

Baker World Enquirer

Bill and Nona Baker Go Ye Fellowship P.O. Box 40039 Pasadena, CA 91114

Happenings - Events and People

April – June

Jay Wall helps people to learn how to get ahead in life.

Located in the former Garfield Elementary School, the Billings Vineyard Church is in the poorest neighborhood of Billings. Yet such an excellent location for an outreach doesn't mean that neighborhood residents would attend the church. Bill Baker explains how they began an outreach.

“Nona and I gave a talk how generational poverty affects people's way of solving problems. Then leadership decided to offer an outreach called Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting'-By World. We visited several organizations and offered our service for some of their clients. We offered an extra benefit as well. When a person dedicates himself to learning they earn \$25 a week. That amounts to earning \$375 over 15 weeks to learn how to change his life.”

There is no lecturing. No preaching. Giving advice is not allowed. People learn the most important lessons in relationship with others who share similar stories. While many activities are done together, each person makes their own decisions. **Jay Wall**, a 27 year old, 'immigrant' from Philadelphia, the facilitator, brought about community among members. (Bill Baker also facilitated. Most people felt that his role was comic relief.)

Jay shares, **“There are many services that feed people and provide material assistance. But I wanted to**

be involved in relationships that sustain dignity and mutual support. I wanted to participate in a discovery process that changes lives. The past 15 weeks have not only been fascinating discussions, but we have had fun. I have learned as much in this group as everyone else! We all feel proud of our accomplishments.”

Testimony of a Getting Ahead participant:

Bernard, age 32, “When I began Getting Ahead, my wife and I were separated. Family and Child Services had taken our three children from us because our home was a mess. They placed the kids with their grandparents. I couldn't keep a job. I usually couldn't concentrate when our groups began because I was too caught up in all of my problems. I also wondered how is it possible to learn anything when no one is telling us what to do? Yet every Tuesday someone comments, “Isn't it amazing how much we learned!” Now my wife is back home. She wants to join the next Getting Ahead group at the church in the fall.

One of the priority resources that I am building is language. What is that for me? One of the weeks we met we learned about the kinds of learning experiences that children from poverty have in their early years of

development. We learned that the children from poor families often enter school with a serious language handicap. And they often times never catch up. This is because there is not the interaction that engages the children to think. So, the language resource means for me what I will do to help my children. I want my kids to grow into mature adults. So I decided to spend time reading with them. I will spend time playing learning games with my kids. I learned mediation skills that help my children learn better ways to process thoughts. To grow spiritually and build my social resources I decided to volunteer at the HUB (Billings Mental Health Center). I had always thought that I was the one who needed help. Now I realize that to improve the quality of my own life, I will reach out to others.”

Lupita, 24, revealed a lesson about relationships and church. **“When I joined this group, I was in the middle of a divorce. My ex was not helping me at all with our two children. Nothing was going right. I was bitter and hopeless. I joined the group because I needed the extra \$25 each week. My moment of change occurred during our 9th week. Each of**

us assessed our own resources. It was then that I realized that I am the one who owns my choices. I marked down three areas of my life that I wanted to build the most: Financial, Spiritual and Social. I began to read with my children from the Bible or Christian story books. Yet I came upon an obstacle when I began attending church. I discovered that church is where I most feel like an outsider. I realized that growing spiritually is not just about a good sermon. It is about feeling safe among others. At church I feel surrounded by strangers who live in a different world than me. This Getting Ahead group helped me realize that I could grow more spiritually by being in a group like this one. It is small and we talk to each other.”

We will ask Lupita to serve in the next Getting Ahead group as a co-facilitator. She can grow spiritually and can share with people who have a common story.

NOTE: The Billings Salvation Army intends to begin a Getting Ahead group in the fall. **Nona Baker** will be one of the co-facilitators for the group. Group size is important. Group size affects the ability to bond, build trust and learn together. The ideal is a group of 8 – 12.

May

Miroslav Pollak visits Bridges out of Poverty communities

Miroslav Pollak, 54, has worked as a university math professor, a member of Slovak Parliament and an activist for a humanitarian group. Last year Miroslav founded the organization Uspech. Uspech, meaning ‘success’, helps people discover and develop their resources for a life. The resources include: building

oneself spiritually, emotionally, choosing the right relationships, having heroes,

constantly learning, growing in language, living healthily, practicing integrity, and knowing of the rules of middle class.

In May Miroslav and Bill Baker visited communities in the southwest to see

practices that help people build resources. They were in Boulder and Sterling, CO, Farmington, NM and Cheyenne, WY. Miroslav and Bill later participated with 100 people from around the country in Albuquerque, NM to learn training in Bridges out of Poverty. When asked about impressions of America, Miroslav said, **“I was astounded by how many Christian groups attended the Bridges out of Poverty training. Christians in America take a much**

more active role in their communities than in Slovakia. On the other hand, it seems that payday lenders (legal loan sharks) are as common as fast food restaurants. From what I have learned how these businesses work, it is not a sign of a healthy society. There are consequences that I think your society will sometime face.”

June

Phil de Vol teaches Bridges out of Poverty in Presov, Slovakia.

Phil de Vol grew up in India, son of a Quaker missionary doctor. For 25 years he directed an addiction rehabilitation clinic. He observed that many principles for living a sober life apply to getting out of poverty. Several years ago he prepared material for the governor of Wyoming that has since been applied state wide. Wyoming is one of the top states as helping people transition from dependence to self-sufficiency in the country. Last year we translated that material into Slovak. This year, Bridges out of Poverty

which Phil co-authored has been published in Slovak. Two years ago Phil visited our city of Kosice and presented his work. This spring the neighboring city of Presov pop. 100,000, contracted with Phil and asked him to share his knowledge. (Miroslav Pollak was one of the authors of the proposal.) In June, Phil shared with 100 community leaders about building individual and community resources and helping break the cycles of generational poverty.