped into a book! It would be a reflection of the person God had designed me to be; an artsy writer who learned to see the beauty of life right in the middle of the ordinary moments every day



brings. And it would be a reflection of how God moves us through the seasons of life and shapes us to be more like Christ.

I was afraid at first that no one would want to read a book like this, but I soon discovered that people did enjoy reading it. I have found a true blessing in watching my story become a ministry.



Inside this issue:

Advancing the Kingdom through Art 1

Advancing the Kingdom through Coffee 2, 3

Advancing the Kingdom by Loving Your Neighbor 4, 5

Advancing the Kingdom through Coffee

By Christina Gray

Non-Profit Coffee Profits the Kingdom

In January 2018, House of Bread Ministries had its first vision meeting. My husband, Jeff, and I met with three other couples, praying together, and listening for God's leading. The goal is to always focus on hearing God's voice and pursuing His plan. The message is clearer now than it was then; success is found in transformed lives. Almost 6 years later we can look back and see how His power worked through us to serve those who need His presence.

January 2020 dawned with the excitement of a fresh vision for community ministry. During 2019 our core group did the work of visiting several ministries with community outreach. Our mission of "Transforming Lives through Relationships and Service" led to the establishment of two non-profit entities, the first is our church, House of Bread, and our outreach arm, Temple Court Community (TCC). TCC is a non-profit coffee roaster using all profits to fund community programs.

The end goal is a community center with a coffee shop here in the rural apple country of Adams County, PA. House of Bread and Temple Court Community ministries envision a marketplace where relationships move to discipleship, and the love of Christ does transformative work with anyone who walks through the door. They will enter for coffee, or a community program, and they will leave knowing they have been in the presence of goodness, and truth. That is how Jesus works; He is everywhere. Post covid statistics for weekly church attendance hover close to 25% in the



USA. Our ministries set a goal to reach the other 75%. Our core team started brainstorming the talents and gifts we all possessed, and what we could do in the space God would provide for us, then our community center vision emerged.

The vision remains the same, and on our way to that end goal, God has confirmed relationships are the key to our success and people are at the center of His heart. As we obediently walk out His plan, we are seeing transformation!

During our last season of free community dance lessons that we held at the local library, we reached over twenty children. Boys and girls learned to move to music, forgetting their differences and building self confidence. At our final performance for parents, we enjoyed time with the families after the show while we snacked and sipped coffee or punch. Listening to so many stories of how kids were encouraged during their time with us, we realized the transformation that God had done as we served. One mother breathlessly ran up to us as we were cleaning up. She said she had all the kids in the van, all six of them! She did not want

to leave without sharing how much this meant to her boy and two girls that faithfully attended. I had never seen her before, then she confided that they live part-time in downtown York with her, but Dad is here, an hour away, in Biglerville. She said this year has been hard for the kids, but they told her that dance helped them to find a way to "get their feeling out." Every week at the very end of dance we did a cool down, usually to a worship song, and then, we prayed over the dancers, "out loud" in the library. At the very end of our recital, we prayed with the kids in a circle and many of them offered prayers as well. They may never walk into a church, but Jesus is everywhere.

We also had the opportunity to bring our mobile coffee cart to a local campground the first Friday of each month. People lined up for a sweet drink, and we prayed for a miracle. We had the opportunity to pray several times with the campground owners. When we needed help, young adults were lined up several times to help set up the coffee cart. At the end of one evening, someone leaned in toward me saying, "this has been a good night for him," pointing to a rather unique young man who had helped us all night. We had given

Continued on page 3

Advancing the Kingdom...

Continued from page 2

him a free drink, which made him incredibly happy. He had struggled mentally and physically for a lot of his life, always struggling to “fit in” as well. Our vision includes training volunteers in any area they can help. He was eager to help and willing to learn. He was asked to leave the organized bible study he had tried to attend, sitting quietly, listening in a church setting was not working for him, but Jesus is everywhere, and he felt the love of the Body of Christ at a campground, just helping the coffee cart people.

Because we don't have a building, we've had to be creative about how and where we serve people. We've used coffee as a bridge to relationships, from serving coffee at drug and alcohol recovery centers to handing out hot cups of cocoa and coffee during our Christmas tree give away, a cup of coffee can be transformational! Our outreach has also included community hiking days for families in the summer. We have had the opportunity to pray with others on the beach at state parks. We have met at campgrounds and in state parks inviting those around us to join in. We've even reached people in a small rock climbing “bouldering”

loft above a woodshop that belongs to one of our core members. Our goal is a community center, but His goal is people's hearts. So, we go with Jesus everywhere.

What does House of Bread look like as a church gathering? Dinner and Coffee is at 6pm on Saturday nights in Aspers. We gather outside around a fire as often as possible. We meet down a private lane at our home, where no other house can be seen. We sing, spend time in the word, then, in small groups, we discuss how we can apply the scripture to our lives. If you continue another quarter mile back that stone lane, there is an empty house. The man who lived there died in the Fall. We only knew him in passing, he kept to himself, and when we did stop to talk, he smelled like a beer! One evening while we were at the campground serving coffee, a pastor who was camping there spoke to us about our ministry. We knew him and had chatted with him before. He shared how he had done a funeral for a man down a private lane in Aspers. It was at the home of our neighbor, who had struggled his whole life to overcome past shadows of abuse. The Pastor wanted us to know something. As he waited for us to make him His Latte, he told us during his time at the funeral a friend of the departed shared this story: When the weather was nice, he would sit out on his porch Saturday nights. He would cry and listen to the singing and the words floating through the trees. He knew where his help came from, he just couldn't get himself to church ... But Jesus is everywhere, even when you are alone on your back porch.

It's His Vision and His Church. He made the coffee beans grow and He will use anything on this

earth, including coffee, to bring people to Himself. We are humbled to be part of what the Holy Spirit is doing in Adams County. Visit us online at www.houseofbread.xyz for more information, and when you're in Apple Country, come join us. Jesus is here!

Article reprinted from The Global Advocate April Issue with permission.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the



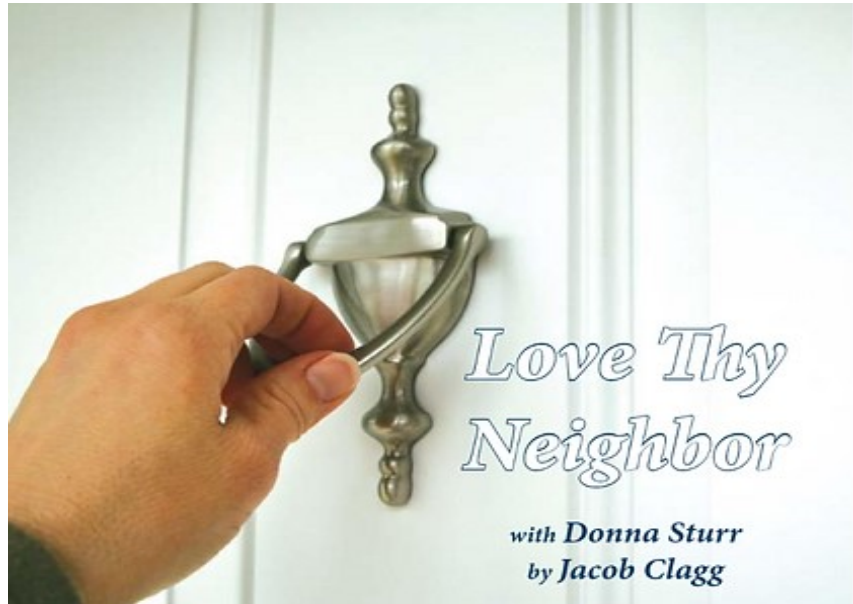
Advancing the Kingdom by Loving Your Neighbor

Donna Sturr, 77, has taught within the church since she was 14 years old. Donna has served as an organist, pianist, choir director, youth and young adults S.S. teacher, Bible Quiz coach, youth leader, and young adult leader. Her husband, Phil Sturr, was a CGGC pastor from 1971-2005, serving York First Church, Harmony Bethel Church, Hillcrest Church, and Mt. Pleasant Church, through 35 years of ministry. Phil and Donna have had a lifetime of ministry together. Donna still works fulltime as the Assistant for Leadership Development with the Brethren in Christ Denomination, serving over 500 ministers with their credentialing and education.

In February of 2022, Donna lost her husband, Phil, after 54 years of marriage. It was a life altering loss, but it wasn't the only large change Donna was hit with. A year later, in June of 2023, Donna was diagnosed with breast cancer. Despite her need for an oxygen tank, this diagnosis didn't slow Donna's ministry down. She still works full-time, and in fact, new opportunities have opened up. To hear more about it, we asked Donna for an interview to share about her continuing to make disciples.

We heard you've recently started a new ministry with your neighbors, what motivated you to do this?

After Phil passed away in February 2022, the Lord laid on my heart a burden for my neighbors and I wanted to share Jesus with them. I knew some of them by name but only a few because of working full-time and not being home a lot. My goal was then to



eventually have a Bible Study in my home for those who may want to attend. In November 2022 I prepared half sheets of paper with an invitation for a "meet and greet" at my house on a Sunday afternoon. 14 neighbors attended. It was great for all of us to get to know our neighbors and chat for almost 2 ½ hours. After the meet and greet I recorded all their names (including children) on my daily prayer list and I pray for each of them, by name, most every day.

What opportunities has God made for you to minister to your neighbors?

Since I can't walk into a store, as I am on oxygen and my levels go too low with any exertion, my neighbors often contact me and say they are going to a store, and they'll ask if they can bring me anything. I often let them bring me an item or two as they then come into my home and sometimes will sit down and talk. I have learned to listen to my neighbors' struggles and hurts and offer to pray for them, which they gladly accept. Some of them have noticed and ask me about how I am handling my

diagnosis so well. This provides opportunity to share about Jesus.

Since the meet and greet in November 2022, I have had opportunity to sit down in my home with 5 individuals or families from my cul-de-sac and get to know them better as well as them get to know me better. The one neighbor is a very strong Catholic but that seems to be where her focus is – on the Catholic Church more than Jesus. I have had opportunities to share the need for a personal faith in Jesus with her. Another neighbor, who is totally unchurched, is going through testing right now for a possible cancer diagnosis and is struggling. I have had the opportunity to pray with her in my home. Another neighbor in his 80's takes my trash to the curb every week. I invited him and his wife over for dinner a few weeks ago and we played some games together. At the close of the evening, I had an opportunity to ask about their

Loving Your Neighbor

Continued from page 4

faith background. Several of the neighbors have brought me leftover food from their meals or they would make extras for me. This gives me the opportunity to engage with them.

Is there something about our relentlessly busy lives that makes us ignore our neighbors? Why do you think we struggle to make connection with people who live next to us?

We are so inward focused, I think, and we come home tired, and all we want to do is rest, get supper for the family, and start the day over again. I needed to create space in my life. When we were in the 35 years of ministry, I would look at my calendar and I would have no free time at all. We were just tied up in our own lives, and our ministry.

We say we know the Lord called us into full time ministry, but what does He want for me today? Each day I get up now, I know I have today, but I don't know if I have tomorrow. I asked my oncologist what my prognosis was, and he said, "you're living today, and you may not have tomorrow." So, that's what I know, but I guess all of us are living that way. We have today to live for our Lord.

Did you have any fears stepping into this new ministry? How did you address those fears?

Each time I engage with a neighbor, I fear that I will say the wrong words and not be a good ambassador for my Lord. I desire to live the fruit of the Spirit and not be a stumbling block in any way. I have never had a lot of confidence in my oral or written communication, as many times I speak without giving great thought as to what I am saying. I

pray daily that the Lord would use me and provide wisdom as I share Jesus one-on-one. I want to make each moment count for my Lord while He has given me reasonable health. My main way of addressing these fears is through prayer and as I sense the Lord leading me to step out in faith and follow that leading.

My first fear was as I walked around my cul-de-sac in early November 2022 passing out the invitations, not knowing many of my neighbors, and handing them the invitation to attend a "meet and greet" at my house. I prayed that day before I left my house. When Phil passed, I prayed for many months to bring me clarity as to how I



could best share Jesus with my neighbors. To my knowledge, only 2 of the 11 homes attended mass on a weekly basis.

Do you see a connection between being vulnerable and being faithful?

Yes, I clearly see a connection between being vulnerable and being faithful. I need to come before my Lord with open hands and arms saying, "here I am Lord, use me" and then being willing to join Him in His work and follow Him in faithfulness wherever He leads. He is the one who will do the work through me. I notice it seems to have

helped in my relationship with my neighbors as I am willing to be vulnerable about both past joys and accomplishments as well as challenges and failures in my life. I need to be willing to be open about my faith journey and that it is clearly my relationship with the Lord that makes a difference.

How has this new ministry changed your relationship with God?

I am practicing my Lord's presence more throughout the day realizing that it is nothing I am doing but only what He can do through me as I fully yield to Him. It is a rather sobering thought that perhaps God placed Phil and me at this address after Phil had to stop pastoring so that we could be the light in a dark world to our neighbors. That is quite a responsibility. Since Phil has passed away, I have been much more faithful in my personal devotions even though there are days that have been missed. These times in the morning have become very special for me as I pray for others (including every neighbor by name) and spend time in God's Word asking what He wants to say to me for that day and then journaling. I desire to keep my eyes focused on Jesus in all I do.

Do you see this ministry as a model that others could follow?

Yes, I do. They may not live on a cul-de-sac as I do but they can use a similar model, whether it is with co-workers, neighbors, a group of new believers from church who they are mentoring, or whatever ministry to which the Lord calls them. I believe God has called us to minister one-on-one and to disciple others and bring them to Jesus by our personal interactions.

(reprinted from The Global Advocate with permission)



Director: Kathy Foor
cgwmdirector@gmail.com

Director of Equipping: Heather Boss
cgwmequippingdirector@gmail.com

Assistant Director: Kathy Odegard
cgwmassistantdirector@gmail.com

Secretary: Kelly DeVincent
cgwmsecretary@gmail.com

Treasurer: Nancy Scott
cgwmtreasurer@gmail.com

Website:
<https://www.cggcwomen.org/>

Facebook:
Churches of God Women's Ministries
(CGWM)

YouTube:
CGWM



If you or your women's group have not been a part of Thank Offering in the past and would like to, all you need to do is get a container and start thanking God for the many blessings he gives you each day. Look for our reminders to send in your offerings in April. We are better together! Thank Offering barrels may be obtained by contacting Kathy Foor or ordering online at [Berlin Packaging](https://www.berlinpackaging.com/).

Visit our Website

<https://www.cggcwomen.org/>

There you will find:

- ⇒ more information about CGWM and it's officers
- ⇒ CGWM Blog
- ⇒ Sign up to receive these Newsletters in your email
- ⇒ Download
 - ◆ CGWM Brochures
 - ◆ Thank Offering Brochures & Barrel Labels
 - ◆ CGWM Booklets
 - ◆ This Newsletter
 - ◆ Opportunities to Connect

CGWM is funded through donations. To donate please make check out to CGGC with WM1800 in the memo and send to:
Churches of God General Conference, P.O. Box 926, Findlay, OH 45839

THE FLOURISH CONFERENCE

SAVE THE DATE

VICTORIOUS!

IT'S TIME TO SLAY YOUR DRAGONS

MARCH 7-9, 2025

Featured Speaker

Georgina Verzal

Register at
cggcwomen.org or scan
QR code

NEW

Location: Grand Point Church—2230 Grand Point Road, Chambersburg, PA 17202