

Growing in Midwinter

In less than two weeks, 500 college students will gather for a weekend of training, worship, and leadership development at our annual WinterFest conference (Feb 20-22). My task this year is serving as the plenary-session worship leader. It sometimes feels like a wonderful privilege — and sometimes like an overwhelming responsibility! I am so thankful for the willingness of many talented musicians who have joined the worship team for this adventure. One of our themes for worship this weekend is “growth”: allowing God to help us to grow just as he nurtures and tends growing plants on this earth. We will also spend Saturday evening focusing on the nation of Colombia and the growing student movement there. My prayer is that our worship times allow students an opportunity to express their hearts before God. May he be pleased with our worship of him!



I spend many happy hours at my desk, communicating with students, studying, and planning WinterFest worship.

Alumni and Friends

At WinterFest this year, we have a way for you to join us! On Saturday, February 21, we are having a

reunion for all InterVarsity alumni from 2-11 pm. It is an opportunity to visit with old friends, join the conference for a day, and hear a bit of the current work of InterVarsity on campus. The cost is \$15, which covers the program plus dinner. You can RSVP online at ivchicago.org — just follow the links for WinterFest. (If you aren't an alum, but are interested in checking out the conference, contact me and I will be happy to find a place for you!)

Shelf Life

Book Notes from Ann

Surrender to Love, by David Benner

Benner is quickly becoming one of my favorite authors. In *Surrender to Love*, he invites us in to experience the transforming love of God in our lives. He describes humans as typically wanting “a spirituality of improvement, not a spirituality of transformation” — we attempt to clean ourselves up before approaching God.

But Benner offers an alternate strategy: come to God in all of your human messiness, rest in his loving presence, and allow his Spirit to transform your fearful, angry, and ugly places. “For love to transform us, not only must we meet in vulnerability, we must also linger long enough for it to penetrate our woundedness.” What

an amazing God we worship — who longs to be near us in our ugliest moments in order to love us into beauty.

Boyd's Eye View

Jon was looking through photos the other day and saw some from the warm weather months. “Look how green everything is!” Ever since then, he has been dreaming that spring is just around the corner — which is not true in Chicago! We are trying to appreciate the snowy weather by lighting candles, having fires in our fireplace, and cooking “comfort food.” (Speaking of which, you can find a recipe for Chicken & Dumplings in my “Web Extra” this month, inspired by my good friend Deborah).

I have just finished a four-month knitting project: an enormous brown blanket which will keep us warm as we listen to all of the commentaries on the *Two Towers* DVDs. We do venture out of the house occasionally — for activities at our church (where Jon was recently elected as a council member), dinners with friends, shoveling snow, and my favorite exercise of swimming (indoors, of course).

Prayer Requests

Please pray:

- For students at Winterfest to soak up God's presence and continue their spiritual growth process
- For the Winterfest worship team: Ann, Kriss, Sandra, Tony, Steven, Katrina, Lina, Ruth, Curtis, Rose, and Max
- Leadership selection, which will occur in February and March

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Extra! Extra! Solutions from God

Jon and I attended InterVarsity's Urbana Missions Convention at the end of December. This convention is an experience of gigantic proportions. It sort of feels like Costco for Christian growth. Every detail is so massive, and each person has a little part in it — but 20,000 people add up to a lot! I had two jobs at Urbana: to work for InterVarsity Press, and to work for Registration on the first day, in the "Solutions" department.

I found that I really enjoyed my job with "Solutions" — I was there to solve everyone's problems! The team was very well-organized, and we were empowered to find good solutions to problems. I got to verify identity when people arrived without a picture ID, find their lost registration forms, help them to pay if they forgot their checkbook, and lots more. This was one of the only times in my staff work when it was positively easy to find solutions to problems!

While I enjoyed fixing things, it was especially difficult when I couldn't solve someone's problem. One woman came to me because she had registered, then inquired about canceling, but didn't actually think she had canceled her registration — but, unfortunately, she had. She was from New Jersey, and had never been out of the state before, and was very distraught about this situation. I advised her to re-register (even with the increased cost), and tried to encourage her that perhaps God had something he wanted to say to her at this convention! She was quite angry with me, and left in tears — I didn't think I would see her again, and that she would probably leave the convention. (But keep reading....)

I spent the rest of the convention with InterVarsity Press, serving in the afternoons as a cashier, and in the evenings selling the

"Book of the Day." I don't think I've ever held so much cash in my hands in my whole life! Again, I had a great time in these jobs — the Press treated us workers very well, and I had a great time chatting with customers about the wonderful books they were purchasing.

On one of the last days of the convention, as I was setting up for the "Book of the Day" at the Assembly Hall, I noticed the woman from New Jersey out of the corner of my eye! I didn't think she would recognize me. To be honest, I hoped she wouldn't — she was so mad at me that first day. But she did, and asked, "Don't I know you?" Hesitantly, I explained that I remembered her from the registration process.

To my great surprise, her eyes lit up, and she gave me a huge hug! Then she told me all about how wonderful the convention had been for her, and how she had been rather far from God over the past years, but attended Urbana anyway at the recommendation of a woman in her church. God had been speaking to her and inviting her to recommit her life to him at Urbana. As far as the registration fiasco went, she was simply going to trust that the money would get worked out when she returned home.

What a joy it was to hear her story! It was a gift from God to see how he worked in this woman's life over the course of Urbana, and to trust that he blessed thousands of people at the convention in ways that will bear fruit for years to come.

For Christ & the University —

Ann

P.S. As always, there's more online at www.annagram.org. This issue's Web Extra: "Comfort Cooking"

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