

The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.



Building Community In A Congregation

By
Kate Allen

Recently I've been contemplating congregations and communities. Raised atheist, I had no childhood experience with the community that comes from one's parents' congregation. My communities have tended to be small and tight, as they come from within the neighborhoods I lived, the schools I attended and the companies I worked. The Fellowship of Reason is the first community I've been a part of which resembles a traditional congregation, what I imagine a larger, looser community would be.

Over the last 3 years, I've observed that FOR members and repeat visitors take part in different parts of our "reason-based moral community." Some, like me, seek the congregational aspects and attend FORum regularly, while only sporadically making it to the other regularly-scheduled social and educational events. Others rarely attend the formal FORum event, but make the monthly FOR activities centerpieces of their social lives. In one way or another, the people we meet through FOR become part of our social network.



To understand my concepts of congregation and community, I view a congregation as being together in a specific (stereotypically church) setting, but dispersed outside the chapel doors, whereas community is a

cohesive group gathered by a particular cause, but which persists in the outside environment as well. For example, I've maintained a community with many of my college alums though we graduated 16 years ago and moved all over the world. Most FOR activities promote congregation and allow for, if not specifically encourage, individual, family and small group friendships to develop beyond the event. But do they promote community – community in the sense of a larger support network? If so, how? If not, why not?

The answers to these philosophical and practical questions differ for each of us, but I raise them for consideration, as we all work on FOR President David Ziebell's goals for 2009. One aspect of FORum I most enjoy is the Celebratory Announcements, but I've recently begun to wonder if it might not be undermining our community. I applaud founder Martin Cowen's deliberate emphasis on celebrating what is good in our lives, sharing it with others and celebrating one another's achievements and flourishing, in opposition to the traditional church focus on all that is wrong with ourselves and the world and therefore requires prayer to resolve or endure. But what happens when one (or more) of us can't think of anything to celebrate on the first Sunday of the month? What if, during these challenging times, we don't have a new job, an achievement at work or a great event in the last 30 days to celebrate? What if our personal flourishing seems meager even to ourselves? Should we sit silently, stand up and say, "Hey, life's not peachy keen this month, here are a few of my struggles, and here's how I'm reasoning my way through them." or should we stay home? Are there readers who have stayed home?

Are we discouraging members from attending FORum, and visitors from returning the next month, when we focus predominantly on personal flourishing, have no designated category for group flourishing, act as though everyone always has good news to share, and mock or discourage any conversation with a

Individual Highlights

Building Community	1
President's Note	3
April Calendar	5
May Calendar	6
Events	7
Birthdays	7
Celebratory Announcements	8

Building Community In A Congregation

continued from page 1

whiff of failure or need?

After reading Martin's essay in March, I was troubled that any mention of personal hardship might be interpreted as a demand to volunteer and rescue. The mention of hardship by others has never made me assume I had to solve their problem. My experience has been that most people going through difficulties of any kind (financial, career, personal, medical) want a sympathetic ear, words of encouragement and perhaps a fresh suggestion. Most of the rational (and reasonable!) folks I know particularly welcome a new idea. Even if it isn't perfect, it may prompt another avenue to consider.

I recently finished Dale McGowan's "Raising Freethinkers – A Practical Guide for Parenting Beyond Belief." I was struck by his assertion that, *"The nonreligious to date have been miserable at forming genuine community. We fret and fuss over the urgent need for more rationality in the world, completely ignoring more basic human needs like unconditional acceptance. Most people do not go to church for theology – they go for acceptance. They go to be surrounded by people who smile at them and are nice to them, who ask how their kids are and whether their back injury is still hurting. Until we recognize why people gather together – and that it isn't 'to be a force for rationality' – free-thought groups will continue to lag light years behind churches in offering community."*

After reading this, I reflected on my sense of community within the Fellowship of Reason. The shining example that comes to mind is a phone call I got last November from another FOR mother. Eric and I had taken our kids to her child's birthday party. At the time, we had both been laid-off and were struggling to find new jobs as the holiday season approached. We were stressed but wanted to join in the celebration. Attending the party were several FOR families, neighbors and school friends of the birthday kid, so Eric and I were mindful not to complain about our predicament. During the course of conversation, one of us mentioned to her husband that we were looking for work. Neither of us mentioned it to her.

The next evening, she called me. I can honestly say it is a phone call I will never forget, because it was so shockingly friendly. I mean no insult to her, I really like this woman, I've known her for a few years and she has always been friendly. But her call was so empathetic and sympathetic, so direct and specific, so genuine and kind, it moved me deeply. I can't recall anyone but an already best friend doing what she did. She recalled her experience with similar troubles in years past, she gently chided me for not sharing my burden in conversation with her at the party, she inquired about our situation, she offered dinner at her house and childcare for our kids, sensing my husband and I might benefit from some fun but

not choose that given our limited finances, and most of all, she specifically offered her friendship.

At the time, I was so stunned I could barely manage to say thank you and promise to call her soon to take her up on at least one of her offers. I then hung up and stared dumbfounded at Eric. After recapping her call, I remarked, *"Wow, when I was growing up, that is exactly what I imagined the proverbial church lady's response would be to a congregant in need."* As I recall, he laughed and shrugged, *"Ideally."*

Since that call, I've become closer friends with her and our families have had several opportunities to bond. When I mentioned this essay to her, she teased me that I didn't take her up on most of what she offered. I maintained that I did, but in ways that differed from her original offers and that we all benefitted. She didn't disagree.

My family thoroughly enjoyed the holiday celebration she hosted and we've gotten together to entertain the kids and chat with each other since then. Most valuably, I feel supported by her. I hadn't asked her for help in my time of need, and I certainly made no demand of her, but her offers buoyed me tremendously. I feel a sense of security now that if I am in need in the future, she would offer again and she wouldn't make me feel I was burdening her just by mentioning aspects of my life where I'm not currently flourishing. Just as importantly, I trust that my growing friendship with her gives her that same sense of support.



That singular event fostered the flourishing of community between us and our families. Among the reasons I accepted her offers of friendly support were that she is part of my reason-based moral community, more so than any religious neighbors who've offered to help my family in recent months. Because she and I share the commonality of a rational world view, I am more comfortable talking through situations in my life with her. It comforts me that she'll never tell me, *"The Lord never gives us more than we can handle."* or *"What you're going through now must be part of God's plan for you."* I'm delighted when she asks, *"Hey, have you thought of this?"*, especially when I hadn't!

As I wrote above, I have limited history with

About the name "The Eudaimonist"

A eudaimonist (pronounced "yoo-DIE-mon-ist") is one who believes that the highest ethical goal is individual happiness and personal well-being. The term is derived from the ancient Greek word eudaimonia, which means, roughly, "well-being."

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the columns appearing in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the organization. The Fellowship of Reason, Inc speaks only through its Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws, and the actions taken by the Board of Trustees as a board and recorded in the minutes of the corporation.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc.**Mission Statement**

The Fellowship of Reason® is dedicated to the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc. is a Georgia nonprofit corporation and a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation

Fellowship of Reason
P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107
678-641-9321

E-mail
info@fellowshipofreason.com

Subscription Information

Twelve monthly issues of this newsletter is \$15 per year.

Fellowship of Reason® is a service mark registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office, Reg. No. 3,117,034. All rights reserved.

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

Martin at 678-641-9321
Dan at 770-595-6106

Wish List: Part One and Part Two

President's Note:

Part 1. Here are some long-range things we want. (The principle of a wish list is: What if we had a moment to ask a deep-pocketed individual for a single thing we were prepared to implement? What might we ask for?)

- A grant for a person to finish a PhD in Montessori education and start a school to be directed in the public interest by FOR, Inc. (would need a volunteer to get a PhD...)
- A grant to start a think tank in community studies for reason-based communities.
- Video and audio recording equipment to improve retention and dissemination of FORum and promotional material
- A building that could be partially rented out that would also provide a physical space for a range of FOR activities
- X-boxes, WII's, etc to provide activities for tweens and teens.
- A host and producer for a series of podcasts and / or radio series. Contents may include oratories and other presentations at FORum. A radio program be based on "personal mission" - would not have to be limited to FOR members, would be useful to draw on the population at large to highlight how having a personal mission makes a difference to individuals.
- A scholarship fund (to be administered by FOR, Inc. to foster FOR's mission)
- A physical lending library
- A members-only website, to support membership coordination, specialized directories, calendar coordination, targeted announcements, lending library, professional contacts, etc.

My challenge to all FOR members is to send me suggestions for what else should be on this wish list, and also to think of how we might make these things happen. Talk to somebody!

Part 2. Here are some short range things we want.

- A member to take over the role of Membership Coordinator.
- A member to take over the role of Newsletter Editor.
- A member to be our Treasurer (an officer position)

Each of these positions takes only a couple hours a month. I know many members who are capable of participating in our leadership team, providing the services that our community thrives on. There's a very little training we can provide, and lots of experience is available, since any person who's ever held these roles would be happy to help out. Call me if you want to volunteer!

David Ziebell
dziebell@comcast.net
404-316-9823

Building Community In A Congregation

continued from page 2

large, loose communities of the sort that the Fellowship of Reason seems in many ways to be, so perhaps my experience with this particular member is actually how the weave of a loose community becomes tighter, the support more tangible, through individuals and discrete events. Perhaps the fact that we meet in the same room for the same events isn't all that, or necessarily what, brings us together.

If our congregation is to flourish, by which I mean both to become stronger and to grow, as a community for current and future members, we must not be so focused on patting one another on the back for sharing a rational sensibility and reasoned morals and instead be open to one another, care enough to ask sincere questions and listen carefully to the responses, to widen our circle of empathy, to borrow a phrase from Dale McGowan.

I'm no Pollyanna that we all will, or must, bond intimately with everyone we meet through FOR, but I hope we can encourage ourselves to do more than tolerate the various individuals who approach our Fellowship and gather at our activities. Rather than just be hopeful this will happen, I will practice my philosophy that community requires more than merely congregating. I thank that particular FOR friend for leading by such lovely example!



**FOR's mission is to
promote the
personal
flourishing of our
members through
reason.**

◀ April 2009 ▶

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 7:30 PM Invisible Colleges Wagner's Ring	2	3	4 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course
5 12:00 PM Fellowship of Reason Monthly FORum and Children's Education Program	6	7 7:30 PM Philosophy Club	8 7:00-8:00 Dance-Cappella-Dish Night 7:30 PM Invisible Colleges Wagner's Ring	9	10	11 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course
12 8:00 AM FOR Runners	13	14 7:30 PM Fiction Book Club	15 7:30 PM Invisible Colleges Wagner's Ring	16	17	18 10:00 AM Monthly Meeting of Executive Committee and Trustees 7:30 PM Patluck Supper
19 Today 8:00 AM FOR Runners RSVP Now	20	21 7:30 PM Philosophy Club RSVP Now	22 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring RSVP Now	23	24	25
26 8:00 AM FOR Runners RSVP Now	27	28	29	30		

Did you know?
Our most up-to-date calendar is on MeetUp.com?

Help our meeting organizers by RSVP'ing at:

<http://www.meetup.com/FellowshipofReason/calendar/>

or

www.fellowshipofreason.com and click on "Events Calendar"

◀ May 2009 ▶

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course RSVP Now
3 12:00 PM Fellowship of Reason Monthly FORum and Children's Education Program RSVP Now	4	5 7:30 PM Philosophy Club RSVP Now	6	7	8	9 11:00 AM Non-Fiction Book Club RSVP Now 12:30 PM Met Opera HD - La Cenerentola RSVP Now 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course RSVP Now
10 8:00 AM FOR Runners RSVP Now	11	12 7:30 PM Fiction Book Club RSVP Now	13 7:00 PM Sandy Springs Pub Night RSVP Now	14	15	16 7:30 PM Potluck Supper RSVP Now
17 8:00 AM FOR Runners RSVP Now	18	19 7:30 PM Philosophy Club RSVP Now	20	21	22	23
24 8:00 AM FOR Runners RSVP Now	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 8:00 AM FOR Runners RSVP Now						

Did you know? Our most up-to-date calendar is on MeetUp.com?

Help our meeting organizers by RSVP'ing at:

<http://www.meetup.com/FellowshipofReason/calendar/>

or

www.fellowshipofreason.com and click on "Events Calendar"

Events

For detailed info on all upcoming events, visit
<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/calendar.htm>

FORum: A Celebration of Human Achievement: First Sunday noon

FOR's premier event. Meet and greet at 12:30 p.m. The program starts at 1 p.m. Presided over by FOR's President or Vice President, members give presentations such as Celebration of Freedom and Celebration of Talent. A 15 to 20 minute Oratory on an ethical subject highlights the program. A short conversation called FORum during which audience members share their thoughts concludes the program. We enjoy post-program conversation until 3 p.m. when those interested adjourn to a local restaurant for further fellowship. Children's Program from noon to 3 p.m.

Martin Cowen director: 678-641-9321.

FOR Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, at the southwest corner of Piedmont Park on 10th Street. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit (corner of Piedmont and 10th Street) follows at 9 a.m. Breakfast lovers, walkers, and joggers welcome!

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

Philosophy Club: 1st / 3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

Philosophy tapes are played to a small group of friends in a private home on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

Invisible College: Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.

Doctor of Philosophy reveals the secrets of philosophy in a live two-hour lecture. There is an enormous fee and limited seating. Adepts and initiates only.

Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at Tele's house across the street from Sally's house. For book selections and more information, go to:

www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm

Tele Holt coordinator: 404-843-1886
 telehold@gmail.com

Potluck: 3rd Saturday 7:30 p.m.

Our next Potluck is Saturday, May 16, 2009, at 7:30 p.m. Remember it is potluck, so bring something good to eat and drink to share. Host: to be announced

Pub Night: 2nd Wednesday (Five Season's Brewing)

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Wednesday at Five Seasons Brewing at 7 p.m. for adult beverages and conversation.

Marianna coordinator Five Seasons Brewing:
 mashoonya@yahoo.com

Movie Night: 4th Saturday, 6:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at John Grover's photography studio to enjoy potluck and a movie. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, March 28, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

John Grover coordinator: 404-872-4555

*Join us for our
 next monthly
 FORum:*

May 3, 2009
Sunday at 1 p.m.
 (Meet, Greet at 12:30)

FOR Children's Program
 from noon to 3 p.m.
 Educational Program from
 12:30 p.m. to 12:50 p.m.

Birthdays

- | | | | |
|------------|------------------|----------|---------------|
| • April 3 | Theresa Barber | • May 2 | Frank Vickers |
| • April 7 | Beth Anne Grella | • May 10 | Gerry Rehert |
| • April 9 | Kathleen Allen | • May 29 | Carla Bauer |
| • April 9 | Kate Miller | | |
| • April 9 | Erik Bauer | | |
| • April 24 | Peter Brookner | | |
| • April 24 | Susan Menich | | |

Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: _____

Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!

Fellowship of Reason

P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107

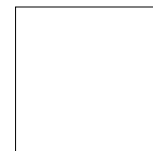
E-mail

info@fellowshipofreason.com

A Reason-Based Moral
Community for the 21st
Century



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.
P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107



We're on the Web!
See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com