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God's "Sari":

The Story of C.S. Lewis Institute – Annapolis

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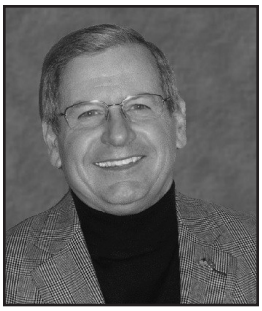
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I once heard a story about the weaving of an Indian wedding garment known as a sari. The process involved a father and son team. The father sits on a platform, while the son sits below, surrounded by spools of thread. At the command of his father, the son moves the shuttle back and forth through the loom. As the father leads and the son follows, eventually a beautiful design begins to appear. What is interesting to note is that the son worked below the father on the back side of the emerg-ing design and had to wait to see the beauty of the end product. He had to trust completely in the father's skill.

In many ways, the story of C.S. Lewis Institute – Annapolis resembles the production of a sari. I now see in retrospect, how God, our Father, has begun weaving a beautiful "sari" in Annapolis through the obedience of his children.

In July 2007 I attended a summer seminar in Oxford, England. There I met Tom Tarrants who was president of the C.S. Lewis Institute. Though my wife, Ann, and I lived in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylva-nia, we also had a small house in Annapolis, Maryland. We visited there on special weekends when our son and daughter attended the U.S. Naval Academy. I also stayed in this home during the week, because it was closer to my office in Alexandria, Virginia. Discovering that our offices were only five miles apart, Tom and I decided to get together upon our return from Oxford. (Can you hear the Father saying, "Move the shuttle," as the first threads are laid?)

After Tom and I got to know each other, he asked if I would be interested in starting an extension of the C.S. Lewis Institute in Annapolis. Tom knew a number of people in Maryland who wanted to participate in the Fellows Program but were unable to do so because of the distance. As you would expect, God had been at work in my life, "nudging" me to consider relocating from Pennsylvania to Annapolis. After prayer and some unusual confirming events, Ann and I grew confident that this was God's leading. We put our house up for sale in the summer of 2009 during the worst downturn in the housing market in years. Our home sold in one week, and we moved into the Annapolis house. ("Move the shuttle again!")



Jim Phillips

The first Annapolis Fellows class—of five men and five women—started in June 2009. They were followed by eleven men and women in 2010 and seventeen in 2011. Initially God blessed us with mentors, and then our first Year Two Fellows graduated and became mentors. Today our Fellows graduates are mentors, leaders of campus ministries, military officers, lay leaders, authors, and ministers. ("Move the shuttle!")

Following the lead of CSLI DC, the Annapolis extension began a quarterly Pastors' Fellowship to provide a forum for fellowship and nourishment. We discovered there was no competing venue for local pastors to gather and converse, so this forum was embraced, and CSLI Annapolis became known to the area churches. Today more than twenty pastors regularly participate in these fellowships. ("Move the shuttle!")

Because we knew of professional men and women who wanted to experience the Fellows Program but did not have the ability to commit to the Fellows curriculum, we offered separate Men's and Women's Fellowships. Scheduled monthly meetings were facilitated by some of our Fellows Program authors and lecturers. Today we have

approximately twelve men and twelve women participating in this pre-Fellows experience. (Another thread is placed in the fabric, "Move the shuttle!")

Then came an epiphany, not the completed sari, just an "aha" moment. One morning in 2009, walking back home from a downtown coffee shop, I stopped in front of our home on Prince George Street. Standing there it occurred to me: we were one block from the U.S. Naval Academy, one block from the Statehouse, one block from downtown Annapolis, and two blocks from St. John's College. This little house, which we had bought years before with no intention of it being our permanent residence, was located at the center of the community, military, state government, and education. It was like the "grand conjunction" of Annapolis. This house is now the home of the C.S. Lewis Institute Annapolis, which Ann named the Aslan House.

As I considered the significance of this location, I questioned the mission God had given CSLI Annapolis to be at the "hub" of the Annapolis community. Why had God placed the CSLI in the center of this community? I did not have to ponder the question long before God gave me a Scripture. While reading *Daws*, a biography of Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, I noted that he believed that God had given him Isaiah 60:11 to be the motto for his home.[1] I also felt the Spirit offering this passage as a governing promise over the Aslan House and CSLI Annapolis.

> *Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations – their kings*
> *led in triumphal procession.*
> *(Isa. 60:11 NIV)*

As I read this the Spirit communicated to me: "You are to keep the doors of this house (CSLI Annapolis) open, and I will bring through them 'the wealth of the nations.'" That is, "I will bring men and women whom I plan to use mightily in my kingdom, and they will bless the nations." ("Move the shuttle!")

At this point, God had added many threads, and we had moved the shuttle to properly place them in the sari, but we had not yet gone "topside" to get a glimpse of the Father's design. First, a few more threads.

About the time Isaiah 60:11 was given to me, two young men came to the door of the Aslan House. They were students at St. John's College (SJC). They asked if Aslan House had anything to do with C.S. Lewis. That conversation was followed by their request to be discipled. One of our Fellows was already hosting a weekly fellowship of SJC women. The men wanted "equal opportunity." So two of our Fellows discipled these two young men. Two became four, and four became six, then ten, and we now have a SJC Women's Fellowship and a SJC Men's Fellowship totaling more than thirty students who love Jesus and each other. It has not been the mission of CSLI to do campus ministry, at least not recently, but there was clearly a void at SJC, and CSLI Annapolis was asked to fill the gap. ("Move the shuttle!")

More than twenty SJC students have graduated from these fellowships and are serving Jesus throughout the world as teachers, seminary students, speech writers, political staffers, poets, and military officers. They are "the wealth of the nations" wherever they are serving Christ.

At the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), there are numerous campus ministries led by gifted men and women. They are all under the guidance of the USNA chaplains. The chaplains have been friends of CSLI and have participated in pastors' luncheons and coordinated with CSLI Annapolis to bring seminar speakers such as Amy and Frog Orr-Ewing, Ken Boa, and Michael Ramsden onto the USNA Yard to address the midshipmen. Some of the leaders of these midshipmen have become Fellows. ("Move the shuttle!")

The "facilitators" of CSLI Annapolis, an informal board of advisers, include John Bishop, Jim Hiskey, and George Anderson. These men have been sought out by pastors, chaplains, mentors, and Fellows to provide personal mentoring, and those they mentor return to their sphere of influence and pass along to others what they have learned. ("Again!")

Last year we hired a program and events coordinator (Amy Yearwood). Amy came to us after spending a year in the UK as a research assistant to Frog and Amy Orr-Ewing. Amy loves to coordinate events and "hang out" with college students while talking about Jesus. She is involved with both the SJC Fellowships and some of the USNA campus ministries. ("And again!")

Again, at this juncture, we had threads of Fellows, Men's and Women's Fellowships, SJC Fellowships, pastors' luncheons, USNA chaplains, facilitators, mentors, employees, the Aslan House, and CSLI friends and supporters. We could trust and imagine that the Master Weaver was making something special, but we could not begin to appreciate his work fully until we were invited to go "topside" to see his handiwork.

That invitation to see his work came for me last fall as I prepared an annual update for some of our financial supporters. After reviewing the threads of the CSLI sari, as I have done above, a graphic overview of what God was doing in Annapolis came to mind.

Follow the progression from the bottom to the top of the map: From the pastors, chaplains, Men's and Women's Fellowships, seminars, and the community at large we receive Fellows applicants. Our Fellows graduate and become mentors to new Fellows, or to SJC/USNA students. These students and our Fellows go out into the world, to live what they have learned through their association with CSLI Annapolis. Two of our Fellows have an opportunity to establish a CSLI in China and expect to have this in place in 2013. Two young people from China have come to Annapolis to participate in the next Fellows class.

Like Antioch, which became the training field for followers of Jesus to go out into the world and make disciples, Annapolis is raising up disciples to go and disciple the world. The young people graduating from our Fellows programs and SJC/USNA Fellowships are going into the world better equipped to articulate, defend, and live the gospel. Because of this, they are in fact becoming "the wealth of the nations."

Had we sat down a few years back and tried to design such a plan, we would not have envisioned what God has done. We could not have sought out and selected the men and women God has brought through the doors of CSLI Annapolis. We could not have envisioned the advance of the kingdom that has been made on the campuses of these two universities in Annapolis. We could not have imagined the places and vocations our young people would have been called to. Even today, we hesitate to make plans at CSLI Annapolis lest we limit what God desires of and for us. What God has done through CSLI Annapolis these past few years can be attributed only to Him and Him alone. We are servants who are delighted to have been invited to participate in His work, His beautiful sari.

Notes

Betty Skinner, *Daws: A Man Who Trusted God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1974), 72.

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articulate, defend, and live faith in Christ
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