

*COMPANIS SUNDAY*

October 23, 2016

**Lee Campbell: Companis Worker with the Coalition for Refugees from Burma & University District Childcare Center**

Hi, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Lee Campbell. At a church retreat, many years ago, I realized that I was a *spiritual being* occupying a physical body. That was an attitude changing realization that has informed all of my actions and decisions in the following years. So when I tell you that I do accounting, and that I fill the role of an accountant, I wish to be very clear that I am not an accountant. So What!!! So what do my statements have to do with Companis?

Let's restate the question: What has Companis brought into my life? It has brought the opportunity to be of service and to use skills that I have developed over the years. But even more it has brought sharing, community and joy. I discovered there was an acute need in the non-profit sector for an ability I had developed in the for-profit world. But, I think I receive much more than I give. I serve in a loving, supportive, inter-generational community.

Ever since I was a young girl, I have wanted to be of service, to follow the urging of the Biblical mandate to go into the entire world and preach the gospel. Yet, I felt no call to go to seminary and become a theological professional. I filled the roles of daughter, wife, mother, friend, business partner, Girl Scout leader, church member, HIV/AIDs group facilitator, bookkeeper, etc. And I did these things with joy and satisfaction.

But after my children became adults and left home and my husband died, I began to have an inner urging to practice my accounting skills differently. I had no idea that the non-profit world actually needed my combination of skills. I just wanted to feel that I was of service in a badly hurting, needy world.

I have known Bonnie and Jerry Sutton, of this church, for many years and they were involved in a Companis partner organization called Interfaith Hospitality Network of Seattle (or IHNS for short). My church, Good Shepherd Baptist, in Lynnwood, joined Seattle First and about a dozen inter-faith churches to provide shelter to the homeless. That was my introduction to the mission of service which

is the “ground of being” of the organization named Companis. I met wonderful, caring, giving people during the several years that IHNS was able to provide its service.

Following my participation with IHNS I had the opportunity to talk with Companis Founding Director Craig Darling at an Evergreen Baptist Association Regional meeting and we agreed to meet and discuss the possibility of my volunteering with Companis. The result was that in 2005, I began to do data entry for Stan Kehl, now Companis Board Secretary, who was running a small non-profit called Religious Coalition for Equality from an office in this church. It is amazing to me that during the time I served at RCE I didn't cross paths with Peter Jabin, who also served there. But I'm delighted to serve with him now.

During the 11 years that I have been a Companis worker, I have served in a variety of placements. Each year has enriched my life in unexpected ways. I have met and shared with people from all over the world; I currently have two placements. I do accounting for CRB – Coalition for Refugees from Burma and I am blessed to have met both Mona Han and members of her family and the Burmese community, as well as high-school students who are refugees from a number of countries. All of these people have touched my heart in ways that tracking money can never do.

In addition to serving the refugee community, I serve at University District Children's Center, where each Tuesday afternoon I read to four-year olds. I have been doing this since 2008 and have met children and families from Asia and Europe as well as a variety of American cultures. Working for eight successive years with children who are all four years old has been both delightful and educational for me. I've been a mother, and served as a Girl Scout leader, I've been a grand-mother, and volunteered in my grand-children's classes, but I have never before made the acquaintance of such a diverse segment of the population. Please believe me when I tell you that children are individuals with their very own, strong personal desires, opinions, beliefs and struggles. I regale friends, family and my fellow Companis workers with some of my favorite experiences. I'd like to steal a couple of your minutes by telling you only one of the stories that keeps me engaged with my four-year old friends. About four years ago, at the beginning of the school year, there was a child who was constantly hitting other children for

no apparent reason, and the teachers were having trouble observing what would start these childish altercations. Because I was sitting and reading, I had the opportunity to see activity in the room from a perspective different from the teachers. I began to notice that this child would hit another child who came into what I would call his “personal space.” As I watched this interaction, I began to wonder if this little boy was autistic. I had a meeting with Sandra Blood, the Executive Director, and asked if anyone had ever explored this possibility. In this particular instance, no one had caught the significance of his behavior. During the course of two years, conferences with parents were held, diagnosis of autism was made, it was recognized that he didn’t like to be touched and it upset him to have people come too near to him. Additional services were found for this boy, and eventually he began to sit with other children and me and listen to books. The last day I saw him before he graduated to go to kindergarten, he put his arms around me and said, “I love you Teacher Lee.”

In each placement where I have served, I have been encouraged by Companis staff to learn, to share, to reflect and to grow. Serving in Companis is not a static experience. Working in Community has informed my service and my soul. I see God at work in this process. As a result I experience joy!

The stories that I have heard whether in placements or in times of reflection with other workers, are sacred gifts; the lives that have touched mine are precious beyond all my expectations. I am so grateful to the people of Seattle First Baptist for providing me and others the opportunity to be in ministry and for the opportunity to reflect at Support Groups and Retreats on the meaning and impact of our service.

### **Peter Jabin: Companis Worker Support Coordinator**

You have no idea... You have no idea what you’ve done for me.

It is such an honor, such a gift to be able to stand up here this morning in front of the Seattle First Baptist community and let you all know what you have meant to me, what you have done for my life, who you have been for me. This is a long time coming and my heart is very full this morning. So let me start with, “Thank you.” Not on behalf of Companis – but from my heart to your heart. Thank you for who you have been to me.

I'm not sure of the word to use for being haunted by something in advance, haunted by something before it exists – but that's what happened with me and Companis. Before moving to Seattle in 2001, I lived in Chicago for a dozen years. I knew Tim Phillips back in the 90's when he was pastor for Grace Baptist, which at that time met in the church I served in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood, Epworth United Methodist. And I kept hearing about this Craig Darling guy. I never met him in Chicago; indeed, it was only after being in Seattle for a few years that I finally met him. But my best friend in Chicago moved to Chicago from West Virginia because Craig placed him through the Esther Davis Center. In my early years in Chicago, I hung out often at the Esther Davis house/apartment – but never came across Craig.

Then I moved to Chicago in 2001 and, unexpectedly, got a job at University Temple United Methodist Church in the U District. I became involved with the First Baptist community as part of my work at U Temple and I have remained involved with you in one way or another ever since. Over the past 15 years, Seattle First Baptist has never asked anything of me, but you have given me many, many opportunities to contribute, to play a meaningful role in the work that you do. ...Oh yeah, and you saved my life. Companis saved my life.

My earliest involvement with First Baptist was with the Religious Coalition for Equality in (I guess) 2002, that group of progressive clergy that fought for the inclusion of LGBTQ folks in WA's antidiscrimination legislation and who laid the groundwork for Marriage Equality and the stunning progress in LGBTQ civil rights that we've seen in the last decade. (Yes, it was people of faith that made that happen.) Because of that involvement, after leaving U Temple, I was hired as Interim Executive Director of RCE in 2007, to step in when Stan Kehl left. What nobody knew at the time was that, as I took that position, I was sinking into addiction, losing control. My life was unraveling. As it happened, Craig had recently placed a Companis volunteer, Topher Jerome, with RCE to help with its website. As Topher and I interacted in my early days with RCE, he, quite unintentionally, 12-stepped me by sharing his recovery story with me and taking me to my first AA meeting. Craig didn't know it and Topher didn't know it, but part of Topher's placement that year was to open the door to sobriety and recovery for me. Through Topher, Companis saved my life.

Other involvements in the First Baptist community over the years have included collaborating with Sky when I facilitated the Spiritual Reading Series for U Temple; working with Bob Sittig and Doug Beasley and Clinton McNair in trying

to get a community-based pastoral counseling center off the ground; working with Nancy Roberts-Brown and Lupe Carlos for a bit at Children's Home Society; and now, best of all, facilitating the Worker Support Program for Companis.

While I have my own faith community in Seattle First United Methodist Church (Seattle's *real* First Church, jus' sayin'), I actually have much deeper and longer connections with you. In a very real way, I belong to you, and I always will. I am so grateful for that. In my work with Companis, I hope to be able to repay the debt of gratitude that I owe to Seattle First Baptist Church – to model for others the grace that you manifested for me.

Indeed, Companis is my ministry. As a Diaconal Minister in the PNW Conference of the United Methodist Church, I am appointed by my bishop to serve Companis - - in addition to my private practice in pastoral psychotherapy. I bring a pastoral counselor's heart, a healing heart to this work. And I feel as though I have been uniquely shaped by my experience to pursue the mission of the Companis Worker Support Program, which is (and this is the mission not of Companis as a whole, but specifically of the Worker Support Program):

..to create a safe space where members of the Companis family can share our stories and experiences in order to nurture a compassionate and sustainable community of service.

I have spent a fair amount time in progressive faith communities. I am familiar with the cost of being fueled by righteous indignation, by outrage at injustice, by anger. Outrage and anger are a necessary part of the prophetic voice, to be sure – a voice that is desperately needed, in our day as much as any other. But anger and outrage are not enough. Alone, they desiccate our souls and make us brittle. Our passion, our commitment, our service must also be fed by compassion, by joy, by the experience of abundance and blessing. We are sustained by mediating for each other the lived experience of grace. We must balance justice and compassion, action and reflection, anger and joy. Companis is committed to discovering and nurturing this kind of balance in our community.

I was given a new perspective on poverty and wealth last week during our worship at First United Methodist. I was invited to see that, were I suddenly stripped of my money, my savings, my job, my home, I still would not be poor. I would not be poor because I would still have you. I can look out in this crowd right now and identify a score of good friends. I am connected in community. Because of these connections, I would ask you and, within minutes, I would have something to eat. I would ask you and, within the hour, I would have a place to sleep tonight. I

would ask you and, within a few weeks, I would have work. I am a wealthy man – wealthy in friends, wealthy in community. My job with Companis is to be, in this sense, a wealth-generator – to grow community, to nurture the connections between and among those who become members of the Companis family.

Since the day I arrived in Seattle, you, Seattle First Baptist, have shared your wealth with me. You have made me rich with friendship, connectedness, belonging. You have fed me with deep reflection and vital worship, and provided me with a bounty of opportunities to give, to serve, to make a difference. That is the nature of the work I now do with Companis. This is the purpose of the table that I lay for Companis.

My hope, my vision in my work with Companis, as well as in my private practice, is to nurture the community of saints, to foster the fellowship of those who strive for and who practice spiritual sanity in the midst of all the insanity that surrounds us. This is an extension of the vision to which I know you, as a faithful expression of Christ's church, are committed. And I thank you for partnering with me and with Companis in the pursuit of this vision.

And again, thank you for helping to restore my life. May I honor you all in what I do with it.