

Edify

a quarterly publication of Waterbrooke Church | summer 2024

Praying for Proximity to Brokenness

Of the many principles involved in sharing Christ with others, the one I find most helpful is “proximity to brokenness.” People who are broken and feel that brokenness deeply are often, by the grace and mercy of God, receptive to hearing of the hope of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 9, a quick cursory reading reveals to us that Jesus went to those who had been deeply injured and broken in their lives: a paralytic, a room full of “tax collectors and sinners,” a man whose daughter had died, a woman with a 12-year long illness, two blind men, and a man who could not speak.

It was in the midst of such brokenness that Matthew writes, “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 laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Evangelism is compassion in action bringing to real people’s brokenness the only true and lasting hope that can be found: Jesus Christ and His merciful and eternal reign. When Jesus commands us to pray to the Lord of the harvest for laborers, we really are asking for God to bring us into proximity to the

deep brokenness that sin and the curse of sin and death have brought into this world. It is praying that people would be both full of compassion and full of

hope for those living next door who are weeping over family disappointments, over the passing of loved ones, over the myriad of sorrows that fills our world every day.

Do you know your neighbor’s sorrows? Are you near to those in your workplace or school who are

feeling heartbroken, hopeless, or helpless because of deep disappointment in life? Do you know them and what in life has left them harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd? Will you pray that God would fill your heart with the true compassion of Jesus that will lead you to share the comfort and hope that God has granted to you in your deepest sorrows? (See 2 Corinthians 1:1-11.)

Pray for our church. Pray that God would bring us into close proximity to brokenness so that we might bring people into a close encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. ♦

- Senior Pastor Kevin Dibbley



LET'S GET TO KNOW: Mike Dokken, Elder

By Karen Kowalke, Treasurer

If you greet visitors on Sunday morning and ask how they found out about our church, chances are they were invited by Mike Dokken. Mike spends much of his free time in restaurants and other public places in a deliberate effort to meet people, listen to their struggles, and share how God helps him through his own struggles. Since coming to Waterbrooke in 2018, Mike has invited many people to church, some of whom now call Waterbrooke their home.

Although he was brought up in the Lutheran church, Mike was not always so passionate about evangelism. He spent years wrestling with questions about faith and grappling with personal challenges. After active duty in the military and a stint as an entrepreneur in the Twin Cities, Mike faced battles with anxiety and PTSD. Everything changed for him in 2008 during a men's Bible Study. That's where he encountered the life-changing truth that nothing he could do would make God love him any more or any less. This realization hit him hard, and since then he has been compelled to share the amazing grace and love that God offers to all who trust in Christ.

Currently serving on the Elder Board, Mike treasures how his time on the board has helped him to grow and encouraged him to pause, reflect and understand different points of view. He values unity and consensus-building as God-honoring ways to make decisions for Waterbrooke.

Beyond his role as an elder, Mike feels called to minister at Waterbrooke by reaching out to those going through tough times, since he has been through many difficult life circumstances himself. Through the process of offering encouragement to others and sharing how God's grace is changing him personally day by day, Mike finds that the Lord continues to heal his own hurts while using him to help others.

Mike's one prayer for each of us at Waterbrooke is simple yet profound: "May you realize that God sees and loves you and is looking for a deeper relationship with you." And if he can encourage you in any way on that thought, Mike's here to talk about it! ♦

Did you know?

- While in the military, Mike trained military K-9 dogs who detected explosive devices.
- When working as a Dairy Queen owner, Mike sometimes invented his own new Blizzard flavors. His Cinnamon Toast Crunch flavor was a big hit!
- Mike came to Waterbrooke in an unusual way: he attended a Paul Tripp parenting seminar here even though he doesn't have kids. ♦



Mike Dokken • photo by Lisa Washington

Tips for Being a Faithful Fisher of Men

By Karen Kowalke, Treasurer

“You’ve got to go where the fish are!” That’s the common Minnesota saying that Mike Dokken embraces as a guide for his personal evangelistic approach.

For Mike, this means frequenting restaurants and bars, recognizing these places are where people often seek solace from their troubles and may be open to meaningful conversations. For some of us, however, God may provide opportunities right where we are – at work, in the neighborhood, or among friends and family – echoing the adage “Bloom where you’re planted.”

At spots like Willy McCoy’s or Floyd’s, Mike doesn’t shy away from taking risks. He intentionally sits beside strangers, diving into conversations to understand their life challenges. He earns their trust by genuinely listening before sharing about his hope. Mike is a storyteller who draws from his own struggles to connect with others; he knows from experience what it feels like to sit in their seat.

Mike often uses a variety of props to illustrate his points: a vial with a mustard seed symbolizes how one must be planted in the right soil to grow and reproduce. That leads into discussions about his struggles and how God has met him firsthand. Mike also uses a gospel coin to discuss the deceptions in life and the truth found in Christ.

How can believers prepare for these conversations? Mike offers some practical advice:

1. Know the Word.

Mike sees the gospel as “a healing balm for people’s wounds.” Familiarity with Scripture allows the Holy Spirit to bring relevant verses to mind during conversations.

2. Learn a model.

Mike recommends learning models or diagrams like the “One Minute Witness” or the CRU “Bridge



Keith Colville (left) is one of many friends Mike Dokken (right) has invited to Waterbrooke.

diagram,” which succinctly present the gospel. These tools often include foundational Bible verses that explain our sinful nature, God’s grace, and the path to salvation.

3. Live out the gospel.

Above all, Mike emphasizes the importance of the gospel resonating deeply in our own lives. He challenges us: if we’ve truly experienced the peace and joy of faith, how can we not share it with others?

Mike’s approach is driven by a genuine desire to connect with people and share the transformative message of God’s love and grace. His strategy isn’t just about conversations – it’s about meeting people’s needs and pointing them towards lasting hope found in Christ. ♦

Karen Kowalke and her family started attending Waterbrooke in 2000, and for the past 15 years, she’s handled finance and human resources for the church. She enjoys hiking at their Black Hills cabin, reading, and improving her rusty French.

“Christians have nothing to be smug about; we are not righteous people trying to correct the unrighteous. As one preacher said, ‘Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.’ The chief difference between the believer and the unbeliever is forgiveness.”

R.C. Sproul, Ligonier Ministries

AGLOW Takes the Stage for God's Glory

By Diana Barto

Live theater performances can be powerful – not just for the audience but also for the actors and those working behind the scenes.

This summer two great stories hit the stage in Hopkins through AGLOW Theater, a non-profit homeschool group with several connections to Waterbrooke Church. Aspiring to creatively reveal God and His truths through theater productions, AGLOW has included many individuals from the Waterbrooke family as actors and volunteers in its performances. Likewise, the church has provided space for the group's play practices as well as film shoots and outdoor performances.

AGLOW is led by Andrea and Jeff Merboth, who are covenant partners at Waterbrooke. They say pointing actors and audiences to the greatest story ever told – the Bible – is key to AGLOW's mission. Storytelling on stage is powerful because we all enjoy a good story.

"Every good story out there is based on the Bible or biblical principles," Andrea explains. "So that is where we go for inspiration."

Sacrifice, redemption, heartbreak, good versus evil – all these themes are right out of Scripture, Jeff adds.

"We love stories! Didn't Jesus use stories all the time? That's what the parables were," he says. "Telling a story works because it brings the point across way better than I could just telling you outright."

A playwright who also serves as director, Andrea carefully weaves God's Word into the scripts she writes. Then she faithfully points to those truths as she directs and disciplines the student-actors alongside producers Tina Culbertson and Kristi Beil. Waterbrooke's Jason Wierdsma runs sound and lights for the performances, and this year Holly Meyers, also from Waterbrooke, joined in as a co-director.

For this summer's matinee show, Andrea wove the gospel message into the classic fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" and has the kids singing a psalm set to a catchy tune that Holly was inspired to create.

What's more, both the fairy tale matinee and the evening show, "12 Angry Jurors," emphasize truths from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 7. That includes lines like, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are

ravenous wolves," and "Judge not lest you be judged." These are words that the actors cannot leave childhood without knowing, Andrea says.

"Light and shadow are my focus," she explains.

"What is wisdom? What are you going to pick, light or darkness? And how do you identify light and darkness?"

Andrea's passion is to help young actors navigate those kinds of questions with a biblical worldview and to combat the wrong messages the world throws at them. The Merboths are dedicated to making disciples.

"That's why we do this. We

see the kids being beat up in this 'dark and perverted world,' she says. "These kids are raised in Christian families, but their faith may not be there, or by definition it is young, very young. So I take every chance I can to help make faith come alive for them."

Through group discussions and Bible-based character analyses, the kids gain a better understanding of the character of man, God's Word, and their own places in God's redemptive plan. They also make new friends, develop as actors, and grow in all the theatrical disciplines.

"We pray for the kids, their parents, everyone coming to the show," Jeff says. "We feel like the show is impacting all of us, changing all of us."

When the final curtain is drawn, the goal is for the audiences, actors, and volunteers to walk away with hope and with direction on how to find truth.

For more about AGLOW, visit aglowtheater.org. ♦



Andrea and Jeff Merboth lead AGLOW.

Diana Barto is married to Michael and serves Waterbrooke as editor of *Edify*. When she isn't baking or visiting their two daughters at college, Diana helps promote AGLOW as a public relations volunteer.



Several youth from Waterbrooke participated in AGLOW's 2023 performance of "The Silver Chair" directed by Andrea Merboth. Pictured at left are volunteers and actors from the Baber, Barto, Bocknicek, Campbell, Ramler, Savage, and Wierdsma families. Many of the actors return this summer for "Little Red Riding Hood" and "12 Angry Jurors" July 18-21 at the Hopkins High School Little Theater in Minnetonka. Visit aglowtheater.org for more details.

Multilingual Worship Cultivates Love

By Pastor Gabe Zepeda

Corporate worship is a lot like sharing a meal at an awkward dinner party, says Sandra Maria Van Opstal. She's a worship leader who, like me, is a Latino.

When we gather for corporate worship, we might feel out of our comfort zone. We might even feel a certain tension because of our differences. But the awkwardness is not necessarily a bad thing. It's actually proof that we are one family, gathered at Christ's table together.

In the parable of the great banquet, Christ teaches us that the kingdom of God isn't reserved only for family members and the rich, but also for "people who are poor, who have disabilities, who are limping, and people who are blind" (Luke 14:13 NASB). Imagine a rich man and a poor man laughing together at a dinner table. Imagine family members serving the disabled like members of their own family. That's what the kingdom of God is like.

But Jesus goes a step further. In Christ's parable, a man throws a lavish banquet and invites many people. But all the invitees decline his invitation! In response, the man tells his servant to go beyond the borders into foreign territory to tell the poor, the lame, the outcast, the outsider, the forgotten that they have a seat at his banquet table (Luke 24:21-23).

Imagine peoples from every tribe and nation seated

at a dinner party together. Imagine no favoritism, no prejudice, no discrimination. That's what the kingdom of God is like. And the church reflects that kingdom reality now on earth.

Christ's parable is a rebuke to the Jews and the religious elite of his day. Jesus is the man who throws the banquet, but the Jews decline His invitation. They even crucify Him. But, frankly, Christ's parable is a rebuke to the church today as well. We all have a seat at Christ's table — not because of our ethnicity or socio-economic class — but because of God's free grace.

Singing songs in multiple languages can teach us how to have "awkward dinner parties" together. It can help us to celebrate and inhabit each other's stories at the table. It can help us see one another. It can spur us to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21). And it can cultivate an atmosphere of love in which we honor brothers and sisters who are different than us by learning and singing their songs. ♦

Editor's note: This is the second in a series about multilingual singing. Catch our next issue for more on this topic.

Gabe Zepeda is Waterbrooke's Pastor for Worship and Gospel Formation. He and his wife Rebekah have four children: Gabriella, Micah, Aletheia, and Zion.

College Group Takes Gospel to Sioux Tribe

By Dana Brumitt

What does a small-town Christian girl do when she goes off to college intending to be a rebel — and runs right into the arms of Jesus?

Ask Ellie Keppel.

Ellie was raised in the church and home-schooled by parents who were youth leaders at Waterbrooke. She was looking forward to a new experience at a big public university.

“I thought I would be a rebel and get into partying, but I never got a chance,” she says.

Within days of arriving at North Dakota State University, Ellie was invited to a campus meeting of Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship. Her rebellious streak was over before it began.

“God got to me before I ever got into that scene...” she says.

Settling into what she calls a typical college life, Ellie got into the rhythm of a first year English major - studying, going to the gym, church on Sundays, making awesome friends, and indulging in one of her greatest passions: coffee.

Ellie’s year was humming along nicely when an exciting door opened for her to go with Chai Alpha on their annual mission trip to Fort Yates, ND. She had been going on mission trips ever since she was 9 years old, so she jumped at the opportunity.

Fort Yates, the tribal headquarters of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, is snuggled up beside the Missouri River at the southern border of North Dakota. In a reservation that straddles both Dakotas and covers 2.3 million acres, Fort Yates is a hamlet with a population of 169 people.

Chai Alpha’s mission was to partner with the local church and conduct a Vacation Bible School for the young people during spring break.

In March, Ellie and a team of 40 students traveled 260 miles from Fargo to the tiny town of Selfridge and were welcomed by Randy and Hazel Hahne from the small Assemblies of God Church that serves Fort Yates.

Logistics were interesting. Accommodations for the girls was the floor of the church and a single shower with limited hot water in the middle school on the other end of town. Imagine 20 girls and one inadequate shower!

The first night, the team broke into groups and canvassed the town, knocking on doors and inviting families to send their kids to VBS.

“It wasn’t the safest place. The neighborhoods were kind of sketchy, and there were feral dogs running

wild everywhere. Some of them were rabid.”

For safety, a leader accompanied each group and, although the initial reception from the people was cool, the turnout was amazing. About 80 kids showed up!

Using skits and stories, the team communicated the gospel story with the young people, lavishing them with love and attention.

“They were so loving, so open, so respectful,” Ellie



Ellie Keppel grew up at Waterbrooke and is now part of the Chai Alpha Christian Fellowship at North Dakota State University.

explains. “It’s amazing to share the love of God with kids who don’t know anything at all about God.”

For six days the team conducted worship services, made crafts, played games and just hung out with the kids, getting to know them and demonstrating love. Hearts were open and receptive.

“Many of them don’t get much love at home. All you had to do was smile at a kid, and instantly they’d be your best friend,” Ellie says.

Her philosophy about evangelism is simple: “Evangelizing is different depending on who you’re talking to. These kids didn’t need in-depth apologetics; they just needed to know that God loves them unconditionally.”

The team also served in practical ways, doing maintenance work and repairs on the parsonage and another house in town.

Substance abuse is widespread on the reservation, contributing to crime, poor health and living conditions, and economic hardship. Many parents struggle to care for their families and many children do not have their basic needs met. For Ellie, this was difficult.

“The hardest part for me was to see little kids who were losing their teeth because they didn’t have toothbrushes,” she says.

Ellie still holds the image of Carmine, a small boy she had a special connection with, crying as the team said their goodbyes on the last day. She hopes to go to Fort Yates again before she graduates — and maybe again after that.

Ellie would encourage everyone to go on a mission trip.

“You can’t fix everything, but a little love goes a long way. You can start a fire and give them some kindling, then God will keep it going,” she explains.

Did Ellie miss out on something by skipping the customary college party culture?

“I have found my life to be far more fruitful because I stayed out of that. My relationship with God has only grown stronger this past year because I’ve seen Him moving, protecting, and loving. I think I would’ve felt very far from God if I had slipped into



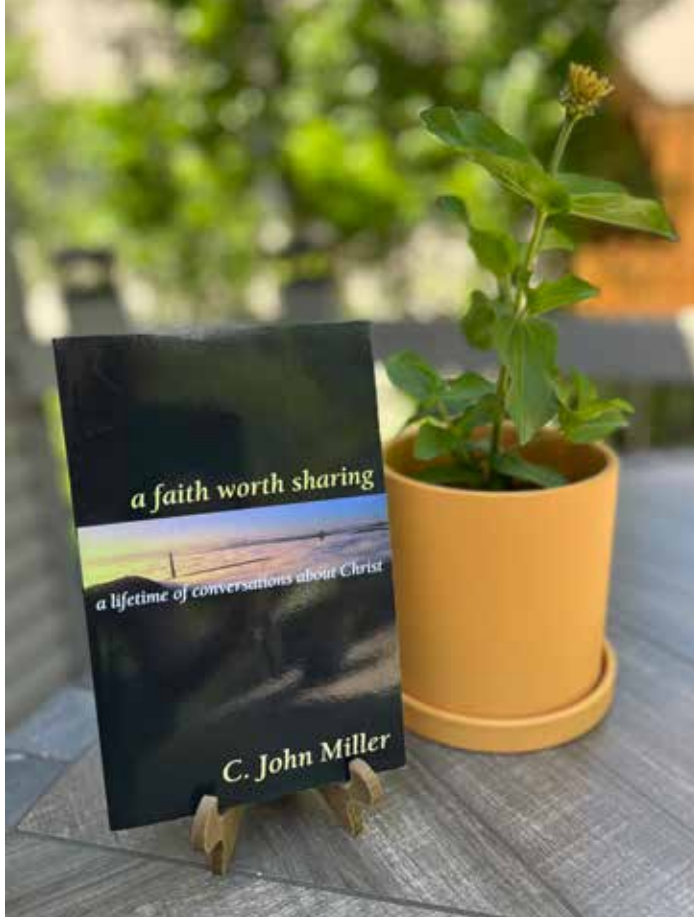
Over spring break, Waterbrooke’s Ellie Keppel and this Chai Alpha team (above) shared the gospel with kids from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in Fort Yates, ND.

the party scene. God has been so good and faithful in protecting me in that way. All of the glory to Him!” ♦

Dana Brumitt is back home at Waterbrooke after a 10-year interlude. She’s had a long career in corporate learning and development and now works to help older adults live happier, healthier lives. Just about any day you can find her walking on the Luce Line Trail or in the pool at the Y.

“But to preach the gospel is not just to tell the truth but to tell the truth in love, and to tell the truth in love means to tell it with concern also for the people it is being told to. So it is crucial to keep them in mind, too, the hearers of the tragic, the comic, the fairy-tale truth. Who are they? What is going on inside them?”

***Frederick Buechner
Telling the Truth: The Gospel as
Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale***



“In a skeptical age, this may all sound far fetched, like a fairy tale for gullible kids. Too good to be true. But this news is entirely true. It just isn’t deserved — indeed, it isn’t fair. As one song phrases it, ‘Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer.’”

Matt Smethurst, *Before You Share Your Faith: Five Ways to Be Evangelism Ready*

“What really convinces others of the truth of the Christian message is not our perfection or our rational arguments, but our willingness to love them where they are and to introduce them to our community of faith. God does not want us to share our faith as independent supermen or superwomen, but as brothers and sisters together in God’s family.

C. John Miller, *A Faith Worth Sharing: A Lifetime of Conversations about Christ*

Quotables

“Evangelism, or telling others the good news of the gospel, is simply praising God in front of those who do not know Him.”

Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God*

“My experience has been we can do mercy ministries much more easily than we can share the gospel. And we’ve got to make sure that we’re sharing the true gospel with people when we do mercy ministries... We must recognize the statement that ‘Always preach the gospel, when necessary use words’ is a foolish statement, because the gospel is a message. It requires words. It’s like saying, ‘Feed the hungry, when necessary, use food.’”

Mack Stiles, “How Can I Overcome My Fear of Evangelism?” 2024 June 10, Crossway Podcast

“Story is a Trojan horse for truth. It can sneak truth past the gates of our defenses and prepare our hearts to hear things we might have resisted if they have come as mere declaration.”

Russ Ramsey, *Rembrandt is in the Wind*

“Jesus, our gracious host, comes to us in our hardhats and bootstraps, and He gently reassures us that His vision will one day be reality. He reminds us it’s His work from the start. That His kingdom is advancing and will one day cover the entire world as the waters cover the seas, including the very corner of the world in which we now live, our neighborhoods. He will do it and we will live in restored and renovated neighborhoods where we wholly reflect Him.”

Chris and Elizabeth McKinney, *Neighborhoods Reimagined: How the Beatitudes Inspire our Call to be Good Neighbors*