

the

COMMONPLACE

a vinelife publication



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The world is full of conflict today. There is little in the way of true shalom on earth today. One of the places that has been plunged into war is the state of Israel after a lengthy time when visitors could come and go with relative safety. One visitor during that time of peace was our own Ruthanne Burch. Below she tells the story of her time there. Another war, raging here in our own country, is the spiritual battle that has resulted in the death of many pre-born children. But God has his warriors like Kathy Bridge and her staff of Gate PRC. I visited them in October and report here the wonderful things I learned during my visit. ~Editor

FROM BLACK AND WHITE TO COLOR

BY RUTHANNE BURCH

RUTHANNE IS THE CHILD OF MISSIONARY PARENTS AND HAS A PASSION FOR THE LORD'S WORK! SHE SERVES ON THE VINELIFE STAFF AND WEARS MANY CREATIVE HATS AS PART OF HER FULL-TIME SERVICE ON THE STAFF AT STONEBRIDGE.

A year ago, I had the incredible gift of going to the Holy Land with my mom and a group from my parents' church. I had no idea what to expect as I stepped on that plane, headed for Tel Aviv. I wondered if I would have some kind of spiritual awakening while I was there or if I was going to have this deeper newfound knowledge of scripture. Well...I know the first didn't happen and the second I think will be a longer process than just 12 days...but my time there changed me in ways I am still learning.

Instead of giving you all a day-by-day travelogue of our trip (which I don't think anyone wants!) I want to share two places we went and how they have helped me to understand God better.

The Sea of Galilee & Capernaum

Capernaum, the town where Jesus did much of his ministry, sits on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Not only is Capernaum significant because of what Christ did there but it is one of the few places we went to where you can see the original stones of the temple and other buildings from the time of Christ. As we walked along the streets I could imagine Jesus walking in those same places. As my hands brushed against those ancient stones, I thought, *maybe Jesus had also run his hands along the same place*. As I looked out onto the Sea of Galilee, I could imagine Jesus looking out and seeing that same water. It was here that Jesus became nearer than he ever has been to me. This place wasn't just a far-off town that is only in ancient stories...it's real, and that made Jesus even more real to me. As we were there, the song "Same God" by Elevation Music kept playing over and over in my head:

*You heard Your children then - You hear Your children now - You are the same God
You answered prayers back then - And You will answer now - You are the same God
You were providing then - You are providing now - You are the same God
You moved in power then - God, move in power now - You are the same God
You were a healer then - And You are a healer now - You are the same God
You were a savior then - And You are a savior now - You are the same God*

God is the same, yesterday, 2000 years ago in Capernaum, today, and tomorrow. We can trust him.

Church of the Holy Sepulcher

This church, or really cathedral, is said to have been built on the place where Jesus was crucified and buried. I say "said to have been" because it's hard to truly know where these things happened because of deconstruction, construction, and the years that have taken place.

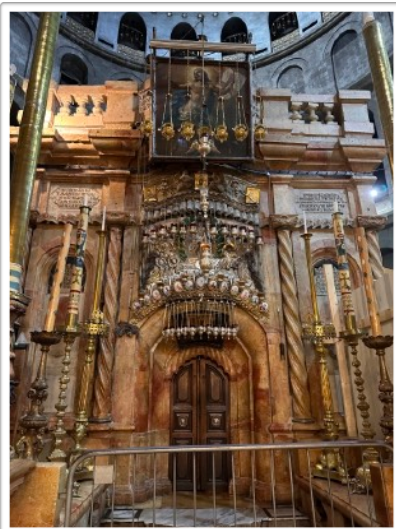
As with many of the sites in the Holy Land there are at least two different churches built on the site; most likely one for the Catholic church and one for the Greek Orthodox church. But the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is different. It is one building, but each of the sites that are special, like the one pictured below (the middle picture on the bottom row): this is me praying at the rock where Jesus was crucified (or at least what we think is.) You can't see it but on the other side of the room, on a different part of the rock is the place where the Greek Orthodox folks would go to pray. This place is only one example of the diversity that is the Holy Land.

There is a complexity of cultures that permeates the land. It is seen everywhere you go. That complexity is punctuated even more with the events that have taken place over the last few months. I'm not even going to begin to pretend that I understand or can explain to you what is happening in Israel and Palestine right now and I'm having trouble reconciling my experience in the Holy Land with the war that is going on right now. I wish I could just say, "these people are right and these people are wrong" but it is just not that easy. But what I do know is that the God who walked on the Sea of Galilee, did ministry in Capernaum, was crucified for us, and rose from the dead all in this beautiful land we call "the Holy Land" is the same God who is more powerful than any war that seeks to divide those in Israel and Palestine (as well as those here in our country). We are not meant to try and figure out why this is happening or to assign fault. We are called to pray for the people in this land who the Lord loves and are made in his image.

Let's continue to pray for peace in the Holy Land. When we don't have words to pray I have found this prayer from the Archbishop of Canterbury to be helpful:

God of compassion and justice. We cry out to your for all who suffer in the Holy Land today. For your precious children, Israelis and Palestinians, traumatized and in fear for their lives; Lord have mercy.

For the families of the bereaved, for those who have seen images they will never forget, for those anxiously waiting for news, despairing with each passing day; Lord have mercy.



Clockwise from top left:

1. The Sea of Galilee
2. Walls and entrances of homes in Capernaum
3. The original sight (the black rocks) of the temple where Jesus preached
4. The Damascus Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem
5. Praying at Golgotha
6. The entrance to the place where it is thought that Jesus was buried. Note the different candle sticks all representing the different religions that have a presence there.

A VISIT TO GATE PREGNANCY CENTERS

BY KAREN RENZO

KAREN IS THE EDITOR OF THE COMMONPLACE.

“It was a job I didn’t want. I thought I had none of the skills I would need to do this. But God reminded me that I had told Him I’d take *any* job He gave me, so I accepted the offer. And I discovered that *every skill* I had acquired over the last 30 years was being used in my new position!” Thus Kathy Bridge, former management consultant, began her new career as director of Gate Pregnancy Centers in 2020.

Kathy was kind enough to give me two hours of her time that morning in October. As someone who was part of Gate’s prayer chain, I wanted to see for myself the things that were happening at Gate after one of our Life Group members sang its praises (his daughter, a nurse, is on staff there). Kathy and I first spoke by phone to find a date and time that would work for both of us when I could have a tour of their facilities. I found out that they started every day with prayer at the Harrisburg location, so I got there in time to join them for the prayer session. Kathy later explained that Gate has experienced significant spiritual warfare because they are saving so many babies there, as well as some of the Moms. Therefore, daily prayer is such a necessary priority for Kathy and her staff.

When the prayers were done, the staff got to work, and the first client came in. I started the tour with Kathy. She explained that an appointment starts with a one-on-one meeting with an advocate. With kindness and empathy, the advocate listens to the client’s story. Then the advocate introduces the client to the message of the Gospel. *There is no client who does not receive the Good News of Jesus Christ during their initial appointment at Gate.* The witness of Gospel truth is essential to everything else that will happen at Gate. And as of mid-December 2023, there are 46 women who have accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord this year. Gate is required to share abortion options with their clients, but they share accurate and important information about the client’s baby that are generally not covered at abortion sites. For example, most clients do not understand that a baby at only 7 weeks gestational age can feel pain in utero.

After this initial meeting, the client then will go for an ultrasound in the room next door to the office where the initial consult took place. Unlike most abortion clinics, the ultrasound screen is viewed by the client as she lies on the table. She can see that her baby is alive, and perhaps realizes for the first time that she is not just carrying inanimate tissue that somehow turns into a baby later in the pregnancy. There is always a nurse who conducts the ultrasound exam and can answer any questions. It is an eye-opening time for the client to see a tiny human being living in her womb. This practice, plus the ongoing work of the client’s coach/educator throughout the pregnancy has resulted in Gate’s extraordinary success rate: 97% of the women who enter Gate for consultation and the ultrasound, make the decision to keep their babies! The secret, I believe is the follow-up, the education the mother receives and as she works through the program she gains points which allow her to earn some beautiful and practical things for the baby in Gate’s baby boutique. The store thrives on the donations they receive. At the end of this article I have a list of things they can really use now.

When Kathy took over the pregnancy resource center about three years ago, it looked much different than it does today. There was no ultrasound equipment. There were supplies and clothing reminiscent of a Good Will center. There was no sharing of the Gospel. And the discussion about keeping the baby? That would be discussed only if it came up in the conversation. And at that time there was only one location.

Kathy’s approach to Gate’s staffing is to hire passionate volunteers. And by God’s amazing provision, she has never had to advertise for help. People have heard about what she is doing and they call her to ask if she has a need for volunteers, including some nurses. God has met the need for competent and enthusiastic volunteers in this way. Right now she has 65 volunteers who fill many roles at Gate. The paid staff is only ten people; nine part time and one full time. This has allowed Kathy to maintain a budget that is about a third of other pregnancy resource centers in the area. Even when she added the Concord location (the former site of S & D Coffee) and needed to redesign the interior of both locations to be able to have a confidential place to meet with clients and have a room for ultrasound equipment and education rooms, she has had help from people who gave her advice and devised workable layouts for the renovations—at no charge. Another blessing comes from Multiply Church, which has multiple locations. Their Concord church is located across the street from the Gate PRC office and they provide monthly support toward the cost of their Concord office. The office is bilingual and the bus conveniently stops right by their location.

Gateway provides resources for mothers who are struggling to make ends meet and may even be homeless. Kathy has a book of over 165 organizations in the area willing to assist women who have no place to stay. “No one leaves without resources”, Kathy says.

When I visited Kathy, she told me about an organization called Save the Storks that provides PRC mobile services. Save the Storks will provide matching funds up to a \$30,000 grant toward a mobile unit. They provide best practices for

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Dear Readers,

We are always looking for people willing to share what God has done for them with our readers in The Commonplace. To contribute or to inquire further, please reach out to us via commonplace@stonebridge.org Thank you!

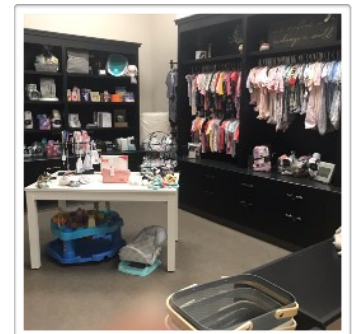
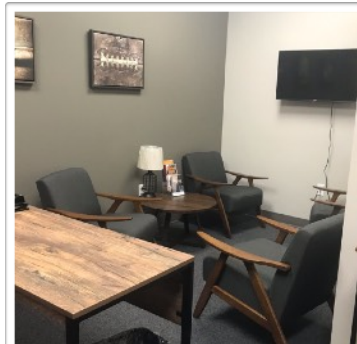
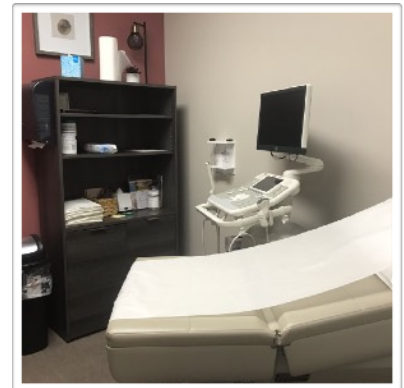
A VISIT TO GATE...CONTINUED

managing the work in the mobile unit. Kathy had a vision to obtain one of these mobile units and begin a partnership with churches in the area to help local women. The plan was to park the unit in partner church parking lots and use volunteer resources from the church to assist local women who would like to use the mobile unit's services. At the time of our interview, Kathy was nowhere near her goal. She told me that so far, she had only collected \$25,000, not nearly enough to purchase one of these mobile units, which cost about \$300,000. However, I was thrilled to learn that they had just had their mobile unit delivered at the beginning of December! As with so many other things, God has provided what was needed for Kathy to make this vision a reality in time for the first quarter of 2024, which was the vision she had laid before God.

God's work continues to bear fruit through the dedicated staff at Gate PRC and Kathy's faith, foresight, and wisdom. She also has completely replaced the Board of Directors with a mature board who understands the need for fundraising, and this Board will help Kathy move forward in meeting the great needs in the Charlotte area. Please pray that God will provide all their needs, as He has so graciously done, and that they will continue to shine God's love to every woman that walks in the door. Pray that many moms will walk out of Gate PRC as new creatures in Christ, ready to carry their babies to term!

Below is a list of items Gate currently needs for their boutique.

- Diaper Genies and the Diaper Genie replacements (i.e., the bags) - *This is the biggest need.*
- New Sleep and Plays
- Onesies for 0-3 month olds
- Long sleeved shirts for children 12 months and under
- Bouncy seats
- New car seats
- High chairs



Clockwise from top left:

1. Classes available this past September/October for mothers. 2. Gate's beautiful new mobile unit. 3. The ultrasound room. 4. Gate's beautiful boutique where mothers can use their points to obtain items that they will need.. 5. A training room for fathers. 6. A classroom