

LIMEY PASTOR

In between time: moments of grace, melodies of God

Time to plan anew. The word from my former church, Good Shepherd on Locust Road in Boardman, is that the gifts of the people of God are being put to work, preaching, witnessing and singing joyfully on that blessed Locust Road. God is living, is present and is calling anew. Thanks are to him and his living word!

My newly borning church, down in the Willamette Valley in Aurora, is in the planting phase. We are worshipping on Friday evenings so that people who work on the weekend will have a church to be at when most other sounds of worship are silent. It should have an appeal to those who seek different worship patterns and different traditions, particularly those who seek an angled entryway into soulful peace.

I am looking at using the Taize services, founded in France, that is filled with that sought-for soulful silence and prayer-filled melodies. My former pastor, Pastor Craig from Christ Lutheran, and I would sometimes head out to the Taize services held at the St. Francis of Assisi Church in Wilsonville and share in afternoon worship in the Taize style. This was a service founded in the bitterness of wartime in the town of Taize, where a monk called Brother Roger sheltered refugees from the fires and wrath of World War II that pursued these wretched people like barbarians at the gate. (The pursuers were barbarians at the gate).

Using patterns of music that included simple chant, biblical texts, short heartfelt prayer and places where silence gathers and distills the dew of prayer from the garden of the Lord, we invite his Sabbath to rest upon us and we rest in him.

Beginnings are delicate places and I want this first "do" of the octave of worship (so to speak) to be felt as a true invitation into God's presence, a ladder into peace.

Many years ago I was graced enough to be provided with a spiritual director called Father Bernard, who was the abbot at Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey down at Lafayette in Oregon. He was a contemporary and friend of the marvelous monk Thomas Merton. I had been sent there to learn some things about the mystical path of faith, which is of interest to me. He recommended to me the spiritual letters of John Chapman, who provided many useful recommendations for pursuit of this quiet exploration of God's world, and I would recommend this work to all Christians (both lay and religious) who like to sit alone in prayer and reflection.

I asked Father Bernard why he had become a monk. He looked at me and said "It was God ... or ... at least I think it was God." And he smiled.

Faith is like that. We think it is God we seek, with our limited instruments of mind, and we move into the darkness, his holy darkness. In his 35th letter, Abbot John Chapman speaks of this. It is a question of living in the *fundus animae*, or apex, or center (or whatever you like to call it), which seems a very frail lifeboat in a stormy sea. But provided we stop in the boat and not in the sea, it is all right.

I think that the Taize service is like that, it provides an experience of the boat and allows us to rest in that very central place where God is with us.

Be at peace, O our souls.
Amen.

Colin Brown is the former pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Boardman.



COLIN BROWN
Faith



AP Photo/Andre Penner

This Sept. 28 photo shows the façade of what once was the Stylofino picture frame factory owned by members of Rhema Community Evangelical Ministry, affiliated with the Word of Faith Fellowship church, in Franco da Rocha, Brazil.

Brazil branches of U.S.-based church target of many probes

By PETER PRENGAMAN
Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — Every day before work, Liliane Souza says, she and three dozen fellow workers at a Brazilian picture-framing factory affiliated with the Word of Faith Fellowship church were obligated to pray.

When workers made a mistake, such as cutting a frame too short, she says they were screamed at and sometimes even hit to expunge the "devil" behind the error. And when Stylofino stopped paying its workers for months, Souza said the company's co-owners — members of a Brazilian branch of the U.S.-based church — had a ready explanation.

"They said the business was struggling because we were sinners," she said.

The business and its labor practices are under investigation by Brazilian authorities — just one of several inquiries launched into a pair of churches connected to Word of Faith Fellowship, a secretive evangelical sect based in Spindale, North Carolina.

The Associated Press has learned that Brazilian prosecutors also are looking into possible improprieties in a land deal involving one of the churches. And education ministries in two Brazilian states said they are investigating allegations that church schools physically and psychologically abused students and redacted textbooks in violation of state policy.

The investigations were spurred by AP stories in July detailing allegations that Word

of Faith Fellowship created a pipeline of young congregants who say they were brought to the U.S. from Brazil and forced to work at church-affiliated businesses for little or no pay. The stories also documented how the church steadily took over the two Brazilian congregations, instituting a fundamentalist vision that included verbal and physical abuse aimed at expelling devils.

Pastors at the Word of Faith Fellowship branches — located in the Brazilian cities of Sao Joaquim de Bicas and Franco da Rocha — have issued statements denying the accusations, but did not respond to numerous interview requests from the AP.

After the stories about the Brazilian churches were published in July, authorities in both Brazil and the United States launched investigations into the allegations of abuse, forced labor and visa fraud. Investigators told the AP that interviews stemming from that ongoing probe led them to scrutinize the conditions at Stylofino.

The small factory in the Sao Paulo suburb of Franco da Rocha was opened in 2000 by Gerson Jose Garcia and Juarez de Souza Oliveira, according to tax records.

De Souza Oliveira and wife Solange Granieri founded Ministerio Evangelico Comunidade Rhema, or Rhema Community Evangelical Ministry, in 1988. Garcia is a long-time member of the church, which includes an adjoining school.

Eight former factory workers interviewed by the AP described a rigid working

environment that mirrored the religious fervor of the church and school. Only members of the church could work there: Leaving the church meant leaving the job.

The employees said they were paid minimum wage and worked most national holidays, late at night and on weekends, but never were paid overtime. They were pressured into signing falsified time sheets that reflected vacations never taken and only the limited hours they were supposed to be working, they said.

They also said they were not provided lunch stipends or allowed to sell a portion of their holidays for pay, both of which are mandated by Brazilian law.

Three of the former workers said they began part time while in high school, working off the books as "volunteers" for no compensation.

Andre Oliveira said he started at the factory in 2007 while still in high school and continued into 2009 about eight months after graduating, working almost every day from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. for no pay.

"I never received even a cent," said Oliveira, who broke with the church last year and now lives in the United States.

He said he feared that refusing to work would have led to being kicked out of church or "blasting," a practice in which followers surround a congregant and scream, often for hours.

The workers told the AP that, beginning in 2011, many employees were not paid their regular salaries for more than a year, instead receiving payments months late or just a portion of what they were owed.

BRIEFLY

Poles pray en masse at border; Some see anti-Muslim agenda

GDANSK, Poland (AP) — Polish Catholics held rosaries and prayed together Saturday along the country's 3,500-kilometer border, appealing to the Virgin Mary and God for salvation for Poland and the world in a national event that some felt had anti-Muslim overtones.

The unusual "Rosary to the Borders" event was organized by lay Catholics but was also endorsed by Polish church authorities, with 320 churches from 22 dioceses taking part. The prayers took place from the Baltic Sea coast in the north to the mountains along Poland's southern borders with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and all along the border of this country of 38 million where more than 90 percent declare themselves Roman Catholics.

Organizers say the prayers at some 4,000 locations commemorated the centenary of the apparitions of Fatima, when three shepherd children in Portugal said the Virgin Mary appeared to them.

But the event also commemorated the huge 16th-century naval battle of Lepanto, when a Christian alliance acting on the wishes of the pope defeated Ottoman Empire forces on the Ionian Sea, "thus saving Europe from Islamization," as organizers put it.

Prime Minister Beata Szydlo showed her support by tweeting an image of rosary beads with a crucifix and sending greetings to all the participants.

Supreme Court asked to review prayer ruling

WASHINGTON (AP) — A North Carolina county will ask the Supreme Court to review a ruling barring it from opening its meetings with Christian prayers.

The First Liberty Institute, representing the Rowan County Board of Commissioners, filed papers Thursday with the high court asking it to consider the case.

In July, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond ruled 10-5 against the county. The judges said that while prayer itself is not unconstitutional, the commissioners' practice of leading the prayers themselves and inviting the audience to join, always in the Christian faith, violated the First Amendment by establishing Christianity as a preferred religion.

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922-3250

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Loving People
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Sunday School: 9:30am
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pendletonfaithcenter.org

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church LCMC
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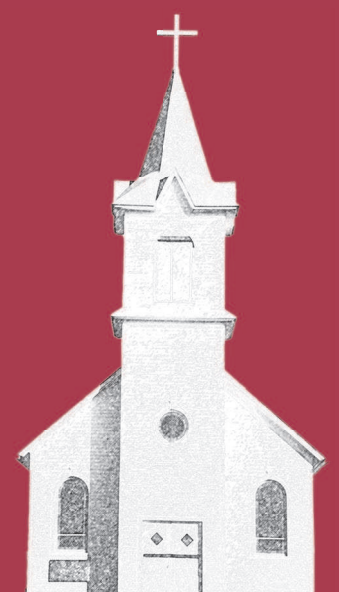
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