

Dear friends of Vital Signs Ministries,

January 2024

As you all know, the Christmas season is a really big deal for Claire and me. And yet this December may have set records for being particularly festive, spiritually significant, and busy. Our holiday season began with wonderful fellowship around our Thanksgiving Day dinner table as we hosted the Kohls, the Lawsons, and Harry Rayburn, one of our friends from our



Aksarben Village Senior Living church family. You can see Harry in Photo #2 where Claire is distributing the order of service before our Sunday afternoon church begins. You see, we print out the day's hymn lyrics, the sermon text, and oftentimes other poems or quotations to ponder. (You'll see Fran and Jane in that photo too.) We are averaging 12 to 18 residents for these services which run about a half hour after which we enjoy coffee, lemonade, cookies along with encouraging conversations together for another 30-45 minutes. We are especially blessed by this

photo because not long ago, Fran had taken a bad fall and had to go to rehab for a while. After one of our visits there, we noticed that Fran had asked her nurse to help her get to the window just so she could wave goodbye to us as we got into the car. Very kind. Anyhow, to have her back home is terrific. Thank you, Lord.



While I'm on this topic, let me also say how tremendously grateful Claire and I are for the volunteers who have helped to make this ministry so effective and consistent every Sunday for the last 3 years, especially Don, Allen, Ruth, Dick, and Patrick.

And could we use more volunteers to occasionally fill in? You bet!

By the way, I didn't forget Photo #1. That picture of us was taken on December 7th by Linda Potter at the beautiful Saint Catherine of Siena Chapel a few miles south of Estes Park, Colorado. We were staying in a beautiful home high above Estes Park for 4 really wonderful days with old and dear friends Bob & Linda Potter and Larry & Deb Harold. What a grand introduction to Christmas it was! Singing carols. Drives up into the snowy mountains. Exchanging gifts. Prayers and much stimulating conversation. Early morning coffee at a place downtown right next to the stream. Delicious meals. A Christmas movie complete with a trivia quiz afterward. Stories of Christmases long, long ago. My first couple games of pickle ball. And more. It was a marvelous, even miraculous time together. And yes, you've guessed right. Photo #4 shows this happy group standing alongside an almost iced-over Fall River. (The Harolds are on the left in this photo with the Potters on the right.)

And that unusual Photo #3 shows me offering sugar cubes (we had a few carrots too) for the horses who live at Prairie Creek Inn, the charming Bed and Breakfast outside Lincoln that Claire and I are pretty high on. It is owned by our friends Bruce and Maureen Stahr. And beside the gorgeous, big house and the Lodge they've also built, and the barn, historic outbuildings, and the horse arena, they also serve as the base of an incredible equine therapy ministry. (Thus, the horses.) Claire and I went down there on New Year's Eve for a very quick retreat (only a day and two nights) in order to work on our 2024 resolutions, walk the trail, read a bit, and enjoy praying and talking in the lovely, serene atmosphere. (We had the huge 6-bedroom house all to ourselves!) It was terrific. I should also mention that we had been there just a couple of weeks earlier for their annual Christmas carol sing and concert in the barn. It was a splendid Christmassy event, very honoring to Jesus, and we hope to make it a tradition from now on.

Photo #5 shows a few of the regular team members who faithfully join together in our pro-life witness and prayer time in front of the Planned Parenthood abortion business every other Saturday morning. In addition, Mark joins Keith & Carol and Claire and I in a similar witness every other Monday. Shown in Photo #5 are (left to right) John, Claire, Don, Ruth, Matt, Bev, Mark, and Isaac. And, by the way, our witness on December Saturdays always includes heartfelt (if not always harmonic!) Christmas caroling. Thus we celebrate and proclaim the glorious Advent of the Messiah -- even there on the doorsteps of this dark, dastardly place.

But let me drop in here another Christmas blessing we experienced on one Saturday morning this last month. Here's how I described it in a Vital Signs Blog post:

One's Christian witness, when truly enlightened and empowered by the Holy Spirit, always has effects. For God isn't wasteful and not only does He speak continually to the consciences of men and women through His Word and His creation; he also speaks through the testimony and exemplary lives of the saints.

Isaac emphasized that wondrous truth in one of his prayers this morning as he thanked God for the clear evidence that our pro-life witness outside the Planned Parenthood abortion business was being duly noted by the people driving by. In some cases, that evidence was pleasant and encouraging as people complimented our presence by a friendly wave or a honking horn. In other cases, people who (for whatever sad and wicked reasons) were angry with our peaceful, prayerful presence indicated it with raucous yells and obscene gestures. Even those who are obviously trying hard “not to see us” standing there on the quiet street with large, colorful, winsome signs are a demonstration that our presence (and thus, our message) is being effectively received.

However, this morning there was one particularly memorable and marvelous moment. A large dark truck slowed down, pulled over to the sidewalk where we were gathered, lowered the passenger side window, and I walked over to the truck. Of course, one never knows what might be coming next but, in this case, God provided us an encouragement that was of profound power. For the 43-year old driver explained how happy he was that we were there and told us he has prayed for us every time he’s seen us. He went on to tell us that he himself was conceived when his birth mother was raped. Yet his mother continued the pregnancy, loving and protecting him until she graciously relinquished him to a terrific couple. “They were the best parents anyone could have asked for,” he said proudly. “And so I have really strong reasons to be pro-life and to bless you all for your efforts!”

That dramatic encouragement -- added to the sweet Christmas carols we had sung in between our prayers and conversations this morning -- certainly underscores the relevant truth of Isaac’s prayer. The world is watching Christians. And God is compassionately, miraculously ministering His truth through His children.

Photo #6 is a screenshot from the Christmas Eve service at Grace Bible Church. It’s become a tradition for several years now for GBC Pastor Dan Hauge and I to have an “expositional conversation” for the congregation’s edification about some aspect of the Christmas story. This year we discussed the genealogy of Chapter 1 in Matthew’s gospel, that unusual (and shockingly confrontational) family tree wherein Matthew describes Jesus’ legal right to the throne of David. It’s a rich and fascinating passage.

Photo #7 is the logo Patrick Osborne designed for us to promote the Christmas edition of our “When Swing Was King” show. It serves here as a springboard for me to say that this year’s showings were every bit as splendid as they have ever been. We presented the Christmas “When Swing Was King” edition to audiences in 10 different senior facilities this past month. Plus we had special showings to a Grace Bible Church group and to the Harrollds and Potters when we were up in the mountains above Estes Park.

We are continually gratified by the responses to “When Swing Was King” and we know you are too. So let me share a couple of examples from our Christmas showings. **1)** A resident’s son told us after our Newport show, “This was incredible! My mother was loving every moment of your show. And so were my wife and I! It was so professional and heartwarming and fun. You two are doing a magnificent service for these people.” And **2)** A daughter who had come all the way from England to visit her Mom said to us after the Aksarben Village presentation, “Oh, I am

so pleased I was here on a day that you did your show. My mother has talked a lot about ‘When Swing Was King’ and now I see why it gives her so much pleasure. This was really wonderful. Thank you so much for doing this.”

Okay, I see I’m coming to the end of my space for this month’s LifeSharer letter but, before I close, I will use Photo #8 to introduce another important (and traditional) Yuletide activity. That is our hospitality ministry which, though we diligently work at it throughout the year, it is perhaps brightest and certainly the busiest at Christmastime. This year it included baking and decorating a ton of cookies which went to guests, our Aksarben congregation, our mechanic, and 7 of the households in our neighborhood. We also enjoyed over a dozen “Santa runs” and breakfasts or lunches out with friends. And then there were the 9 dinner parties we hosted here at our home for a total of 54 guests! Our menus (depending on which party we’re talking about) involved roast beef, apricot kielbasa, burgers, pork roast, bratwursts and hot dogs, roasted potatoes, mashed potatoes with gravy, slightly honeyed carrots, green beans, and a large assortment of Christmas cookies and ice cream.

And that good looking bunch in Photo #8? That would be Claire with Matt & Laura Troutman and their kids along with Dick Wilson and Sharon Struve.

However, I’m not quite through the Christmas list yet. For instance, the two Christmas card editions of VSM’s quarterly letter-writing parties were on November 27 and we hosted our latest Book Brunch on December 9th. Also, quite a few copies of my novel *The Christmas Room* were bought (and given away) in recent weeks and our promotion of the audio recording of “The Christmas of the Talking Animals” and our “Making the Most of Christmas” collection were productive too. We organized, promoted, and Denny helped emcee the quarterly luncheon of the Business & Professional People for Life luncheon on November 30th. And finally, there was our utterly spontaneous mini-parties of 12th Night where we took slices of apricot torte from the Lithuanian Bakery to a few friends’ homes and played for them splendid Christmas narratives from our collection.

So, you can see why I contended at the beginning of this letter that our December has been remarkably festive, spiritually significant, and busy!

Okay, I am now definitely out of room, so I’ll close this up by expressing our most sincere thanks for your friendship, prayers, and financial support this past year. We are and will forever be grateful to you all. May God abundantly bless you and your loved ones in 2024.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denny". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom left of the page.