



Wildwood
Mennonite
Church

Greater than the Sum of our Parts

Wildwood Mennonite Church // May 16, 2021
Worship Leader: Graham M // Music Leader: Josephine K
Sermon: Kerry Reimer, Parkland Restorative Justice

Welcome to Wildwood!

Welcome to our at-home (or wherever you happen to be) worship materials! We're so glad that worship in these now-normal-but-still-not-normal ways continues to be meaningful for you. Our worship themes this spring remind us that we are hardly the first Christian community to go through hard times, and that thousands of years of faith continue to point to God's faithfulness. This rarely means that we get what we want, yet somehow God continues to show up.

In that spirit of longing and expectation for the presence of God in all times and places, welcome. The Divine Spark is with you; come and see.

Music for Meditation // [Just Ice](#) // Josephine Kroeker

Call to Worship

Creator God,

As we gather today, be with us, and may your presence join us with our siblings across the world. Provoke us to love and good deeds. Help us choose to walk together in the way of Jesus, and give us the strength to take those steps.

Amen.

Peace Candle

O God of life and love and peace,

We witness the violence and injustice in your Holy Land

And our hearts break.

Our hearts break for all Palestinians—

For the victims of violent attacks from Israelis


For those who have endured decades of occupation and oppression

For those whose homes and olive orchards have been demolished

For those who languish in Israeli prisons and in the “open air prison” of Gaza

For those without nearly enough water and electricity and medical care

For those who are refugees, long displaced from their homes.



Our hearts break for the Jewish people of Israel—
For the victims of violent attacks
For those who live with fear and insecurity
For those who re-live the trauma of the Holocaust over and over.
We lament the hardened hearts of world leaders who continue to ignore the
oppression of Palestinian people
For those who distort or turn their eyes from truth
For those who fail to see the humanity of all your children.
Heal us all, O God.
Heal the broken and comfort the sorrowful.
Give hope to the hopeless and courage to the fearful.
Strengthen the peacemakers and reconcilers.
Confront those who practice injustice and commit violence.
We especially pray—
That weapons of war be laid down
That walls of separation and the machinery of occupation be dismantled
That prisoners be released
That demonizing of “the other” cease
That political leaders seek the good of all people in Palestine and Israel.
We pray also for ourselves—
That our eyes will be opened to the ways in which our beliefs and actions have
contributed to injustice and to violence.
O God, whose heart breaks for the world,
May your justice dwell in the land
May your righteousness abide in fruitful fields
May the effect of righteousness be quietness and trust forever
May the effect of justice be peace — enduring peace.
Amen

Sharing Time

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. Sharing items can be emailed to the church office or the pastors to be shared with the congregation. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.



Congregational Prayer // You Answer

There are so many names for you, O God.

Yahweh Lord, Ancient One, King, Alpha and Omega,
and the list goes on.

With so many titles, how can we know whom to call?

Yet you are the first and the last, the ruler of all,
the God from the beginning and the God to the end.

When we call to you, you answer
and all will hear your voice. Amen.

Emily Toews (Canada), 2015.

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Together in Worship www.togetherinworship.net

Song // [Beyond a Dying Sun](#) // Voices Together #416

Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Brenda M!](#)

This week's story is [The Three Robbers](#) by Tomi Ungerer with excerpts from [Go Show the World: A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes](#) by Wab Kinew.

Scripture // adapted from the NIV translation

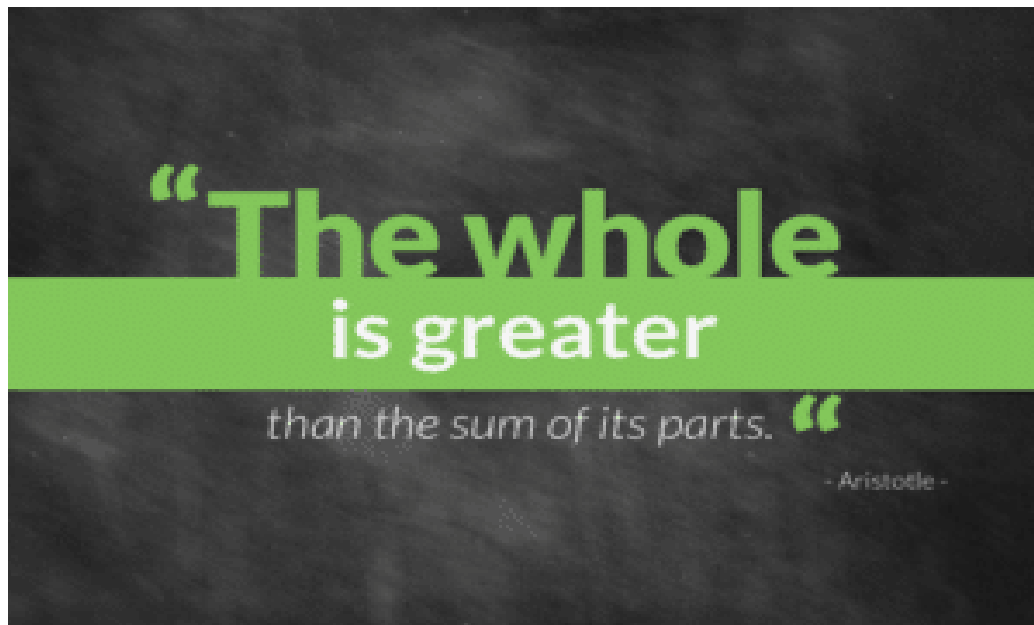
2 Peter 1:3-4

God's divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of the God who called us by God's own glory and goodness. Through these God has given us these very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep on loving one another as family. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Sermon // Greater than the Sum of our Parts // Kerry Reimer - Parkland Restorative Justice
(If you'd rather watch than read, [click here for the video version on youtube](#))



Good morning, my name is Kerry Reimer (pronouns are He, him) and I am grateful for the land that I live and work on: Treaty Six territory, and the homeland of the Metis. It is so very good to be here today at Wildwood MC. I do appreciate being asked by Pastor Joe and the Church to come and share what's on my heart.

I am the director of Parkland Restorative Justice in Prince Albert. Although I have not been one to move, shift or change very much over most of my life, the last 10 years have brought much change. It seems I am getting to be friends with change. In the days we live in, getting comfortable with changing lifestyles, landscapes, and labor will help us to achieve greater resilience. And Doing it together is always better.

I said that I am director of Parkland Restorative Justice, that is only since August. But who I am cannot be contained in that one vocation. While I am more than the sum of my parts, my parts make up a huge part of the whole of my identity. We cannot be defined by any single action or short series of events. For instance, If I had told you that I had committed a crime in my early years and spent 5 years in prison for that crime, no matter what it may be.... but let us say a violent assault on a girlfriend, or I shared with you that I spent 20 plus years living a double life, numbing my emotions and connection to this world through alcohol, drugs, manipulating the opposite sex, friends and family in order to fill the emptiness inside, all the while stewing with an inner rage that made my life and those around me hellish.

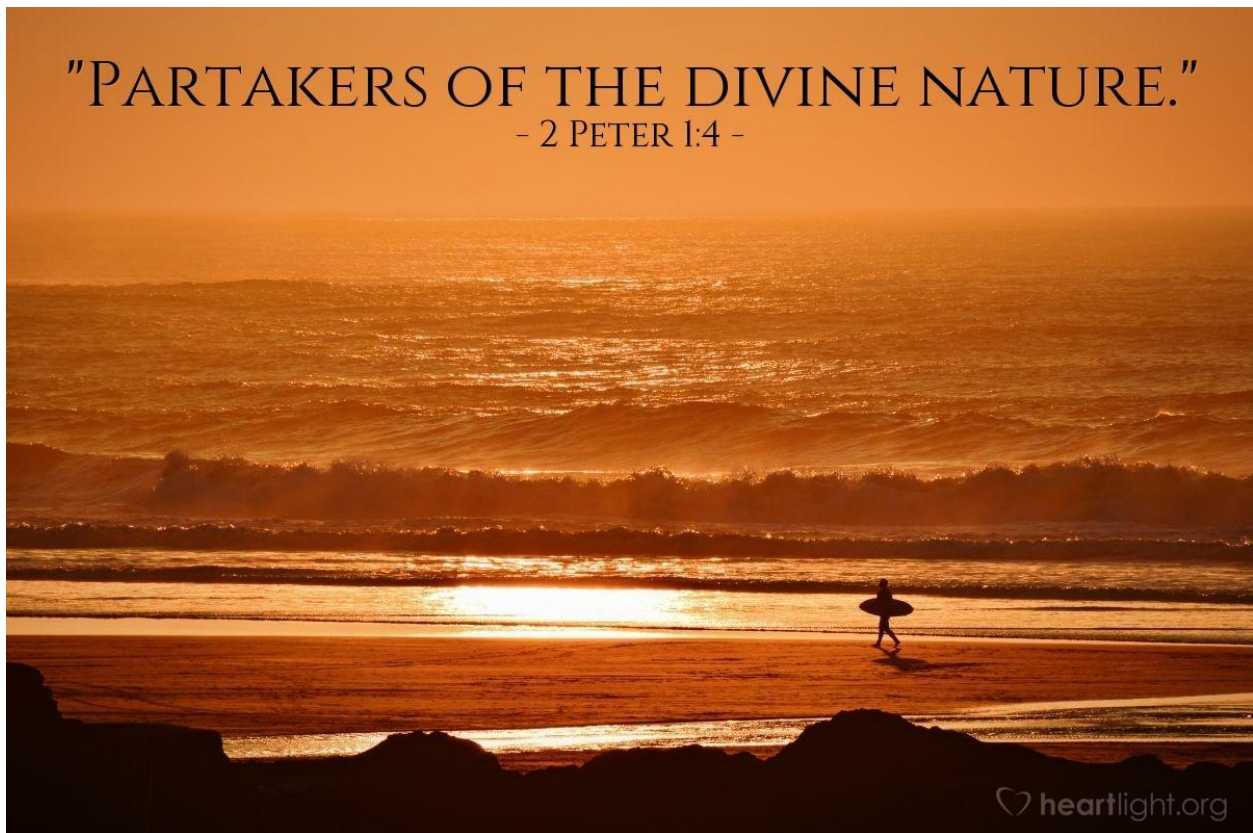
Do those things or events define me?

It seems to be a part of our societal system to permanently label or stereotype individuals based on singular events or pieces of them that have become public knowledge: and then for all time and from then on all future parts will be judged and attitudes dictated by these few moments.

Some other parts of me include small businessman, recent graduate from Horizon College, husband, step father to 2, step grandfather to 7, son, son in law, manager of homeless shelter, fundraising professional, lover of reading, photography, cycling, motorcycling, mindfulness meditation, contemplative prayer, small groups, psychology, and counselling. Well, that's a few of my parts anyway.

In our first scripture; 2 Peter 1:3-4 it describes the divine power that offers us all the option of "participating in the divine nature". This divine nature is what binds all the parts of us together. Our creator has made us to be like Creator. To think, to act, to feel like Jesus. To do the good works on earth that were predesigned for each of us, and all of us, to do. To use our precious creativity to build each other up in radical community, to reach out to the "other" and bring them into this community, to share of the divine nature, to assist others to cultivate their divine nature, and let the nature of God bubble up, to increase and overflow in a glorious witness of what the kingdom of God can be. A Mystical Union.

"PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE."
- 2 PETER 1:4 -



This scripture has been on my heart for quite a while. 2-3 years at least. Wondering about the connection to God, to God's nature, to the presence of God in us.

My research (Google, lol) of participating or partaking in the divine nature brought me to this quote: "To become partaker of a divine Person means that the essence of the soul or the will is

either conformed, or conformed and united to a divine Person by being infused with a supernatural essential quality or a supernatural virtue, respectively.”

(<https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/8554/in-2-peter-14-what-does-peter-mean-by-partakers-of-the-divine-nature>)

My understanding is that we can be changed by proximity to Christ; by living and being close by to Jesus, or we can be made more like Jesus by mystical union.

I don't know about you all, but I just want it all! Closeness, conformity, and the mystical union!

The text also refers to Hypostatic union which is quite a mouthful, but maybe a phrase some are familiar with. Hypostatic translates as “personal” and so theologically hypostatic union is the personal union of Jesus two natures, Human and Divine.

We see then that “the hypostatic union is the mysterious joining of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus.” Like us, Jesus has parts too! Joined together in one person.

In God's generous invitation to participate in the Divine Nature, we get to inhabit, or rather, the Divine nature comes in to inhabit us.

When I am out of sorts, stressed, angry, over thinking, naming, blaming, shaming of myself, others or the world, I know that I have been operating out of my head. Overanalyzing, over thinking, ruminating, (chewing the cud). It leads me away from my connection to my heart, which is where the divine presence lives and moves and has its way. Community and connection with the source is what heals, gets me back on track with my true, divine nature, overcoming the false fleshly nature, at least for a while.

Back 5 years ago, shortly after my wife and I met, we were walking in downtown Saskatoon. There were many people on the streets of the core that day. Including the pan handlers, the homeless, those who carry within themselves great suffering.



Inevitably we were asked for money. I immediately went to my head, analyzed the persons demographics, weighing their stated need versus their actual need. Was I being lied to? Was I being manipulated? Was there another resource that I could point this person to? This all goes on in a few seconds and so I am totally immersed in my head, my thinking and almost completely out of touch with the immediacy of the humanity before

me. In contrast my wife, when presented with the exact same need, simply asks God, checks her body, and then simply gives from her heart.

Of course, while watching her do this the first couple of times, I have to grill her and see what she is thinking. But she's not. She is participating, in the divine nature.

When one is living solely out of the head, with the thinking mind, it usually feels physically cold, and the emotions are distant and removed. I know that I have had times of ministry service when I should have been feeling warm and connected with God but was cold as a stone. In the following quote Richard Rohr reflects on his own experience with this. He says "I can think of times when I was celebrating Mass in proper form but with a hidden cold heart. Only when I moved into the congregation and received their genuine smiles and warm hugs did I even realize that my heart had been hardened before. Suddenly it was caring and connecting again. That is the rub of any conversion experience: You only know how much you needed it when you are on the other side! That is why you need the tenacity of faith and hope to carry you across to most transformational experiences. When you can let others actually influence you and change you, your heart space is open." (*Rohr, Richard. Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps (p. 12). St. Anthony Messenger Press. Kindle Edition.*)

When I came to faith in the Christian church at the age of 40, I was drawn not by being taught of what a great sinner I was and how much I needed salvation. I had known how much of a piece of garbage I was for a long time. I lived with toxic shame for years prior. I came to faith and surrendered because God showed itself to me as an unconditionally loving Being that was passionately in love with me. The healing of the shame is ongoing and strange as it may seem, the old negatives linger. My struggle with self worth and personal significance helps me to see, and to empathize with The Other. And so my ministry life has been pushed that direction. It is like the old cliché: "But for the grace of God go I." I strive to push back any pride and ego inflation that rises up in my monkey mind and seek to meet all the "others" on level ground. Standing up in the pulpit feels awkward and so when speaking in person, I will deliver the message on the floor, with the people. Now, I don't tell you this to make me seem super humble, and proud of it, but to know that the broken parts of us that come from our past, that still hang on in the present, are valuable. God will use them if we allow it.

Something I learned in working in the North Battleford homeless shelter and is now being firmed up is that "There is no Us and Them. Only US." There are no disposable people.





Famous Russian Author Alexander Solzhenitsyn said:


“If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

As I said earlier; “But by the grace of God go I”

I have learned a lot about spirituality in my study of addictions. I discovered this quote from Johann Hari and it is applicable to many situations where we need a return to truth, a return to the heart. He says: “The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it is connection, Human relationships.” And it is proven in science;

“Consider the following social experiment in Portugal: the only country that has made all drugs legal. They put all of the money that used to go to punishing addicts into building community in society and giving people meaningful work. The addiction rates plummeted by 50%. One observer suggests that maybe we shouldn’t call this phenomenon addiction, but rather bonding. It just so happens that in the absence of healthy bonds, we do the best we can and we bond with inanimate things that mimic the brain chemistry of relationships. Therefore, the best preventative for addiction to drugs is “addiction” to healthy, loving relationships. What if the opposite of addiction is not sobriety but connection?”

I find it a relevant concept as many of the inmates do suffer from addictions, as do we. This is a philosophy that guides us at Parkland Restorative Justice as well. It is one of our central tenets as stated on the website: “We believe that positive social support is a basic need of all people and a powerful healing tool for change.”



Can the people of God learn more about inclusivity from an addiction's researcher and philosopher like Johann Hari? Can we grow and heal by being in non judgmental, loving relationships, for example, with those who are incarcerated? those who may not be so easy to love? While in the presence of the "Other" if we look beneath the surface and be patient, and wait for it, we will experience humanity emerge from the facades of anger and intimidation into a beautiful, vulnerable, loving, connection and encounter with the divine nature.

Parkland Restorative Justice And P2P

Parkland Restorative Justice has existed since 2014 and we coordinate the P2P, Person to Person visitation program, CoSA, Circles of Support and Accountability, and Dad Hero, a program to assist incarcerated Dads to become better parents. We exist to create safe communities by following the principles of restorative justice in helping offenders reintegrate into the community. P2P has an amazingly long, successful existence and is faith in action. It all began in 1974 with Orville Andres, a pastor at the small Grace Mennonite church in Prince Albert. My office is in the back corner of the GMC building in PA today and I was privileged to get to know Pastor Ed Olfert for a few months prior to his second retirement in December. By reading some of his great articles and speaking to him I grew to understand the meaning, the feeling of AWE. Looking for it, being aware of it, cultivating knowledge of things, events and people that are awe inspiring.

I am in AWE of P2P's humble beginnings, and continued humble reliance on God. The impact of Person-to-Person prison visitation is hard to fully measure. It is an extension of God's nature moving in his people, giving it away freely to the "Other". By the other I mean those who have become judged by much of popular society as unworthy of normal human acceptance and love. Unsurprisingly, this is where Jesus chose to hang out. This is who he was comfortable with and was in deepest relationship with. Because he was drawn to the lepers, the outcasts, the tax collectors, they were drawn to Jesus. They participated in the divine nature together.

Dale Schiele of Prince Albert took the P2P program, expanded and made it a normative part of daily Sask Pen life. Even today, it has a highly favoured status in the Pen. I was adopted into that favour as I was introduced to the head warden last fall by our previous director Heather Driedger. (whom I am sure a few of you may know... ;)

In 2014, after much discussion, P2P and the CoSA programs were joined together officially and incorporated under the banner of Parkland Restorative Justice. This assisted us in partnering with a wider cross section of faith groups that were becoming increasingly involved in prison visitation at Sask Pen. We recognize the faithfulness of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan and individual churches and donors, as well as Mennonite Central Committee and their focus on restorative justice. We cannot and would not be who we are without their loving generosity.

Diversity was and is vital to the success of this ministry and since 2014, Parkland Restorative Justice has received support from the Roman Catholic diocese of Prince Albert, The Living Skies Regional Council of the United Church and others.

For 20 years, Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) has been operating in Prince Albert and across Canada. It assists high risk sex offenders to successfully reintegrate into society at the conclusion of their sentence. CoSA has been heavily researched and the success rate is beyond compare. Up to 80% of men who are released from long term incarceration who engage in the CoSA model (compared to no engagement with the program) will not reoffend.

And yet, the federal government and Public Safety Canada is planning on cutting this program and the funding nationwide, including the funding that has helped Parkland Restorative Justice operate the program for 20 plus years.

For PRJ this is a significant hit to our budget. We have witnessed its value and the successes of the men who have benefited from the circles right here in our region. We know these men by name.

All of our restorative justice programming does put a lot of emphasis on the men who have no doubt broken laws, violated societal norms, and left victims in their wake. However, I will remind you that the many successes that Parkland Restorative Justice, its programs P2P, CoSA and Dad Hero, have enjoyed, the bottom line is that we strive for “No More Victims.”

Please keep PRJ in your prayers and thoughts as we seek out innovative solutions to funding the CoSA staff and program.

If you are interested in volunteering for P2P visitation or phone calls, please give me a call.
306-763-6224

For an example of restorative justice programming in the prison environment, check out this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BILLA2zVKL4>



Volunteers, in all our programs are vital. They bring God inside the Pen but also encounter him there. Many times, they enter into serve in the penitentiary, desiring to bring the love of Christ to those who are suffering. However, it is often one who comes to serve who gets served. Hearts are exposed, vulnerability emerges, in a trusting encounter and

both persons end up participating in the divine nature of God.

Here are a few of many quotes from visiting volunteers in the P2P program:

"We feel like they have an impact on our lives just as we have an impact on theirs".

"It means so much for them and demands not much of me."

Many described the spiritual growth that followed their involvement with P2P:

"It is an important part of my spiritual journey increasing my understanding of people."

"It has been part of my spiritual route. My God just got bigger."

Volunteering in the program made visitors more open to seeing people beyond their deeds:

"It has helped us; we understand that they are human."

"There is not much that separates any of us. Addictions and a few bad decisions – lack of people to love them. We have developed compassion for these people. What if our grandson was in here?"

Visitors have commented on how contact with inmates had changed their attitude and made them more empathetic and tolerant:


"I used to think, "they did the crime, now they do their time, but now when I've heard their stories and know about their home life, I go out and think that "there but by the grace of God go I!""

While maintaining sympathy for victims of crimes, it became evident to many visitors that some inmates may also be victims of their past. All is not black and white.



One of our faithful, long time P2P volunteers who has been a life time follower of Christ, a servant in the church, and a devoted spiritual seeker shared an experience with me on the phone just a couple of days ago. A moment that she had visiting one on one with a man on the inside of Sask Pen. She would not share the details, but in recalling this event that was from a few years ago, I could tell that what

she was about to share was deeply impactful. Her voice which was normally quite stern and business like on the phone, got quiet, and as she began to speak, I detected a small quiver in her tone. She shared that *'Its never happened before or since, but in that room with 30 other people, situated deep in the cold environment of Saskatchewan penitentiary, visitors and inmates chatting openly all around us in this room, As I sit across from this violent offender, this inmate, this man, this human being, and a mystery of the divine, in that moment, it was "the only time in my life where I saw the face of God"'*.



The visits to the prison can bring about the experience of mystical union....a sharing in the divine nature. In our great intellectual pursuits, when we are stuck in our heads, let us leave room for the God who is unexplainable. God who seeks union with the heart, the center of the emotions, and the seat of the soul.

The poet Rumi writes, “Find the real world, give it endlessly away, grow rich flinging gold to all who ask. Live at the empty heart of paradox. I’ll dance there with you—cheek to cheek.”

Meister Eckhart says “God is greater than God.” The hope is that our sense of God will grow as expansive as our God is. Each tiny conception gets obliterated as we discover more and more the God who is always greater.

Saskatchewan Penitentiary Inmate:

“For these people to come in here and visit us in prison, it is a big gift – a little piece of heaven.”

To learn more about Parkland or to explore partnering in their works as a volunteer or donor, you can check out their website (parklandrestorativejustice.com) or contact Kerry directly: 306-763-6224 / director@parklandrj.com

Song of Response // [Beauty for Brokenness](#) // Voices Together #712

Offering Prayer

God, we look at our humble offerings and we think they might not change the world today.
But they help us remember.

We remember that you are generous.

We remember that when we give our money, we mean that we’re giving ourselves.

We remember that you working in us does change the world, letting your kingdom come on earth.

Bless all of these gifts. Amen.

Sending Song // [We Are Salt for the Earth](#) // Voices Together #297

Benediction // [Empowered Benediction](#)

Go into your week knowing you are
loved perfectly,
saved eternally,
and empowered as a disciple of Jesus
to share God’s love with everyone you meet.

- Carol Penner