

“Changing the World 101”

Impassioned speaker challenges SMC students, community members into action

By Lou Fancher

Saint Mary's College launched Jan Term's 2013 "Inspired" Speaker Series on Jan. 8 with a dynamic, rousing call to action from Ignited Leadership founder Jason Connell.

The 26-year old seeker of social justice and world traveler would have every reason to sit down and take a rest, but instead, he paced like a caged cheetah across the Soda Center stage; unfurling tender, personal stories and hurling inspirational challenges to the approximately 100 member audience.

"One of the reasons I'm happy to be here is that despite the small size of SMC, you have more service hours per student than almost any other college in the country," he began.

Describing the 17-year-old Chinese mother he once saw digging food out of the trash to feed the baby she held wrapped in a blanket, Connell said, "That's not a kind of poverty we see in this country. I shifted from partying in every country I could visit to seeing what kind of difference I could make in the world."

Connell offered a two-sided invitation; stressing the importance of admitting that no one person can save the world while suggesting every single person could take steps to build a better community. Promising to accept private questions after the lecture, share his email address, and send digital copies of his lecture notes, Connell dove into the dark, evil world he is devoted to changing.

"The Virgin Cleanse Myth," he announced, describing a much-believed, clearly erroneous story Soweatans are led to believe will eradicate the HIV-AIDS virus. "(People with AIDS) are told, if they have sex with people who are assuredly virgins—two year olds, three year olds, who are kidnapped and raped—you will be cleansed," he said.

With an HIV-AIDS rate of 17.8

percent, meaning one in six South Africans are infected, lack of education and a desperate population leads to tragedy beyond imagination. "What would you do, if the cards had been dealt differently?" Connell asked, suggesting the very thought made his heart hurt and his head spin.

"These problems are not just in Soweto," he claimed, "they wrap themselves around the world."

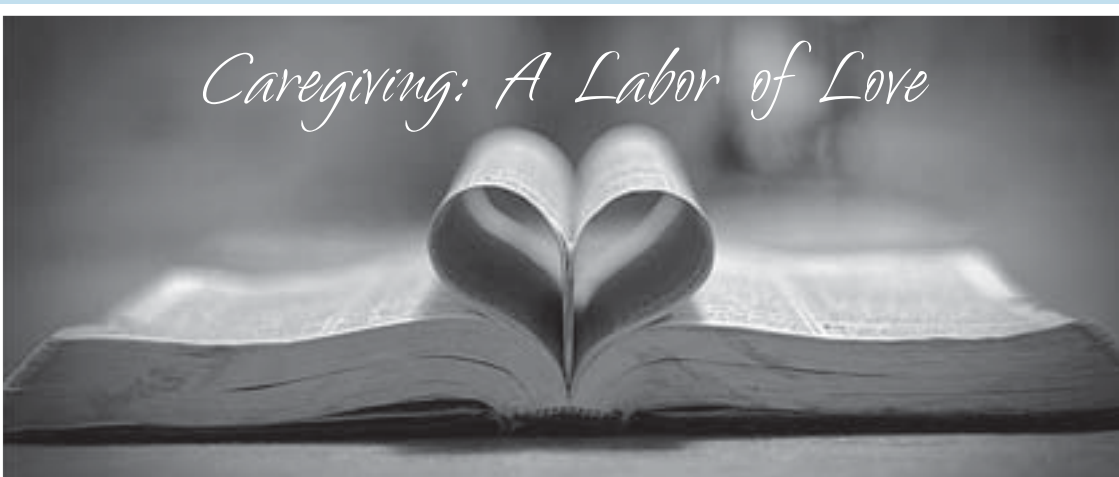
Embracing the enormity of poverty, genocide, global warming, water deprivations and other global concerns can make a person shut down, Connell said. "Completely powerless: that's how I have felt," he admitted. "But it's a false feeling."

To prove his point, Connell jumped off the dire bandwagon of world problems and planted his feet firmly in Global Camps Africa (GCA), an example of solutions. GCA takes kids in dire poverty and places them in the countryside at what is, essentially, a classic American summer camp. The camp has a dual purpose: to lift kids out of poverty and prevent the spread of HIV.

"Study after study shows the kids who attend have lower HIV rates," Connell said. "They commit fewer crimes, go to school more often, and they're happier. The way you change the world is working with small groups of individuals."

Perhaps sensing his message had strayed to abstraction, Connell moved to Uganda, recalling the personal drama of a young woman whose family was brutally murdered by the Lord's Resistance Army. The warring faction, whose phenomenal levels of violence are unimaginable to Americans (except, Connell noted, in video games he said cause gamers to mistake violence for entertainment), spared the young woman's life because she was pregnant and killing a woman bearing a child was one step beyond their moral code.

...continued on page B7



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Software Application Allows Riders to Track Buses Online

By Sophie Braccini



Bus tracker Chris Lohmann

Photo Sophie Braccini

Christoph Lohmann agrees with County Connection: the new Bus Tracker application is a really helpful tool. The online application lets users visualize where buses are on their route and calculates arrival times at whatever bus stop riders are interested in. Lohmann, who takes the bus about four times a week, likes to be able to plan trips with Bus Tracker, but he hopes that the smartphone app will be improved and made more user-friendly in future versions.

Contra Costa County Transportation Agency (CCCTA- County Connection) announced at the end of last year that all buses would be equipped with GPS devices that track their positions in real time. With the help of software called Bus Tracker, users can see where the buses are located on a Google map; the product can also calculate how long it will take a bus to reach a specific stop. Riders create a free account and can get personalized alerts, so they know when to leave their home/office to get to the stop on time.

"I tried this out this morning and it is a really good tool, especially when planning the trip home from the office (in San Francisco) on BART then taking the bus to Moraga," said Lohmann. "The desktop (full browser) version works really well

but I think the best value comes from being able to view arrival times when you are en route on BART."

Finding and using Bus Tracker is easy. First, visit www.cccta.org and click on "Bus Tracker"—on the upper right of the home page. Then choose "bus location map" and click on "find stop" - Lafayette/Moraga/Orinda is Route 6. The map displays where the bus is located on the route and is refreshed every 30 seconds. There is a smartphone version to plan on the go, but Lohmann notes, "I tried using this on my iPhone and it only works so-so."

"If they would develop an app optimized for smartphones to track the bus routes that is something I would use on a daily basis," he says. "The text version is okay and useful but not as user-friendly as the BART app, for example. I use their app every day and it has proven to be very useful. I hope that they go beyond the text version for mobile phones."

In an area like ours where buses are infrequent, this added feature will add peace of mind and more predictability. "I have to say that [Bus Tracker] is a great service and it would be great if [CCCTA] were to add a 9 p.m. bus to their regular daily schedule," concludes Lohmann.

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