

# Thankfulness: *Closer to the Heart of God*

Suzy West, CMA's Director of Administration/COO, just popped her head into my office. "I have good news about the upcoming annual conference in Palm Springs: As of December 1, we're already 300 registrations over where we were at this same time last year."

"That's 20 percent more than last year," I said. "It doesn't get any better than that." Or does it?

We're staring at what could well be the best-attended annual conference in CMA's 30 year history. I'm tempted to believe it doesn't get any better than world-class speakers like Gordon MacDonald and Patrick Lencioni, more than 100 seminars and workshops, and a new wave of supporters and friends for Christian Management Partners, who are ready to infuse CMA with new passion and resources.

Thirty years ago, a handful of Los Angeles-area ministry leaders and business people gathered around a table, drawn together by the courage to ask, "How can we help each other become more effective leaders, better managers, better mentors, better servants, better stewards of the resources and opportunities God has given us to do his work?"

For 30 years, God's faithfulness and wisdom have directed our path. You can see the footprints of executive leaders like Alan Bergstedt, Jim Canning, Dean Hazelton, Sylvia Nash and John Pearson. Your footprints are there, too, because you and your ministry are part of CMA's journey. Look around. Look back. What causes you to be most thankful?

I was working in my office on the lower level of our home one day. Everyone was gone except our 11-year-old daughter, Capri, who went to the garage to get her bike and then meet her friend, Maggie. But once inside the garage, Capri heard the kitchen door lock behind her. Then, the circuit breaker popped and she couldn't open the garage door. Suddenly, she was alone in a cold, dark, windowless garage—with no way out.

Being on the far side of house, I couldn't hear her cries and screams for help. Four hours later, I heard the front doorbell ring. It was Maggie, wondering where Capri was. Me too! I hustled through the kitchen, opened the door, and there on the garage floor I saw Capri curled up in a fetal position. When she saw me, she burst into tears. "How could you leave me?" Immediately I put my arms around her, held her and apologized to her as she sobbed.

After a few moments, I pulled the rope and opened the garage door by hand. Light burst through, and an interesting thing happened. In a matter of seconds, Capri jumped up, dried her eyes, grabbed her bike and rode off with Maggie, glad to be on her way. She didn't look back. She said nothing. When you're busy moving ahead, it's easy to leave thankfulness in the dust.

May it never be so for any of us in CMA who have wit-

nessed God's faithfulness. How can we *not* be thankful for all he has done?

Consider how the Lord brought together a handful of ministry leaders and believers in the marketplace 30 years ago (see page 9) for what was to become CMA.

Consider how their shared vision to raise the excellence and effectiveness of ministries resonated with the attendees, then less than 200 strong, at the first annual Christian Management conference, March 30, 1978.

Consider how leaders, board members and innumerable volunteers have unselfishly contributed their expertise, time and treasure to welcome thousands of new members into our association.

Consider how strategic endeavors like CMA's Executive Leadership Program and CEO Dialogues have encouraged and equipped leaders to take their respective ministries to the next level.

Consider how revered people like Ted Engstrom, Peter Drucker, Bob Buford, Olan Hendrix, Mark Holbrook, Paul Nelson and Virginia Patterson have shown us that integrity, wisdom and service are not mere benchmarks, but rather the necessities of godly leadership.

Consider how much God has blessed CMA through people like you, and consider how much he desires to bless us all through our upcoming annual conference.

When you think of all of this, consider how natural it can be to echo the psalmist's words: "Praise God's name with singing, And I will honor him with thanksgiving" (Psalm 69:30).

As an association, there's a lot of opportunity before us, and I believe thankfulness can help us grab hold of God's greater purposes and plans. Start with gratitude and think of how the Lord has blessed you and your ministry through CMA. Now, imagine releasing that knowledge, extending your influence to advance the Lord's work to 1,000, 5,000 or, yes, even 20,000 ministries which have yet to join CMA.

Imagine your ministry's best practices helping a halfway house save the life of a drug-addicted teen, or causing a relief and development organization to increase the food supply to a starving land. Imagine how the gratitude for these and other extraordinary outcomes can deepen our dependence on God.

Let's be thankful. For our heritage. For our future. And for each other. Let our thankfulness be the profound acknowledgement of all we've been given to advance his kingdom on earth, and may our own grateful hearts take us closer to the heart of God.

**Frank Lofaro** welcomes all CMA members and associates to email him at [Frank@CMAonline.org](mailto:Frank@CMAonline.org). He's eager to hear from you.



**Frank Lofaro**