

Saints and sinners: The life of a Jehovah's Witness

This is a story of how I became a Jehovah's Witness for a day.

Like everybody else, I had been called on numerous times over the years by these door-to-door "telemarketers," who use the doorbell instead of the telephone to get your attention — and often your goat!

The Witnesses' foot-in-the-door tactics antagonized many. Consequently, it was not unusual for them to get a door slammed in their faces.

Little by little, however, this began to change. Aware of the bad will they were creating, the sect's leaders did a remodeling job on the Witnesses' image. The persistence remained (it is still true that, if you turn them away, they will be back in another few months), but the old antagonistic attitude was replaced with a pleasant demeanor.

I was not alone in noticing the change. Irish author, Alan Bestic, wrote that, "The rank-and-file of this much-abused movement are gregari-

ous, cheerful and happy people. At their international assembly in London, I was treated with the utmost kindness, gentle courtesy and genuine friendliness by every Witness I met."

But the Witnesses' "doorbell ministry" continues to annoy some. Witnesses still receive an inhospitable reception at many doors. Having never had a door slammed in my face, I decided to see what it was like. I asked Gene Tenke, a Witness friend and neighbor, if I could accompany him on his rounds one day. Gene was a successful cookware salesman and lifelong Witness.

I am telling you this story now because Gene passed away recently and I have been thinking of that afternoon when we went door-to-door together.

Our problem that day was not that people slammed any doors in our faces. It was that we got no answer at most doors we knocked on. Yet through the screen doors, we could hear a television playing or people talking.



george plagenz

• saints & sinners

"They know we are Jehovah's Witnesses," Gene said. "That's why they won't answer."

That was one part of it. Another was the neighborhood we were canvassing. Gene pointed out it was solidly middle-class. "People are happy here and content," he said. "It is those who are troubled and lonely who are most interested in our ministry."

The church's biggest growth is in the poverty-stricken Third World. (The Jehovah's Witnesses' most recently published statistics, as of August 2001, cite a practicing membership of more than 6 million — up 1.7 percent from the

year 2000.)

Ironically, while the doorbell ministry irritates so many, it is responsible for the Witnesses' great growth.

"Most who are Witnesses today once slammed the door in the face of a Witness caller," Gene said. "But situations change in people's lives. The next time we come, they may show an interest. Almost every Jehovah's Witness today joined as a result of the door-to-door ministry."

As Jehovah's Witnesses firmly believe that they must "beat their swords into plowshares" and not "learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4), they do not participate in war or serve in the Armed Forces. Thousands have gone to jail as conscientious objectors. (Gene himself served in prison for 30 months during World War II.)

Gene recalled that once he rang the doorbell of a woman who had lost a son in World War II. She became angry with him over the Witnesses' refusal to take part in the war that cost her boy's

life.

"I can understand how you feel," he told her. Then he added, "If it is any consolation, you can be sure it was not a Jehovah's Witness who killed your son."

Witnesses believe we are living in the Last Days. They look forward to the "new heaven and new earth," spoken of in the book of Revelation, that will replace the present order after the battle of Armageddon.

This new world will be one beautiful park, alive with colorful varieties of animals and birds. Instead of growing old, citizens of the new earth will grow progressively younger. We will all be as we were at age 33.

After a foot-wearing day in which we met more indifference than enthusiasm from the people we called on, I asked Gene if he sometimes didn't get discouraged.

"When we get depressed," he said, "we remember that the Creator is watching and that we are pleasing him."

Don't have a prayer? Prayer lines mean you can always call for one

By Bobby Ross Jr.

Associated Press Writer
NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Out of a job, "Snooky" from Maryland turns to a 1-800 number.

It's not an employment service, though. It's a 24-hour prayer line.

The call reaches the home of an 89-year-old woman — one of a legion of volunteers — who writes down the woman's prayer request and asks God to help.

"Be with her right now, Lord, and help her shut her eyes and see you," the volunteer prays. "Let her open her ears and hear what you have to say just to her."

The Nashville-based Upper Room Living Prayer Center, an ecumenical ministry funded by United Methodist

Men, receives more than 25,000 telephone prayer requests each month and an additional 5,000 by e-mail, fax and regular mail.

It is one of many telephone lines and Web sites across the nation trying to connect people with God.

From the Assemblies of God's "1-800-4-PRAYER" line in Springfield, Mo., to the Peale Center for Christian Living prayer center in Pawling, N.Y., volunteers take prayer requests around the clock.

Mary O. Benedict, manager of the Upper Room prayer line, said callers like the anonymity the ministry offers. Volunteers ask only for first names and home state or country, but providing even that information is optional.

The telephone requests are forwarded around the world to 350 prayer groups who recite the prayer for 30 days.

"People sometimes are afraid to have other people know they have a problem," Benedict said. But with the Upper Room prayer line, "they can call and know they're safe and share that concern and have someone pray for them."

Sometimes callers can get help even if a volunteer isn't immediately available. "At the tone, leave your message and rest assured that your request will be prayed for," said a recording on the Peale prayer line recently. A voice on the Silent Unity Prayer Ministry in Kansas City, Mo., comforts callers on hold with the recording, "While you wait, be assured that God's love is with you."

Yet callers should still be careful not to be too trusting, watchdog groups like the Dallas-based Trinity Foundation warn. They advise against giving an address or credit card number to people working for prayer lines.

"I've always said, 'If you call a prayer line and they want anything more than your first name, hang up on them because God knows your last name,'" said Ole Anthony, Trinity president.

While Upper Room is a ministry of the 8.3-million member United Methodist Church, volunteers are from several Christian denominations. About 120 people in Nashville routinely answer calls on weekdays.

Some work from the Upper Room office, but most have calls forwarded

to their homes. Nationally, 6,000 people working two-hour shifts keep the line staffed at night and on weekends — 365 days a year.

"There's so many people who don't have a place to turn," said Clayton Easter, a prayer line volunteer in Columbia, S.C.

The prayer line started in 1977 as a vision of Maxie Dunnam, who was then an editor of Upper Room devotional magazine. The publication still advertises the toll free number — 1-800-251-2468 — but some find the line through chance. A Texas waitress told North Carolina volunteer Jim Davenport she saw the line on a dollar bill she received as a tip.

Margie Smith, 71, answers calls for two hours every Tuesday and Thursday

— whether she's in Nashville or at her family's home in Florida. On a recent morning, her phone rang 28 times.

"The Lord has blessed me in many, many ways. If I can impart some of the Lord's blessings on the people that call, that is all I can hope for," said Smith, a Presbyterian who credits prayer with helping her husband of 47 years survive lung cancer.

Some callers want God to cure their cancer. Others need help fixing broken relationships. A few hope to win the lottery. Jim Roy, who retired as the center's manager on Sept. 30, said the volunteers don't try to convince callers to pray for something else, but instead hope God can move the person in the right direction.



Church of Christ

Bible Baptist Church
Pastor: Don Crutcher
Fifth & Broadway
899-7368
Sunday: Sunday School: 9 am
Worship Service: 10 am
Evening Service: 6:30 pm
Wednesday: Evening Bible Study: 7 pm

Calvary Gospel Church
Pastor: Rev. Steve Rains
Fourth & College • 899-3605
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Morning Service: 10:30 am
Evening Service: 6:00 pm
Wednesday: Adult Prayer and Worship: 7:00 p.m.
Youth @ the Rock House: 7:00 p.m.
Helping you focus upward in worship, inward in commitment and outward in evangelism

Church of Christ
401 Caldwell
899-6185
Sunday: Bible Study: 9:45 am
Worship Service: 10:45 am
Wednesday: Bible Study: 7 pm

Church of the Nazarene
Pastor: Matthew Delp
Third & Caldwell
899-2080 or 899-3797
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:45 am
Worship Service: 10:50 am
Evening Service: 6 pm
Wednesday: Evening Service: 7 pm

First Baptist Church
Pastor: Bud Chester
Fifth & Center • 899-3450
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Morning Worship: 10:30 am
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm
Tuesday: Mens' Prayer Group: 6:00 am
Thursday: Night Bible Study: 7:00 pm

Seventh Day Adventist Church
Pastor: Arlin Cochran • 785-332-2888
Saturday: Sabbath School: 9:30 am
Worship Service: 11 am

First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Pastor: Loren Strait
Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233
Sunday: Worship Service: 10:30 am
Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.
Activities: Junior High & High School Youth Groups, Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups, Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship
Special Notice: Handicap Accessible, Hearing Assistance Equipment and Infant and Toddler Nurseries Available

First United Methodist Church
1116 Sherman
899-3631
Pastor: Rev. Janet Hernandez
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Worship Service: 10:30 am

Sonrise Christian Church
Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398
Minister: Tony Kafka
Youth Minister: Doug Bean
Sunday: Worship Service: 9:30 am
Sunday School: 10:45 am
Wednesday: Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm
Adult & Children's Classes: 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran Church
13th & Sherman • 899-6161
Pastor: Scott Grimshaw
Sunday: Sunday School: 8:45 am
Worship Service: 10 am
Wednesday: Confirmation: 6 pm

Kanorado
United Methodist Church
Pastor: Leonard Cox
399-2468
Sunday: Sunday School: 9 am
Worship Service: 10:15 am

Goodland Bible Church
109 Willow Road • 899-6400
Pastor:
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:45 am
Morning Worship: 11 am
Evening Worship: 6 pm
Wednesday: Call for location

Grace Fellowship Church
104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423
Pastor: Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134
Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am
Worship Service: 11 am
Youth Group at Gattshall's at 5:30 pm
Adult Bible Study 6 pm

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
13th & Center
899-2115 or Rectory 899-2114
Priest: Father Charles Schneider
Deacon: Gretchen Talitha
Adult Forum: Sunday: 8:30 am
Morning Prayer: 9:30 am 1st & 5th Sundays
Holy Eucharist: 2nd, 3rd, & 4th Sundays: 9:30
Sr. Warden for emergencies during the week 899-2067

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (719) 346-7984
Sacrament Meeting: 9:30 am
Sunday School: 10:45 am
Priesthood/Relief Society: 11:30 am

Word of Life Foursquare Church
223 E. 10th
899-5250
Pastor: John Coumerilh
Weekend services
Sunday: Worship Celebration and Kids' Church: 10:30 am

United Methodist Church
Brewster:
Pastor:
Worship Service: 10:45 am CST
Sunday School: 9:45 am CST
Winona:
Minister: Rev. Bob Winters
Worship Service: 9 am CST
Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

Iglesia Del Dios Vivo
La Luz Del Mundo
Spanish Speaking Church
Minister: Esteban Ortiz B.
1601 Texas • 899-5275
Daily Prayer: Sunday thru Saturday: 5 am & 6 pm
Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am

Our Lady of Perpetual Help
Pastor: Father Norbert Dlabal
307 W. 13th • 899-7205
Sacrament of Reconciliation: 4:30-5 pm Saturday or by appointment
Mass Schedule:
Saturday: 6 pm
Sunday: 10:30 am
Spanish Mass: 1st & 3rd Sunday: 2 pm

Pleasant Home Church
Serving the rural community for over 100 years
Rt. 1, Box 180 • 694-2807 • 3190 Road 70
Pastor: Charlie Busch
694-2242
Sunday: Worship Service: 9 am
Sunday School: 10 am
Evening Service: 6 pm

The following sponsors urge YOU to attend your chosen House of Worship this Sabbath:

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