

by Vicki Sairs

The LCF Connection

Caring about each other's stories

People who attend London Christian Fellowship in London, Ohio, might not realize how fortunate they are. They can wake up on the first of the month, open their email, and find an invitation and a link to the current month's issue of *The LCF Connection*, the little church newsletter that is so much more than that.

They can read about their sisters and brothers (Which LCF couple speaks Pennsylvania Dutch at home? Who loves reading sci-fi?), get pastoral advice for what to do when they're spiritually unmotivated, and learn about ways to pray and read the Bible that help them think more deeply about who God is and how he might be revealing himself to them.

In addition to interviews and feature stories, the *Connection* provides transparency for the church's leadership: summaries of the church council and the elders' team meetings appear regularly. Readers can also find out what events are coming up and how they might serve in the community.

Doris Swartz, LCF's secretary and the organizing force behind the *Connection*, keeps the newsletter on track with her steadfast commitment to keeping people in the church in touch with each other.

It's a lot of work, and she can't do it alone. Over the years, she's enlisted teams of helpers—people who scout out stories (“Life as a Foreigner, Again”), interview people like Dorothy Jones (“Look Who’s Celebrating 95 Years!”), and bring their editorial skills to bear on the raw material of a church newsletter.

Currently, it's a two-person team: Doris and Theresa Hennis, who brings years of writing experience to the table. Past helpers of note include Andrew Sharp, who was studying

journalism at The Ohio State University in 2009 when he agreed to be the editor. “Andrew did a wonderful job,” says Doris. “I still miss the humor that he added to it!”

Here's an example, taken from Andrew's first “From the Editor” note: “Rob [Swartz, Doris's husband and LCF's pastor] asked me to be the editor, possibly because I was underemployed at the time and looking a little crazed from spending long hours in my apartment with nothing to do. I appreciate his thoughtfulness.”

Andrew left to take a newspaper job in Delaware in 2013, but teacher and writer Trish Eaton stepped up and worked on the *Connection* with Doris up until February of this year. Others who have helped are Jennifer St. John, Candice Mast, and Amie Smith; Amie still contributes occasionally.

Theresa began helping out with the *LCF Connection* in 2014. Her gifts, she says, are writing and proofreading. “When I heard the *Connection* was a ministry opportunity, I was so excited. I've written for magazines, but I never had the opportunity to write for a smaller publication.”

The ministry has been good for her, she says. It takes discipline to meet deadlines, to be willing to write outside her comfort zone, and to work with and interview different personality types with the “same goal of honoring God.” Her favorite part of the ministry is getting to know fellow church members better and hearing their stories. “That's my passion—getting to the heart of someone's story and hearing how God has used them or is changing them.”

She has a high view of the work: “We are writing for God. His story involves every one of His people's stories, and the newsletter makes a difference by being a vehicle of information and stories that ‘connect’ the congregation.”

In an ideal world, says Theresa, “everyone would read publications like our *LCF Connection*. That would mean

“I remember printing out the pages of text and then attaching clipart and taking the final project to a printer in West Jefferson to get copies made.”



LEFT (photo credit Doris Swartz): The many faces of church newsletters at London Christian Fellowship. Left to right, *Shalom Community Church Newsletter* (this one is from 1989); *Shalom Community Church Connection* (published from August 1990 to November 1993); *Shalom Community Church Connection* (1992-1995); the first *LCF Connection* under the editorship of Andrew Sharp; two more recent issues of the newsletter, designed using InDesign and printed on the church's color copier.

RIGHT (photo credits Vicki Sairs): Theresa Hennis, left, and Doris Swartz in the library at London Christian Fellowship. They are the team behind the current rendition of *The LCF Connection*.

RIGHT BELOW Doris is the church secretary and oversees the production of *The LCF Connection*. Here, she and Theresa look over archived copies of the newsletter. Doris says, “I like the history it provides. I always enjoy whenever I take the time to look back at past issues and am reminded of God’s faithfulness and the many people who have been a part of LCF—some for a short season and others since the beginning.”



that everyone would be attending home churches, would be engaged in fellowship, and would want to hear their brothers' and sisters' stories, as well as the stories of those who are hurting and who need to hear God's story.”

Like many church newsletters, the *Connection* has a checkered history. Doris has been around for most of it. “From my records,” she says, “it looks like the desire to communicate with the congregation in a regular written form started in the very early years.”

Shalom Community Church (now LCF) began in 1984. Rob and Doris started attending there after they got married in 1988. Being an archival kind of person (and also the church secretary!), Doris has copies of Shalom’s early newsletters. The first, issue #5 of *The Shalom Community Church Newsletter*, is dated May 20, 1989. The editor was Janice Lapp (who was in Voluntary Service with Rosedale Mennonite Missions with 42 Little College, the day care that was run by Shalom and Rosedale Mennonite Missions).

She has others: The two-page *Shalom Communicator* was edited by Fern Horst and published monthly from August 1990 to November 1993.

Next came a quarterly, four-page newsletter, *Shalom Community Church Connection*, begun in the summer of 1992. “I was hired by Shalom in August 1993 as secretary,” says Doris. “One of the responsibilities in my job description was to help with the quarterly *Connection*.” She typed new articles, did some editing, gave the discs (!) to Steve Swartz, and monitored and distributed it.

“I remember printing out the pages of text and then attaching clipart and taking the final project to a printer in West Jefferson to get copies made.” For a while, they distributed it to local businesses, leaving copies for customers to pick up.

Life being life, the newsletter became defunct in the mid-90s. Years later, in 2004, Rob and Doris were serving on the elders’ team. “I remember a conversation about how we needed to do a better job communicating with the congregation about what we were discussing and the decisions we were making at our elders’ meetings.” The team recalled the *Connection* newsletter and decided to begin using it again. They called it *The LCF Connection*.

The elders’ team provided content, and Doris copied it on a different color of paper each month with the black and white printer at the church. “It was a lot of work to come up with articles,” she says, “and there was not one specific person in charge of it, so we eventually slacked off.

I don’t have any copies of it from 2008.”

Since Andrew’s editorial intervention in 2009, the newsletter has been coming out every month.

Doris and her team have established a rhythm. “We try to meet once or twice a year to brainstorm together, plan ahead, and put together a rough sketch of what we’d like to feature each month and who to ask to write,” says Doris. At the beginning of each month they spend time thinking, praying, and talking about the pieces they want to include in that month’s issue.

“We send out emails as soon as possible asking people to write articles, or we begin talking with people to get their responses to questions.” For example, one month they invited the kids to ask Pastor Rob a question. Silas, age 6, asked, “How is it like to be a pastor?” Rob answered: “It’s fun. It’s hard. It’s rewarding. It’s scary. It’s an adventure. It’s the coolest thing I’ve ever done.”

Doris hopes to have all the pieces in hand by mid-month, so she can do the layout. She uses InDesign and highly recommends it, although there is a learning curve. “I try to have the rough draft finished and emailed out to the editors 7 to 10 days before the end of the month, so that they have adequate time to edit it and get the necessary changes back to me. I make their corrections and then send a final copy to them to double-check before we publish it.”

On the first day of the month she emails the pdf of the newsletter to the church’s email list, uploads it on LCF’s website, and posts a link to it on LCF’s Facebook page. She



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A Soft Place to Land

by **Theresa Hennis** and **Molly Rosati**

*This article ran in the March 2017 issue of **The LCF Connection**.*

God uses whatever it takes to draw us nearer to himself, and for Molly Rosati, he used a horse.

Molly had horses from the age of seven to 17. Before she learned about training horses using natural horsemanship techniques, she used the more traditional horsemanship techniques that she was taught.

She says, “I used pain, fear, and intimidation to bully my horse to do what I wanted. A harsher bit in the mouth, a lash of a whip, a punishing attitude—all ways to show the horse who was in control.”

Like a horse comes to understand its leader, so comes our understanding of God from the “leaders” in our lives. Whether from a parent or other authority figure, patterns of trust or distrust are instilled in us from an early age.

“Horses are wired to feel safe in their herd,” Molly says. “The herd has a leader, established by many factors, and leadership fitness is checked on daily. Does my horse think I’m fit to be the leader that day?”

If correct behaviors are established by the leader, the horse will be calm, trust the leader’s requests, follow, and want to be with and do things with the leader.

An unfortunate experience in 2000 with a horse chosen for her family left Molly fearful and unsure of her ability to lead.

“I got Ginger, thinking she’d be a good family horse, but she didn’t see me as a leader,” Molly recalls. “When I used the chain under Ginger’s chin to show her what was what, she reared up, her hooves flying.”

A friend, Tami, shared the method of Parelli Natural Horsemanship with Molly. She worked with Ginger for 20 minutes, and Molly saw an altogether different horse.

Parelli Natural Horsemanship is a frame of reference, a way of thinking about horses, and a training approach using the instincts and neurological wiring of the horse to establish communication and cooperation between man and horse.

Molly went on to buy Whinny, a beautiful bay roan quarter horse, and she took her to a Parelli Natural Horsemanship Clinic. Her initial goal was to learn more about how to work with her horse, and she volunteered to go into the round pen (a 60-foot fenced ring where the horse is free to move with no

halter or rope) with Whinny and follow instructor Jesse Peters’ directions while participants observed. However, the instructor laid aside his initial goal to work on a skill when he observed Whinny was unable to look at Molly, or him, with both eyes.

“Whinny ran along the fence with one eye on him and the other eye looking over the fence, out the door and window, planning and holding on to a way of escape,” Molly says. “She could not give him both eyes (and thus, the rest of herself) and trust him or be with him in total submission and feel at peace with him.”

Jesse worked with Whinny, making it easy for her to come to him, but harder if she only gave him one eye. She had to move faster and run **HARD** if she looked away. “Make the right thing easy” is a training motto.

“Whinny was panting, dripping sweat, and we would think, this is it, she will rest with Jesse now,” Molly says, “but at the last second she would lose her nerve and run out to the rail. Finally, she walked that slow walk to his chest, both of them looking into each others’ eyes. We all were crying.”

Sometimes, we walk a slow walk towards God, unsure if we will find rest. We search for a way out from what we see as the hard work of being in relationship with him.

Like the training motto “Make the right thing easy,” God’s word promises good for us.

Matthew 11:29-30 The Message (MSG): “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

There were more breakthroughs to come for Whinny. She was searching for patterns. “You don’t get through hardship just once,” Molly says. “You keep asking for the connection and trust again and again.”

Whinny thought relief was connected to performing a certain action, but she had to learn that rest and relief were found when Jesse became her full focus.

Jesse put Molly in the ring and told her she had to become a soft place to land. “When he said that, it broke me,” she says. “I realized I hadn’t been safe for Whinny. I had an agenda, always needing her to perform a certain way to meet my expectations.”

Tears come to her eyes as she remembers that moment. “It hit me; I keep one eye on an escape plan. I don’t fully trust God to take care of me.”

With that realization, as she watches Whinny approach her with trust, Molly is inspired to take another step closer to God.

He is her soft place to land.