

**Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation**

In search of the compassionate life

BryAnn Becker

April 4, 2008

It's the wonderful paradox of service: the more you give, the more you receive. The Teddy Bear Den may not sound like a place where I have received such joy and fulfillment through service, but perhaps that is because you do not know about this non-profit in Sioux Falls. The Teddy Bear Den offers a healthy incentive program for low-income women expecting a child. This program, located in downtown Sioux Falls, serves as a sort of shop where women can purchase items for their infants, such as clothes, diapers, and blankets, through earning points by taking care of themselves and their child. When volunteering at The Teddy Bear Den, I find a sense of centering that is hard to explain. As I talk with these women and spend time with their children, I feel blessed. How is it that the seemingly simple acts of helping women pick out items to purchase for their children fulfills me? Is it because I am forced out of my so-called Augustana bubble? Or is it because I feel needed because these very women need my help?

This past January, I had the opportunity to ponder such questions about service and compassion in a creative non-fiction class taught by Dr. Janet Blank-Libra. In the class, we pondered how writing itself is a compassionate act. Yet, in learning about compassion, I began to feel unsatisfied with my level of service. In learning about the high levels of compassion others demonstrate, I felt like I was not doing enough. In a book called *Field Notes on a Compassionate Life* by Marc Ian Barasch, our class met Zell

Kravinsky, an altruist almost to a fault. In 2003 this Pennsylvania professor of Renaissance literature decided to give one of his kidneys away. Yet, unlike most kidney donors, Kravinsky was not donating to a relative or family friend but to a mere stranger. But Kravinsky's generosity didn't stop there—and unfortunately his altruistic nature had consequences. His wife even threatened to divorce him when she found out he was giving away most of the family fortune to endow hospitals. Kravinsky represents one of those individuals who continue giving and giving—a selfless giving that defines those we call altruists. The *New York Times* said that Kravinsky's “brand of altruism border[ed] on obsession, perhaps even a sort of benign madness.” Kravinsky later remarked he would have donated the other kidney if it meant he still could have lived. Kravinsky does represent a form of extreme compassion, and extremes make us wonder whether we are doing enough for others.

What qualifies as giving enough? How much time is enough to volunteer? How much money should we give to non-profits and places of worship? And, in Kravinsky's case, how many organs should we donate? Is there a quantifiable amount that makes us compassionate human beings, Christians one-step closer to being selfless and altruistic? Are we giving enough? Compassion, while found in the extremes, does not become more justifiable or more worthy of a cause when done in excess. Jesus shows us in his actions on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas that compassion can be found in the simplest of activities; we can show compassion by listening, by walking, and by breaking bread with one another. Jesus shows us that selfless altruism comes sometimes by losing ourselves in listening to others.

On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion are talking about the resurrection and about what had happened in Jerusalem. Their faces are downcast, and they are discouraged. They are trying to make sense of the meaning of the empty tomb. Jesus finds them, but they do not recognize him. Jesus merely asks them, "What are you talking about?" When they say they are speaking about the happenings in Jerusalem, He says further, "What things?" In these questions, Jesus shows us that the simplest form of compassion is to listen. He does not reveal himself to them, but walks and listens to their conversation. He is with them. Jesus listens to their concerns, their confusions, and their misunderstandings. He participates in their questioning as they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. And when in Emmaus, he breaks bread with them and eats with them, giving thanks. Jesus shows us that compassion is walking alongside, listening, and breaking bread. It is listening and honoring questions that may come at inopportune times from those in need.

How do we learn to walk alongside others and to listen even when we know the answers to others' questionings? Reaching this stage can be difficult. Barasch in his book talks about a test for compassion one of his friends uses to gauge people. She said, "First, would they risk hiding me from the Nazis in their attic? Second, if we all had to hide out together and there was only one candy bar to live on, would they share it with me?" The woman said that only one of her friends had made the cut.

I wonder if I would. To me this seems like a very tough standard, most particularly the second standard. I love a good piece of chocolate. I'd like to think that if I were in hiding, I would hand over the last morsel of the candy bar to a friend or even a complete stranger. But am I to that point yet? I'm not bold enough to say that I am. Of

course, it's not that one must reach a certain "standard" of altruism, but life seems to be a journey in becoming more compassionate.

Compassion takes time, and genuine service takes time. It is a process to reach out to those in need. But we have time. And we have Christ, who offers us the grace to continue on the road towards leading a compassionate life. Colossians 3:12 says that we should "clothe" ourselves with compassion. This daily endeavor to put on a mindset of compassion should not be seen as a challenge that we may fail at, but should be a jubilant call for our participation in the lives of others. Indeed this call for compassion binds us together as we walk in lives of faith.

MORNING WORSHIP

Friday, April 4, 2008

Prelude

Welcome/Announcements
Invocation

Kari Lenander

Call to Worship

Col. 3:12-15

Kelly Johnson

L: As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

C: God of compassion, hear us.

L: Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

C: God of compassion, hear us.

L: And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

C: God of compassion, hear us.

L: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

C: Amen. Thanks be to God!

Hymn *"Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"*

ELW 712, vv 1-2

Scripture

Luke 24:13-33

Angela Shubert

Message *"In Search of the Compassionate Life"*

BryAnn Becker

Hometown: Pierre, SD

Majors: English, Journalism

Hymn

"Here I am Lord"

ELW 574

Prayers/Lord's Prayer

Kari Lenander

Benediction

Dismissal

Postlude

Thank you to those who helped lead worship this morning. Also, thank you to Dr. Janet Blank-Libra and to Pastor Paul Rhode for inspiration for the sermon. - BryAnn

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SYNOD ASSEMBLY - Any students who are members of the ELCA in South Dakota are welcome to represent our student congregation at the synod assembly, **May 30 and 31, 2008**. Hear the wider church at work claiming and supporting its ministry! Expenses are covered. See Pastor Paul if you are interested.

FOCUS ON MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

This coming week campus ministry will join Advocacy and Coalition for Social Justice in lifting up the UN Development goals for this millennium.

Tuesday April 8, 7-9pm - Bread for the World workshop in the 3-1 room

Wednesday 10 am - Tammy Walhof of Bread for the World will be the speaker in chapel.

Sunday, Apr 14 11 am Worship will celebrate the Old Testament vision of Jubilee—and its power to fuel imagination for debt relief I internationally and personally.

Monday, April 14 -Doug and Jane Koons, missionaries to India
Thanks to Evan Kulesa and Laura Hibma for their leadership in this emphasis!

SERVICE OPPORTUNITY - We have another service opportunity coming up! **Wednesday, April 16th, we will be going to the Sioux Falls Community Food Bank from 6:30- 8:30 p.m.** We will be meeting at the chapel at 6:10 p.m. to carpool. At the Food Bank we will be boxing food. Each month, thousands of individuals and families from across South Dakota receive food assistance through the South Dakota Food Bank pantries or one of the 500+ organizations that they provide food to. Last year, their food banks distributed over 8 million pounds of food in the fight against hunger.

If you are interested in helping at the Sioux Falls Food Bank on April 16th **email Kelsey Erickson by April 10th** (keerickson06@ole.augie.edu).

CHAPEL CALENDAR

Sun. (6 th)	Worship, 11 am - Sweet Fellowship Outreach Team
Mon. (7 th)	Worship, 10 am - Karen Younger, Nursing
Tues. (8 th)	Hunger Workshop, 7 pm - 3-1 room
Wed. (9 th)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Tammy Walhof, Bread for the World; Chamber Choir
Fri. (11 th)	Worship, 10 am - Josh Schoenfelder, Sr. Spkr.
Sun. (13 th)	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul
Apr. 13 th and 14 th	- JUBILEE EMPHASIS