

“Let Me Send Him My Crutch.”

A Cripple Gives a Christmas Lesson



Note: Some of you haven't heard from me in months or years. Please accept this Christmas letter for my work at Justice For All as my attempt to begin to reconnect. Let me know how you're doing, your updated contact information, how I can pray for you: www.hbmm.net, www.facebook.com/steve.wagner. – Your friend, Stephen

Dear Friend,

It's a tradition. Every Advent, my mother lovingly places the needle of the record player on a vinyl copy of Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Whenever I was home for Christmas, we listened...sometimes more than once. Even for a boy who didn't care much for classical music, I was always enchanted by *Amahl*. Now, I make a point each Advent to listen to the opera with my family.

The opera is rich with comment on everyday human problems. There are precious mother-son interactions about lying and childhood optimism. The plot illustrates the disparity between rich and poor as well as the thorny ethical problem of attempting to justify the *bad means* of stealing with the *good end* of feeding one's child. Perhaps most interesting, the opera comments on Christ's humanness in the incarnation through Amahl and his mother, a pair with striking similarities to Christ and his mother, Mary.

The basic story is this: A first-century crippled boy named Amahl and his mother are dirt-poor and are contemplating the prospect of leaving home to go begging. Three kings on their way to Bethlehem take lodging with Amahl and his mother. As the kings sleep, the mother sings a moving aria about the rich, “Do They Know?” and takes some of the gold from one of the kings. After she is caught in the act, the kings describe how the King they are seeking (Jesus) doesn't need the gift of the gold. They forgive the mother and offer her the gold. But she has a change of heart.

Mother: Oh no...wait...take back your gold. For such a king, I've waited all my life. And if I weren't so poor, I would send a gift of my own to such a child.

Amahl: But Mother, let me send him my crutch. Who knows, he may need one. And this I made myself.

Mother: But that, you can't, you can't.



The day was Christmas Eve, 1951. Five million television viewers tuned in to watch this first opera written for television. According to Wikipedia, it was the largest audience to ever watch an opera. Although I missed the premiere, my family regularly “tuned in” to the vinyl record each Advent when I was growing up. My wife and daughters and I will be listening this week.

And then...well, I won't give away the dramatic climax of the story.

As we approach Christmas, I am reflecting on Amahl's willingness to give Jesus his dearest, most useful possession, imperfect and commonplace as it was. I think of similar gifts I bring to Jesus each day.

One of those gifts is my investment of *time* in our staff here at JFA. It's imperfect and it doesn't compare to the gift Christ has given us (His life), but it's my dearest possession. Helping our staff grow as trainers, speakers, and mentors means “being present” when they're hard at work during our seat work (seminar) and feet work (outreach). I give feedback, and when a mentor is stuck, I step in to model how to answer a tough question so that it doesn't sidetrack the group. This “training certification” program is the

best gift I can present to our staff...and it's the best gift I can present to Jesus. It's your partnership that makes it possible. Thank you.

As we approach Christmas, I'd like to share a short, year-end summary of how things are going with my JFA work, my support raising, and the Wagner family. Some of these items represent the time investment I've just described. Some represent other gifts I bring to Jesus.

- **Half-Way There** – Thirteen JFA trainers were busy learning to teach portions of our five-hour “Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue” seminar in 2010. Our initial goal is eight trainers certified to teach the entire seminar. I believe we'll reach it by June 2011. We're almost to four at present.
- **Thousands Impacted** – In 2010...
 - JFA trained 1,357 people in 34 seminars across the country. 41% of these people (563) completed the essential “feet work” component of their training by having conversations with pro-choice advocates during our outreach events (thirteen campuses in nine states).
 - I coordinated the team of 23 people who mentored our volunteers through these events.
 - 3,180 people also heard one of JFA's 38 presentations. I gave special presentations at Wheaton College and the South Dakota Right to Life convention.
- **New Materials** – I spearheaded a complete revision of our training manual, now called, *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue – The Interactive Guide* and the first edition of JFA's new *Guide For Trainers*. These materials animate the entire JFA program. Our staff mentor team, non-staff mentors, and a partner organization (Right to Life of Central California) use them to train others to create abortion dialogue that changes minds, heals hearts, and saves lives.
- **Free eBook Coming Soon** – I am preparing to offer an eBook version of *Common Ground Without Compromise* for free beginning next month. I'll tell you more in my January 1 newsletter.
- **Time for Support-Raising** – My strong support team continues to be generous and faithful. I am so encouraged. I'll be spending much of the first part of 2011 raising the remainder of my support, which has been at about 66% since I began at JFA. I'm excited to finally be able to contact new supporters.

Whether it's one of JFA's mentors or volunteers, one of you who supports my work, my wife, or one of my children, I want to invest in each person by *taking time* – time to listen, look each person in the eyes, think together about a problem, pray for miracles, or...to simply be “present.” That's how I would treat Jesus if He were physically present. I encourage you to give the same gift this Christmas.

Thank you for your concern for me and my work at JFA. Would you take a moment to consider giving a year-end gift to JFA to help me in that work? To give a gift or make a commitment to give in 2011, click this link: <http://stephenmwagner.blogspot.com/p/support.html>.

Merry Christmas!

Stephen