

Values briefs

► Joyful noise

A judge in Minnesota has found no legal grounds to silence a charismatic church's joyful noise to the Lord.

Hennepin County District Judge John Holahan in Minneapolis recently dismissed charges that True Apostolic Assembly Church had violated state law and city ordinances with noisy worship services. A noise reading of 65 to 70 decibels was taken outside the church.

Holahan said the law applied in the case is unconstitutional because it regulates noise generated by religious activity more stringently than that of other activities, including political rallies.

► Wildlife support

Saving the nation's wildlife is the goal of the Evangelical Environmental Network, a group that has called for strengthening the Endangered Species Act.

According to leaders of the group, recent efforts in Congress to dismantle the act are the moral equivalent of sinking Noah's ark.

While evangelical Christians support Republican positions on such issues as abortion and family values, organization members believe the words of Psalm 24:1, which says, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it," said Stan LeQuire, national director of EEN. "If we are going to follow God, we need to treat the land the way He would, protecting everything, whether it be a salamander, bald eagle or slug."

Comprised of more than 1,000 churches nationwide, the EEN has pledged to spend \$1 million to educate the public about the importance of protecting "creation," according to a report by environmental writer Amy Gamata.

"We are consistently pro-life — that means everything," LeQuire said. "We are against abortion, war, poverty and the unraveling of creation."

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► Mosaic restored

A 1,500-year-old mosaic in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome is being restored, thanks to funds from the Getty Grant Program.

The mosaic, which depicts the coronation of the Virgin Mary and decorates the apse of the basilica, has been damaged by water seepage over the years.

The California-based program, funded by the J. Paul Getty Trust, has given \$58 million to 1,400 conservation projects in 135 countries over the past 12 years.

► Plain Christians

A new magazine, Christian Advancement, published in Rugby, N.D., will carry articles focusing on church-related issues in the Great Plains.

The magazine will cover such topics as local church outreach, discipleship and worship, Christian organizations and Christian schools, devotionals and Bible commentary.

"There are many Christian writers living in the Great Plains who have much to contribute," said magazine editor Wayne Vleck. "I want to give them that opportunity."

The magazine will be issued four times a year at an annual subscription price of \$12. To subscribe or submit articles for consideration, write to Christian Advancement, 808 244 Ave. S.E., Rugby, ND 58368 or call (701) 776-2982.

# The journey upward

## Many find renewed sense of spirituality in 12 steps

BY CINDY LANGE-KUBICK  
Lincoln Journal Star

"We are only operating a spiritual kindergarten in which people are enabled to get over their drinking and find the grace to go on living to better effect. Each man's theology has to be his own quest, his own affair."

—Bill W., founder of Alcoholics Anonymous

The smell of fresh-brewed coffee, the acrid scent of a just-smoked cigarette, the clatter of folding chairs. A moment of silence followed by throats clearing and a low rush of voices.

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;  
"The courage to change the things I can;  
"And the wisdom to know the difference."

Every night of the week, all across the city, members of 12-step groups meet. They are in recovery: alcoholics and drug addicts; compulsive overeaters and gamblers; sex addicts and co-dependents.

Some of what happens in these rooms — mostly within the walls of churches — looks and feels like religion.

There are prayers, discussions of God and talk of being saved. There is the oft-quoted Big Book, written by Bill W.

But something is different. You don't have to believe in Jesus — or Buddha, or Mohammed — to belong here. You don't have to believe in God at all — at least not in the way defined by many mainline churches. For most members, it isn't church — and it sure ain't religion.

Outsiders might deem these unlikely spots for spirituality. A group of ex-drunks talking about spiritual awakenings, faith, prayer and higher powers? Yet some kind of spirit surely is moving in these places.

"Gambling came first — I put God on the back burner."

— Marcia, Gamblers Anonymous

People come into 12-step recovery by many avenues — a treatment program, the pleas of a spouse, the realization that their lives have become unmanageable. The last thing on their minds is God.

In his book on alcoholism, "Eight Million Ways to Die," Lawrence Block writes, "I came in here to save my ass. And then I found out it was attached to my soul."

Bob, a longtime AA member, heard the phrase with a slightly different twist when he entered the program: "Church saved your soul," his sponsor said, "and AA saved your ass."

Ask most 12-step members, and they will tell you they didn't enter the program to save their souls — it was their earthly bodies that were in jeopardy. But somehow, somewhere, the spiritual side took hold.

Bob struggled with the God part of the

### The 12 steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

alcohol recovery program. (Several of the group's 12 steps refer to "God" or a "higher power.") But he wanted to get sober.

"Early on, the group was my higher power," he said.

Others enter as Christians with a knowledge of God, who lost sight of their faith through their addictions.

"I was spiritually dead when I was using drugs," said Becky, an 18-month member of Narcotics Anonymous.

"When food is making me drunk, I may not hear the voice of God," said a member of Overeaters Anonymous, a woman who called herself a born-again Christian before she joined the group, but didn't discover "God within me" until she became "abstinent" and quit eating sugar and flour.

Spirituality has become a big part of many 12-step members' lives. They pray daily, ask God for guidance, surrender to a higher power.

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RANDY HAMPTON AND SHEILA STORV, Lincoln Journal Star

## Franciscan priest hits a few in discussion of meditation

BY CINDY LANGE-KUBICK  
Lincoln Journal Star

The best way to improve your golf game is to sit quietly, breathe deeply, close your eyes and imagine a perfect putt.

So says Franciscan priest Friar Justin Belitz.

Belitz was in town earlier this week talking to folks at Christ Unity Church about meditation.

Combining sound scientific principles with stand-up comedy ("You can call me Just-in because I'll be Just-out"), Belitz shared his passion for the ancient art of mental prayer.

Belitz, 61, a picture of joy (and a drop-dead clone of Kirk Douglas without the chin-blet), brought a GQ sensibility to his flowing brown robe. Laughing long and hard, mimicking the slouched meditative state of the chronic television watcher, drawing a raucous picture of his boyhood in the Polish section of Omaha, he was the perfect advertisement for his product.

A friar and Catholic priest for 40 years, Belitz began to meditate as part of monastic life. He and his fellow friars would "chant the office" from midnight to 1 a.m.; then he would disobey his instructors and "just sit in the quiet."

"It was a wonderful experience." He's been sharing that joy — and selling his books and tapes — all over this country and Europe ever since. And if this week's crowd was any indication, people are hungry for what he has to offer.

Prayer is nothing more than becoming aware of God's presence.

— Friar Justin Belitz

Explaining both the scientific aspects of meditation (when brain waves slow down, the subconscious mind opens up) and its theological roots (all of the saints and the mystics practiced meditation), Belitz honed in on its practical applications for stressed-out 20th-century dwellers.

Children can use meditation to speed the learning process; patients can use it to regain health; golfers even can use it to improve their golf game, Belitz said.

In the subconscious, the "mind is free of all limits," Belitz said. And gaining access to that part of the mind allows people to make radical changes.

pain that Jesus experienced on the cross so that I can be the perfect lover."

That centuries-old phenomenon, Belitz said, is being played out today, as people use meditation to arrest diseases like cancer.

"God is not up in the sky — God is here," Belitz said, pointing to his chest. "Prayer is nothing more than becoming aware of God's presence."

If people become skilled in meditation — a form of prayer — they can change anything in their lives, he said.

It all rests on the principle of cause and effect.

If people fill themselves up with garbage, they can't expect to get a healthy Thanksgiving dinner, Belitz said.

Pointing around the room, he said that everything there first was conceived in someone's mind and then became reality.

It's the same, whether people are talking about their spiritual state, their weight or, yes, their golf game.

"See yourself in perfect form... See yourself under par every single hole," Belitz said, flashing his Kirk Douglas grin.

"You'll improve yourself more that way than standing out there on the golf course."

For more info  
Friar Belitz will be in Omaha today, Sunday and May 25-26 to teach the Silva method of meditation. For more information, call (317) 545-0742.



CINDY LANGE-KUBICK, Lincoln Journal Star