

Shana's Story...

*[As written by Chris Adams... adapted by Kathleen Weller... and told
at the August 22, 2009 meeting of Peace River Presbytery]*

The story that I am going to tell you... is not mine. It belongs to a Youth Leader named Shana Dublin. 7 young people and their parents. A church called Buckingham and their Pastor, Randy. A General Presbyter named Graham Hart who happened to be in worship at Buckingham June 21st, the Sunday this story happened and wrote about it in the Weekly Pastoral Letter. Mostly, it belongs to Pastor Chris Adams – whose work I've stolen word by word, except the ending. Chris, after reading the Weekly Pastoral Letter, contacted Shana, and told this story in a sermon he preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church in July. Today I share it with you, because you as members of Peace River enabled it to happen by your gifts over the years.

About a year ago, a teenager was totally and utterly lost. She was getting in trouble in school, angry all the time, and experiencing an inner turmoil that was eating her up from the inside. This little girl was in trouble.

But then somebody did something crazy. Somebody invited her to church. I don't know if anybody had ever invited her before, but what I do know is that she had no church experience at all up to that point. Well that's not really true. Her experience up to that point honestly was that the church was a group of people who judged her for being in trouble and being in turmoil. Her parents didn't go to church; in fact nobody she knew went to church. The church just wasn't for her or her family.

But that young lady made a decision that day, and she went to church. Over the course of the next year, things started to change for her. She connected with her youth leader Shana Dublin, she connected with the church at Buckingham, and she connected most of all with her Savior.

In fact, this young lady even invited others to church. The parents of those kids were amazed that every Sunday night at 6:00 PM their children were not out getting in trouble. They did not even have to look for them because they knew every week they were at church. Every week!

Along the way, Shana asked if she could teach confirmation and the pastor and Session approved.

The youth went through the classes taught by Shana and then they did something else crazy. This group of non-churched teenagers agreed to attend a conference at Cedarkirk, Challenge to Change.

The mission they worked together in while staying at Cedarkirk was Beth-El, a ministry to the farm worker community of Southwest Florida.

When they returned, each of these kids stood to be accepted as members of Buckingham church. But this Sunday was a little different than most of the Confirmation times in our congregations...

Pastor Randy Moody introduced the first young person and carefully explained that in order to become a church member, this youth had to first be baptized. So with a shellfull of water he dumped it over the young head, "In the name of the Father..." then with another, and of the Son, and then another and of the Holy Spirit.

Randy moved to the next young person, and did the very same thing. Then he did the same with the next and the next and the next. In fact, when he was finished he had baptized seven of the eight youth because none of them had ever had any meaningful church experience before, and thus none of them had ever been baptized.

Can you imagine sitting there in that congregation watching as Jesus Christ our Lord heals and claims as His own seven brand new disciples? Wow!

But here's the thing. There are no boundaries and no limits to the power and the presence of Jesus Christ to create healing and renewal in our world.

Jesus can heal American youth from Ft. Myers Florida, at the very same time healing elderly men from Guatemala and Honduras at Beth-El.... You see... there's more to this story.

It seems that the mother of the girl we first talked about, who also had negative experiences of the church, also did something crazy.

She decided to chaperone her daughter's trip to Cedarkirk, she was there for The Challenge to

Change.

On Thursday night, it all came out. The group gathered for devotions and invited the youth to share some reflections of their week at Beth-El.

The mother began. She admitted that all of her life she had hated Hispanic people. She thought they were lazy and looking for a hand out. She told the group that the only group she had hated more than Hispanics were church people. She had not been in favor of her daughter having anything to do with the church.

But then she said, with tears in her eyes, that she had watched her daughter change. She had seen her go from being so in turmoil to perfect peace. She was intrigued and so she had agreed to come on that trip to Cedarkirk.

But when they went to Beth-El, this mother said she experienced a pull on her life that she could only describe as the presence of God. She saw the smiles and the encouragement of her daughter and the others, and she saw the smiles and the encouragement of the people at Beth-El. She was changed.

In that moment, through what had been years of built up frustration and tears, this mother surrendered her life to Jesus Christ. This woman who had been so filled with rage, the same turmoil her daughter had that she locked away so tight, was in an instant healed. She was at peace. At peace at Cedarkirk... because of Beth-El... because of what you have done... as a Presbytery offering 1.525 million dollars to these two Covenant Partners since 2000.

Sometimes we think the best days of the church are behind us. We hear that our economy is bad and there isn't enough money for ministry. We are told that Cedarkirk has had its budget cut. We learn that Misión Peniel will be suspended at the end of the year because there isn't enough money. Everything is lost, we worry!

But in our midst... for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear... the amazing healing power of Jesus Christ is demonstrated. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear... Christ pours out power on those who trust in Him. For those who have ears to hear and eyes to see... in one of the dozen SMALL churches in Peace River Presbytery and through our

Covenant Partners - Cedarkirk and Beth-El (the least worldly wealthy among us) - people young and old who were dead to the things of God came to life through the amazing healing power of our amazing Savior.

I was at a congregational meeting a few weeks ago where they decided that the church was more a business, than a family. But this story tells us something different. This story tells us we are brothers and sisters in Christ's family. And we are to do all we can for our brothers and sisters.

By the way. I (Kathleen) told you earlier...that this story belongs to Shana, and the youth at Buckingham, and Graham and Chris. But it belongs to you too, as the Presbytery, because of your support of Beth-El and Cedarkirk. And it belongs very personally to me. I baptized Shana Dublan in 2004 in another SMALL church of PRP, 1st Lehigh. She was one of the adult baptisms Peace River Presbytery recorded that year. Shana Dublan is my daughter-in-law. I baptized her the week before she married my son Sean.

Friends, I invite you to support this special appeal. There's work to be done, right here, among us and it is urgent work. And we need your help... that God might receive the glory.