

TRUNK – CHRIS AUER



NEW JERUSALEM COMMUNITY MIDDLE YEARS

Trunk: the main woody stem of a tree, distinct from its branches and roots; and...the nose of an elephant...and a large box with hinged lid used for storage.

Remember that metaphor about the 3 blind men asked to feel different parts of an elephant? Each of us here remembers our time at New J differently, right? The blind men metaphor was actually spoken to remind us that no one religion has the corner market on the Truth. That's important. I think we remember what we need to remember (and how we need to remember it), what we cherished, and sometimes what hurt the most. And the older we get the more we have to rely on others to tell us: What do you remember? Not the nose, but the memory of an elephant is what we could use! Together we're here now, opening that hinged-lid box, looking at what we've stored inside in the time period of 1976-1985.

So here we go:

As the tree began to grow the trunk stretched upward and grew in circumference. This center expanded its rings: Initiation Ministry, Tues-Fri Morning Breadwinners Group, Marriage Sponsorship, Toddler Ministry evolving into the Family Life Office. Starting as a group of teens, it wasn't easy to pivot to families who were arriving with school age children in tow. I think of the Cafferky's, Muellers, Santoro's, Heisels, Petry's to name a few. It was easier to grow with the newborns! Still, those kids were incorporated into the social activities of the Circles the parents were in, into their own family life of prayer and service, and the way the families reached out to include others at meals or in extending their homes to guests, to singles and other married couples.

And the rings of the trunk continued to expand outward: Guest Ministry, Healing Ministry, Overground Railroad and La Amistad (this is Lucia, the youngest member of an LA HH – think St Lucia the earliest mission trip!) low-income housing involvement, Tax us for Life protests on April 15, becoming a Sunday-worshipping community, the Environmental committee, traveling teams, local parish renewal. And of course, those of us with jobs across the spectrum, brought faith values into our work environment- from the teachers – and we had many – to the engineers to the lawyers to the remodelers – you name it – feel free to use chat to add your own fields of work, bc the trunk expanded to encompass them all. Remember: *“Christ played in 10,000 places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his. To the Father through the features of men (and women's) faces...”*

With Richard and John traveling more and more, we were given the opportunity to en flesh our commitment to lay leadership, lay-led worship, and from the beginning, women in leadership. As more married, the number of community households gradually decreased. Still, we grew in our intentionality, signing our Holy Thursday forms where we spelled out how we would live out the 3 core values of Interiority, Community, and Service.

As serious as we were, we danced around this tree trunk, like children playing ring around the rose. We knew how to play!! I swear that should have been the 4th core value! Thank God for lightheartedness, for the kids, for ways we forgot ourselves, for the playful leaders of New J juniors, for ways that distracted us from taking ourselves too seriously.

With every expanding ring in the tree trunk, the tree grows stronger – it's not diminished. And yet, with every person who left, for so many important and varied reasons – it pulled at the heartstrings of those who remained. We were so sure we knew who we were - an oak, a cedar, a maple. But life had other plans about how we would branch out and how we would bear fruit.