

Love INC links people in need to volunteers from a network of area churches. Our mission is to transform lives and communities, In the Name of Christ.

I recently reread a LINC from the Spring of 2007. The story is embedded in my mind and heart. It is so powerful in showing what Love INC is and does for our community, that I decided to rerun the article. This is what Love INC is: Churches working together, partnering together to help our neighbors in need. I hope it will touch your heart. VOLUME XVI, ISSUE I, Spring 2007
Raymond Klein, Executive Director

A Little Child Shall Lead Them

A couple of weeks before Christmas, Pegasus had flown the tiny baby — whose life hung in the balance — from Medical College of Virginia in Richmond to the University of Virginia Hospital.

Born with heart and lung defects, it was clear that, apart from a miracle, only a complicated surgery could even begin to help her.

Over a period of about 6 weeks since an otherwise normal birth, little Erica endured open heart surgery, echo heart lung bypass, subsisting with a feeding tube, breathing and kidney machines. And with blood clots in the brain, the grim prognosis projected that she might be blind, never walking and supported by a kidney machine through life.

Emotionally drained, exhausted and agonizing over the health of their precious daughter were the young par-

ents. Having already spent the ten days since her birth at the Ronald McDonald House in Richmond, they followed her to Charlottesville. Now joining them for support were the young man's parents.

But no one was prepared for what came next — the Ronald McDonald House here in Charlottesville was full. Sensing the impact of the crisis, the UVA Hospital social workers were on the phone with Love INC asking for help and the staff quickly responded. That reaction was just the first-fruit of a great outpouring towards this family as they stood strong in the midst of a great trial.

Now, while Love INC does not typically recommend that churches subsidize the cost of a motel in lieu of the use of community shelters,

this case seemed to beg a breaking of the norm. After consultation and considering other options, it was decided that the family would be best served by keeping them together in a motel close to the hospital — especially since the young couple had another child, a toddler, who also had health issues and needed to be near medical care.

During the course of seeking the best option for housing, the crisis became widely known and soon help began to pour in from near and far. In fact, Shelby Crews, the grandmother and the main contact with the family, could not even remember the names of all the people who came to see them, but “stay tuned” to hear what she had to say about the outpouring of care. In the meantime, join with us in a journaling of some of that support so that you can begin to grasp what happens when the body of Christ draws together

in love.

Emerson Shelton of **Cunningham United Methodist Church** said “Worrying about where they are going to stay should be the least of their worries when they are under stress like this. Dave Saville of **Grace Community Church** shared similar sentiments as he too had had an infant needing major surgery earlier in the year. Both men helped with the family's stay at the motel — and Sue Shelton, Emerson's wife, was a faithful encourager for Shelby and the family over the weeks.

As soon as he heard about the situation, Father Pinnock from **St. Anne's Parish in Scottville** hurried to the hospital to pray with them and bless the child. His wife Dottie organized a prayer chain in their church and gathered food for them. The church voted to help them with additional food and lodging.

Cathy Black of the **Rockfish Outreach Center** was another who said "We must do something for them." And she did, helping with some of the motel expense and praying daily for the infant. A woman only known to the Crews family as "Teresa" came to the hospital with cookies and prayer for the family.

Pastor Jeffrey Riddle prayed with the family. The folks at **Calvary Baptist Church** gathered up a food basket for them and helped them with gas. Glassell Williamson, the secretary at Calvary Baptist, was quick to share:

"It is so sad about the baby. I met the grandparents and they are so precious, good Christian people. The grandfather has been witnessing to others in the hospital as he is visiting the parents and baby. That is just so great! God has blessed them in this troubled time and I know He will continue to do so as they face the probably of losing this child. We have been praying for the family and little Erica that God's will be done in this situation."

Emily Moody of **First Baptist Church** set up a food card at Reid's Market for the family. Several prayer chains in the area were notified and soon many were inquiring about the health of this tiny girl. Even an unknown pastor

from Maryland came to the pediatric unit to pray with the family.

Pastor Marcus DeLoach, from **Albemarle Baptist Church**, said that he knew this was a genuine need as soon as he heard the story. He and his son went at once to Kentucky Fried Chicken and bought dinner for the family and took it to them in the hospital.

Tracy Tedford described how she and her church, **Monticello Wesleyan Church**, became involved. She was the "Teresa" who brought cookies for the family. Her pastor, Jim Moretz, and the lay pastor, Pete Porcaro, visited the family regularly, always praying for tiny Erica.

Tracy spoke about how impressed she was with the young mother, who, always calm, with a faith unshaken, knelt beside the little bed to pray, then would say to her baby, "You can get better now that I've prayed. Get better so that I can hold you and love you." Tracy's church took up a collection of \$700 in cash on Christmas Day for the family as well as collecting on-going money for food. On Christmas Day they brought gifts for Erica's toddler brother, little William 4th

. Though the initial operation went fairly well, the tiny body did not respond as well as hoped. Erica's little kidneys refused to work and her body filled with fluid. Then infection set

in and her blood pressure dropped. She could not breathe on her own. On top of this, she began to have seizures, a condition passed to her genetically. To make matters worse, her toddler brother was rushed to the UVA Emergency Room with uncontrolled seizures.

The grandparents came down with colds and had to return home, four hours away, only to find that the water pipes had frozen in both theirs and the young family's trailers. And then another grandchild was hospitalized with another health issue. These were very dark times for this family.

Yet listen to what Grandmother Shelby had to say to Love INC about all they had experienced...

"Without our friends and all the caring people here in this area, we wouldn't have made it through. And I know God will help us get through no matter what happens. People shouldn't give up on God even when bad things happen to them. We don't always know why bad things happen to us, but we have to put it in His Hands."

Then she told about the people from churches all around Charlottesville, who had helped in all the aforementioned ways. While she could not remember names, she knew some

of the visitors were pastors and everyone who came prayed. Shelby declared, "Where there is much prayer, there is much power, so don't give up on God! No matter what, He's holding your hand even when you can't see Him. He's always there for you. His Son paid a worse price than any of us ever could."

But more than prayer was going on in the hospital. Lives were being changed for eternity. William, Shelby's husband, was attentive to the spiritual condition of each visitor, witnessing to and praying with those also going through difficult times.

Shelby also told the story of a woman of another faith with whom her husband shared for several hours, reading to her from the Bible. This lady said to William, "I never knew God was loving and kind this way. I was never taught that." Shelby went on to encourage her to keep reading the Bible and to get to know God personally.

A young lady from Amherst came with Shelby's niece and one sight of Erica brought conviction that her life, which centered on drugs and partying, was a dead end road. With tears she accepted a gospel tract from William and then plied him with questions until 3 AM. Concluding that "The God you tell me about is a good and loving God. I never heard about Him before," she gave her life to Christ in the wee hours

of the morning. Now on fire for the Savior, she attends church and reads the Bible.

The faith of this family in the midst of their trial has touched others. One nurse observed William kneeling and praying over his granddaughter hour after hour. So moved by the scene she found that sleep just eluded her. Restless in her soul, she sought out her own pastor and committed her life to Christ. In her joy, she called the parents of the baby to share what had happened.

A friend of Erica's father was strung out on drugs when he heard what had happened to her. Touched by how this young dad was trusting God through the ordeal, he began attending his family's church. Then he commenced reading the Bible for the first time, gleaning from it truths about himself and God that he had never considered and finding a peace that drugs had never given him..

As an aside, but very much related to the faith of this family, Shelby talked about how she had taught her children and grandchildren to love and serve the Lord. "My six year old grandson always prays over his meal and when he went to school he did the same thing. One day the principal called him to the office and

told him he wasn't supposed to pray in school. The principal said, 'Who taught you to do that?' and my grandson said 'My Granny.' He was told he could not say prayers out loud in school, so now he just bows his head and silently prays. And all the kids in his class bow their heads and pray like my grandson."

Shelby's oldest daughter had married an unbeliever. In fact, Shelby commented "You couldn't even pay him to go to church." But on the morning of Erica's funeral something happened – not unexpected considering all of the miracles that occurred since the day of her arrival here in Charlottesville. And now you know that Erica went to be with the Lord. On January 15th, her brief 6 week sojourn here on earth concluded.

While never uttering a word, she was God's vehicle to wake up His people to give, visit, pray, come alongside in love and sympathy, hope, to trust in the midst of adversity and witness to God's grace. And she was at the center of bringing others to consider the claims of the Savior, for some of those to receive Him unto eternal life, to awaken those who were truly hungry to know Him to seek Him on the pages of scripture and to turn around lives in many wondrous ways.

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Erica's death was very hard to take – as the death of any child would be. Speaking for the family, Shelby said, "It is the hardest thing we have ever been through, but while it has been hard, we will never forget her." She went on, "We would like to thank all of our friends, family and everyone who was there and is still there for us. But God comes first and so we thank everyone for their prayers. In fact, we hope that you will thank Him everyday that you are alive and well."

Reflecting on Erica, Shelby declared, "We know she is in a better place, with no more pain and suffering. But if we are saved and living for the Lord, we know that we will see her someday. He is still on the throne and in control." There is faith that is real!

As little Erica was being laid to rest, Shelby's oldest daughter and son-in-law were facing a crisis of their own. Their son was born that day and rushed to the Medical College of Virginia Hospital with breathing difficulties. But in the midst of their personal trial, the Spirit was working one more time. This new father began to question the deeper questions of life. And his father-in-law had answers. But it took some long and tearful conversations addressing questions about God and faith and the Bible.

Convinced, convicted and believing, the son-in-law declared "I'm going to start living for the Lord. I'm going to buy some church clothes and a Bible." The next Sunday he was in church and has begun the habit of reading Scriptures to his children. Thankfully, their newborn son is doing just fine.

Along with Shelby and her family, we want to thank the many churches that chose to get involved in very tangible ways and for the many individuals who came alongside fellow members of Christ's body in the face of their trial of faith and in their sorrow. This should be the norm. Keep this story in mind as you weigh how you are responding to those in need. ■

From the Executive Director

We at Love In the Name of Christ, can count up the successes of our recent initiative, that is, the Transformational Ministry. Your support has made all this possible in the transformation of the lives of our neighbors in need.

We've now begun our second session of Transformational Ministry called "Affirming Your Potential." Our neighbors in need from the first session are advancing to Boundaries with other life-changing courses such as Personal Finance, Personal Life Skills, Parenting Skills, and more, which will be available in the future. For those who have been stuck in a cycle of dependency to become self-sufficient, this is life changing!

The entire program has been built on Biblical principles with the goal of teaching God's grace and what He has in store for you. He wants you to prosper but He expects you to do your part.

We consider the initiative to be a success if there is transformation in both the client (Neighbor in need) *and* the mentors (Spiritual Friends).

Again, your support, whether through the donation of goods and services or monetary support, make possible all of the initiatives Love INC provides to serve our churches, as well as providing assistance to fill the needs of our neighbors.

Please do not hesitate to contact me personally at Raymond@loveincville.org or (434) 977-9777 if you would like to meet or have me speak at your next church function. I welcome any opportunity to share stories about how your support is transforming lives... *in the name of Christ!*



Blessings,

INSERT SIGNATURE

Raymond Klein

Executive Director



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