Carla Durand:

Good evening everybody. Good evening and welcome. My name is Carla Durand and on behalf of the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research and St. Benedict's Monastery, I would like to welcome each of you to this presentation tonight entitled The Joy Factor. My guess is that most of you learned about this lecture through campus advertisement either a poster on a bulletin board or perhaps an electronic announcement. Well I have been coordinating and advertising events such as this on the CSB and SJU campuses for a number of years and I can't recall the last time I've had so many email responses about the lecture. People were saying things to me like “This even looks great,” “I look forward to coming to this presentation,” and “Will this lecture be videotaped?” and yes, it is. I'm not entirely sure what this says, but I have a thought that it might mean that people are looking for, seeking, yearning, for more joy in their lives. And when we hear a title such as The Joy Factor, “we anticipate a positive message that we hope can be a real antidote to the bad news syndrome which surrounds us every day on TV and in the newspapers. So tonight I have the real privilege of introducing our speaker Jep Hostetler who will share his thoughts with us on the notions of joy and cultivating joy in our lives.

Here's a little bit more about Jep. Jep received his BA from Goshen College in Indiana, his PhD in anatomy at Ohio State University, and received his postdoctoral training in Anatomy and Electron Microscopy from Tufts University School of Medicine. Jep began his professional career as a Human Anatomy and Histology instructor at the University of Kentucky and from there went on to teach at the Ohio State University College of Medicine for nearly 30 years, where he earned multiple Teacher of the Year awards. Through those years Jep taught in the Department of Anatomy, the Department of Preventive Science, I’m sorry the department of Preventive Medicine, the Department of Psychiatry and the Ohio State University School of Public Health. For part of his career he was the Director of Medical Humanities and taught students about drug and alcohol abuse medicine.

Jep's professional and civic memberships are many and they include the Executive Secretary of the Mennonite Medical Association, the Columbus Mennonite Church BREAD justice team, Association for Medical Education and Research and Substance Abuse, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Mennonite Health Association, the Pledge of Resistance Peacemaking Group, and interestingly enough, the International Brotherhood of Magicians from 1967 to the present day. And for two of those years, 1994-1995, Jep was the International President of that Magicians Brotherhood.

His most recent books and articles include “The Humor Spirituality and Well-being,” and I do have copies of that article up here on the front table for anyone who is interested, “Is
Laughter Really the Best Medicine?” which showed up in Sojourners in August 2011, and I have copies of that for those who are interested. He’s the author of Ten Things Parents Should Know About Drug and Alcohol Abuse and he is the author of The Joy Factor.

Jep is currently serving as a resident scholar in the Collegeville Institute where he is currently researching the intersections between humor, health, and spirituality. And for those of you who are Sisters, you received a little yellow card that has a little more information about that project.

Jep is joined on this campus by his wife Joyce and together they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this past summer. Where's Joyce? There. *audience applause* Both Jep and Joyce are active members in the Mennonite community and are participants and justice and peace-making opportunities.

Jep loves the outdoors and jogging. He has run four marathons, the last of which was when he was 65 years old. He is in demand as a magician and humorist in church and civic groups, conventions, and conferences. We are so fortunate that Jep and Joyce are with us through the end of this semester and we hope that at some point their paths will bring them back to campus again.

So please join me in welcoming Jep Hostetler. *audience applause*

**Jep Hostetler:**

Thank you. Wow, sounds like I died, didn’t it? What a wonderful introduction. I really appreciate it.

I can tell you that this place has been one of the most hospitable places I have ever been. The Collegeville setting, the campus, students actually say, “Good morning” and “Hello,” and I’m always amazed that they do that. And it’s quite pleasant.

When we came to Collegeville, as often happens, we saw a person that we knew, and it's not always good to see someone you know. Joyce and I lived in Evanston, Illinois for a year where I worked at the laboratories in different parts of the city and I would take the elevated railroad every day down into Chicago. Well this particular day I ran to the train, it was raining, I had no umbrella, and I sat down beside an elderly woman. I must tell you my parents taught me to respect our elders, and I really truly do. But the problem was her umbrella was between us on the seat. So I got off the train before she did, and I reached down and reflexively grabbed her umbrella. She grabbed my arm and we struggled a little bit. Then I realized what I had done, and I asked her to forgive me which she did. Well that afternoon my lovely wife called and said, “Would you please bring home all of the umbrellas. You keep taking them to the office, you leave them there. Bring the broken one too.” So I put the umbrellas under my arm I got back on the train. You’re ahead of me, aren’t you? *audience laughter* And who should I
meet but this little old lady. She took she looked me right in the eye and she said, “You've had a pretty good day I bet. Haven’t you?” So it's not always good to see someone you know.

Tonight I'm going to speak of joy. I have no big answers. I only have experiences that have affected my life on my own spiritual journey, and some of my interest in what humor does for us.

You have in front of you a little card. If you'd be kind enough to look at the bingo side. Someone asked me if I know anything about Catholics. I said, “I know a Catholic word.” And they said, “What is that?” And I said “Bingo.” It wasn't very funny the last time I said it either. So you have a card. You'll notice there are six squares that are black, six squares that are lighter. So what I'd like to have you do is put your finger on one of those black squares. Okay, are you ready? Or just look at it with your mind and remember where you are. A few of the sisters do not have them yet so we will just wait a second.

The Bible, by the way is very clear on having a lot of words that have to do with joy, celebration, and delight. Just a few if you remember from reading, “A cheerful heart is a continual feast.” A lot of these come from Proverbs. That one's a proverb. “A cheerful heart is good medicine.” Remember Ecclesiastes, “A time to weep, a time to mourn, a time to laugh.” “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning” Psalms 35. “Rejoice the Lord always and again I say rejoice” Philippians 4:4. “For that our mouth was full of laughter in our tongues with shouts of joy” Psalm 126:2. “Do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength” Nehemiah 8:10.

And by the way that statement, “The joy of the Lord is your strength,” I put on the back of my jacket as I ran my first marathon. I didn't know if would help, but it was worth a shot. At about mile 17 I decided that I had hit the wall and the cramps were very bad, and along came three young ladies. They caught up with me and they said, “Oh I see what's on your jacket. Would you like for us to pray for you?” And I said “Please!” *audience laughter* So as we were running, they prayed for me and I made it to the end of the marathon. It wasn't pretty, but I made it. I don't know what the joy of Lord had to do with it, but it seemed to work.

Back to the card. Everyone has a card. Put your finger on or with your mind, select the square. Now move directly left or right to the nearest light square. You might have to cross over a dark square, but everybody should be on a light square. Move directly straight up or down to the nearest dark square. You may have to pass over a light square. So everybody should be on a dark square. Now go diagonal, just one up or down, to a light square. Finally go left or right to the nearest dark square. Now I want you to say out loud, quite loudly, where you are at this point. One, two, three.
Audience:
Joy

Jep Hostetler:

Whoa, how cool is that? Everybody has joy tonight.

Everybody has joy. But what is joy? Let's get down to business. Joy turns out for me to be much bigger than a component called happiness. Happiness to me is circumstantial, when things come together. Your health is decent, you have enough to eat, you have shelter, you have friends, and then for about eight seconds, you're happy. Joy on the other hand is much deeper and much wider. I say it's an understanding that we know we're in the right place. We know that we have something sustaining us and the key here is that we can be in a boat full of sorrow on this river of joy. We're going to talk about that just a moment.

So let's get down to work. My first point is very simple. Life is a gift. Now, now as an anatomist this is important to me. When you woke up this morning this little muscle called the heart was beating faithfully. You didn't pay for it, you didn't earn it, and there it is, beating nicely. Thank you very much. And somehow it continues to do that. How many times does it do that in your lifetime? Well here's a little secret for you, a million seconds is about 12 days. If you started counting today, one thousand one, one thousand two, and you counted to a million, it would take you about 12 days. A billion seconds is 32 years. So if your heart beats one time a second, let's just say for average, it would mean that in 64 years it had beat over two billion times. And of course if you make any motion at all, run up and down steps, it's much more. So, on average, your heart has beat over 3 to 4 billion times before you go to the next life. That's a lot. And I'm very grateful for that. As a matter of fact people of joy, I think, each day are grateful for this one day that we have.

My father was a round mound of sound. Now that simply means on side view he was round. He was never unhealthy that we knew of and he loved to laugh. But at age 72 he was painting on a barn, he was up on a stepladder, and his knees became weak and his feet were tingly, and something was terribly wrong. So what happened was he made it to the pickup truck, he drove home. I was home that summer. He fell out of the truck and he crawled on his hands and knees toward the house. He was very sick. So he said to my mom, and this is what happens we have seven children, he says “Mother,” that’s what husbands call wives when you have seven children if you understand, he said “Call the doctor and get some help.” Well it turns out within three days my father was completely paralyzed from his neck to his toes. You're familiar with it it’s the Guillain-Barre disease. It strips the myelin from your nerves and takes away a movement. But over time you can get some movement back. So as a physical therapist came over time his finger started moving and his wrist, and then his arms. And he had us put a pulley in the ceiling of the bedroom and we put a rope over this pulley, he had a sling out of metal and wire and stuff canvas. And Dad could take the garden hoe and he'd get a hold of one foot and he’d put it in that sling and then the other foot he’d put in the sling and
he’d pull his legs up and down a couple hundred times a day. I understand this is Chicken Soup of the Soul kind of thing. But where I'm going with this is this, he fought for his life and he made it to age well, I won’t tell you how old, but at age 75, he could drive a car. He couldn't stop it, but he could drive it. *audience laughter* That’s it. No, no problem there. He lived to be about 85.

Life is a gift. It's a simple not new concept folks. It's simply a reminder that each day we're to be grateful and joyful. In fact, there's a rhythm to it. A rhythm to our waking, our working. Your own precepts say, “We are dedicated to a daily rhythm of prayer and work as we praise God and witness to the dignity of God’s creation.” That's gratitude. And I'm not stretching it, or am I trying to be modeling. I sense gratitude in that phrase. Gratitude is what joyful people do.

Number two life is sacred. Well there's a new one. Here's how I learned about non-violence. Our family were Mennonites. I still am a Mennonite. But one day my two brothers, one older and one younger, would dream up things to do then I would be the one to choose to do them for some reason. But we had these baby chickens called peepees, little fluffy baby chickens, and my older brother said, “What would happen if you just hold up that little peepee chicken and you just boof him on the head with your finger? I'll bet he'd get dizzy and then we can put him down and he'll run crooked. Would that be fun?” So okay so I became the boofee all right. So I picked up this baby chicken and I boinked him on the head. Dead as a doornail, broke his little neck. And I was so sad. At that moment my father came around the corner of the chicken house he said, “What happened to the chicken?” I said, “He fell over!” He says, “Why?” I said, “I petted him too hard and he fell over.” “He said you killed him, didn’t you?” and I said, “Uh huh.” I was a skinny little kid, believe it or not. My dad picked me up by the shoulders, he took me over to a stump, and he sat me down. And then he got in my face and this is exactly what he said, “We are nonviolent people.” Scared me, I'll tell you what. *audience laughter* And then then came the lecture about how we as people of conscience, we do not harm animals, we do not harm people, we do not harm each other with our words or our actions. And that is seared into my head.

It's much harder to carry out. When our daughter was molested and she came to our bed at six in the morning weeping, she been taken into the bushes. My immediate reaction is “I want to kill him!” because I'm a human being. Where does that go? How do you work with that? How can life be sacred especially when it's your own kid? Without being melodramatic I’ll just tell you that when you look at sacredness, it’s not just our daughter or you. It’s even the man that molested her. He has a sacred spot. He’s done some evil things. He's wrong and it's awful, and it's terrible, all of that. But when we look at the other, I'm convinced that if we assume that were made in the image of God, then each person is equally sacred period. No exceptions. And so people of joy look at the other and say, “Hmm, this one is as sacred as that one, and this one, and that one, that one.” Now there's a lot of things politically that go around, that how we relate to each other, and how we act, but that's my second point. The people of joy understand that life is sacred.
Number three, people of joy understand that life is difficult. Have you ever met someone that smiles all the time and his wife just died, his kid ran away, and house burned down? How you doing Freddy? I'm just fine thank you. He's lying. People of joy have the same pains as everybody else. We hurt, we suffer, and in fact, if you look around and you see some families suffer much more than others. Why is that? I don't know. It just seems one tragedy after another all on top of the other, so we end up with a string of tragedies, and it happens to us. So that's where it comes in that the joy hasn't left, but for the moment, thank you very much, I am not in a very good place and I own that. And I will weep, and I will cry with you.

Now some of it we bring on ourselves. We do, we do dumb stuff. For instance, Joyce and I decided to go trekking in Nepal. That should be fun. Trekking up the mountains, for two weeks. Well we arrived in Nepal, we decided to walk up the mountains, it's called the Annapurna Sanctuary. It's one week up and one week back. As we proceeded, oh I must tell you I'm afraid of heights. *audience laughter* I had no understanding of what that was going to mean. The next to the last day going up we came around a corner and there was this ledge, I think was this wide. My wife says it was this wide. It's about a hundred feet long going around the corner straight drop-off about 800 feet. And I just stood there. And now this is not rational, but I thought, “I can't do this.” I said, “I want my mommy.” *audience laughter* And then I said the 23rd Psalm four times then “Help!” And then the Sherpa says, two of them, the words that mattered most, “We will walk with you.” So when we have difficulty, and they had me face the mountain, one put one hand on one shoulder, and we shuffle sideways, and we went around the corner. We made it, not because I was brave but because someone walked with me. So when we have these difficulties, one of our problems I think is we're so independent. We don't want to ask for help. We do not want others to know our problems. In a community like this I would guess that's not true. I would guess you're willing to ask for help. I don't know but I'm suggesting that when we have trouble it's not a bad idea to ask others to walk with us. That's simple.

Now the heart of my, oh by the way a fable of St. Francis of Assisi when he told brother Leo that “True joy comes not from success but in rejection and suffering which causes us to reflect on Jesus’ pain and rejection.” So we all suffer. Life is difficult but the joy has not left.

Now some of you are starting to nod off. I brought with me a little treat here. It's an old rope, okay. I raised it from a string *audience laughter* That is so bad isn't it? This is called a Robin Hood knot. Singing: “Robin Hood, Robin Hood right through the day oh.” Boink, you’ve got a knot! Or if you take a rope, *standing on a chair* how's that for the people in the cheap seats? I'm going to be 80 years old so, in seven years. *audience laughter* This is just an interlude because some of you are getting sleepy. *cutting rope with scissors* It's called healing the ropes. Heal! Needs a little help, I can do this. And there it is, completely restored. Wow this guy's good! *showing repaired rope with hand over knot* I tell you what, *looking at knot* Slight scar. *moving knot on rope and taking it off, tossing it on the ground* Get rid of scars, start all over again. *audience applause* No don't.
Number four, life is short. Now this is important to me. In my learnings over time one of the things I had to work at was accepting other people, I'm still working at it. These are called the 3 A's and the three R's from a book by David Augsburger called *Caring Enough to Forgive*, ancient book and he's given me permission.

Acceptance that's equal. Listening, listening you say in your own precepts, “We strive to listen with the ear of our hearts.” This last week Father Luigi drew a little picture in our in our worship setting of an earth and inside was a Japanese figures for listening with 14 hearts. And in service yesterday it said, “Open the ears of our hearts. Open the ears of our hearts to hear the voices of all creation with compassion and reverence” is what you say. That is acceptance.

Acceptance is hard. Our daughter came down the steps for her 16th birthday, she had on a beautiful dress, earrings, the whole deal, right size panty hose, the whole deal, high heels. Her boyfriend came to the front door. *knocking* I opened the door and what I beheld, an orange tuxedo, green cummerbund, black and white checkered high-top tennis shoes, big earring, ponytail, and a streak of purple hair. I took one look at him and I said, “Acceptance, acceptance, acceptance.” It's not that easy. It turns out he was one of the nicest young men you ever want to meet. What's the deal? Purple hair is not fatal.

People of joy, when we meet and greet another, we are present. Nobody's a throwaway, nobody. And it's hard because immediately we judge, tattoos, piercings, we go, “Oh ee uh!” and they know, they know. So for me and my learning through the drug alcohol programs that I've taught, recovering alcoholics and people of that problem, they know if you're walking with them or its downhill. Strong to week, smart to dumb, rich to poor, saved and not saved, whatever language you want, the power is downhill. And when we accept people it's straight across.

We don't have to accept their behavior. My wife the director of a teenage drug alcohol program for girls, 13-year olds, 12-year olds, addicted. Their language was awful, she never heard such things. And the rule was at her office, at her hospital, you can't, you can't touch the client. She said, “I'm a mother. I'm a mother and I'm a nurse.” So she got the rule changed at the right time and the right place with permission. She'd say, “Come here.” And the girl would come, and she'd open her arms like *opening arms wide* this, not straight like this so you have to turn sideways. Because we often do this, we will love you if you do it just right. She would say “Come here” and they would come to her bosom and she would encircle them with her arms and she would rock them, and she would say, “You know your behavior really stinks, but guess what, I think you can make it.” And each one of them knew instinctively that they were accepted. Period.

So here I got to preaching, sorry. So the issue here is acceptance. The other piece of acceptance is that its hospitality in spades. Acceptance is hospitality. And there you go again, “We seek to respect all persons and to welcome them with warmth.” Warmth, acceptance,
and joy it's right in your stuff. When I started getting this speech ready I said, “They're writing my speech for me, how good is that?”

Second A, we’ve got to move along. Second A is about being available, and I don't mean every little piddly thing, I mean really available. We had in our home seven children and always a foster child or two. So you get the picture, that's a lot of oatmeal. And what happened was one of the little ones, her name was Debbie, at about 9 or 10. Debbie always colored outside the lines, I mean really outside the lines. She had run away from home, she learned how to swear, she'd go steal cigarettes from the neighbors, she'd drink my dad's elderberry medicine, it was down in the basement, all kinds of things. So they bring her home and they'd scold her and maybe spank her, which I don't believe in but this thing, and she got all straightened out. She grew up and moved to Columbus, Ohio where I lived and she got in trouble with different men, so she had three different children. I mean three children from three different men. And she was on welfare and she lived in this little ramshackle of a house. And one night she called and she said, “Jeppie would you come down here and help me kill the rats?” See my name is Jep which is short for Jephthah, but everybody called me around Jeppie. “Would you help me kill the rats because my mattresses are on the floor and when the children go to sleep the rats come out and they bite the children's toes and make them bleed and I'm scared of rats. Would you come help me kill the rats?” I hate rats almost as much as cliffs, but I got in my little car, a Volkswagen at the time, I drove down to Debbie's house. I went in and got a broomstick, fearless nonviolent warrior *audience laughter* looking for rats under the stove and under the refrigerator, banging around. I went into the bathroom and there on the bathroom floor was a disposable diaper with holes chewed in it. I knew the they were around. Behind it was a bathtub full of dirty clothes so I put the stick under the clothes and I raised up the clothes. Cockroaches, hundreds of cockroaches! I hate cockroaches too. And then I went to the stair door going downstairs. I open the door *making a creaking noise* sound effects, and there in front of me was were two wooden shelves right, you know, going down you can see them. And I remembered at that moment when my father told me years earlier. He said, “If you ever meet a rat on a shelf, don't blow on it because it would jump on your face and bite you.” Did any of your parents ever tell you that? Why would he have told me that, and why did I remember it at the moment? To make a long story short, when I went down to the basement, I found the hole where the rats are coming in. We fixed the whole, set the traps. The next day we had four dead rats. Got them all.

What's the deal? The deal is this, if you're to be available, sometimes we have to go when we least want to go. And the person that needs the tender touch the most is the most obnoxious. Those of us who are married we know about these things. When do they need the tender touch? When things are out of kilter. So that when we look at the other and say “I'll be there for you” there's something about meaning it that really means it. That's why I think people joy are available.
Number three, authenticity. I think it’s important to try to be real. It’s taken a long time my life to figure that out and I’m still not totally real and I don’t think anybody is. But the older we get, the more we understand you’re going to be like your father Jep, no matter what you want to say about it you know. Or you’re going to be this way or that way. Carry it, own it. And as this authenticity starts creeping out, celebrate it. Look around you, look at the Sisters look at the monks, each one has become this authentic thing that when you meet them there’s no fake. There’s no fake. That’s kind of cool.

And so authentic, my mom, my mom was authentic, okay? She never liked the beard, that was hippie days and she'd say, “When are you going to shave off that old beard Jeppie?” I said, “Mom it’s just a beard.” “Oh come in. I love you anyway. Are you still doing magic?” “Uh-huh.” “You're not going off to the dark side are you?” I said, “No Mom.” And the second marathon she wrote me a letter saying, “Dear Jeppie, I understand you memorize stuff when you're running, here's some Bible verses you should know.” And she wrote out of bible verse for each letter of the alphabet that she memorized when she was 11 years old. But guess what, she didn't know there are 26 miles in a marathon, so I had a mile, I had a verse for each mile. That’s authentic, that’s real.

I’m gonna move along. 3 R’s, life is short. Remember we are to be accepting, I mean I'm just inviting us, things I’m learning about this, and be available and be authentic.

Now the 3 R's this is important. We have a lady in our church who has cerebral palsy a bit and her hands don't work as well as some, and she loves for me to tell this story. We have sharing time in our congregations, it’s not exactly high church in terms of what I've seen here and have learned to enjoy. So she came up to the microphone she said, “Could I share my poem?” “Of course Anita.” And this is what she did. *Reading from paper*

“Love is a beautiful thing
Let's spread it all over
Love is catching on
Let's pass it on
Anita”

It was quiet you know, no one knowing what to do, and then one of the older ladies in the back line *clapping* then older gentleman, a wise old man *clapping* a parishioners’ standing ovation. And Anita is standing there *sniffing* you like this stuff. You know because she was so impressed that people liked her poem. But that's not all, someone took that poem home, and they ironed it and they put it on their piano and wrote a song and it goes like this *singing*

“Love is a beautiful thing
let’s spread it all over
love is catching on
let's pass it on
pass it on
pass it on"

*audience clapping*

Now, now when Anita is sad, all she has to do is say “Will somebody sing my song?” 180 people, 200 people stand to their feet and sing this song by memory. But that's not all we've done that for 35 years. Recognition with a big R. People of joy recognize each other’s steps.

The second R is reinforcement, which Ephesians say is encouragement, and people of joy encourage each other, and they mean it. It's not fluff. They say to children, “Aren't you pleased with yourself with what you just did?” as opposed to “I'm proud of you.” It's my own bias. Say to the child when they do something well, “Aren't you pleased?”

I had a mentor, a mentee, who tried to get into a play and he was just awful and he can’t get in. So he comes to me says, “Oh man I did get into the play.” And I said, “Yeah but aren't you pleased you had the guts to try out? Aren't you pleased?”

They don't all get A’s, or even B’s, but we can support them with recognition and reinforcement.

And the third R is respect, and that is right smack in the middle of one of your statements. “Community, we are committed to respecting each individual forming stable relationships, receiving counsel from the community, and affirming common good.” That's what you are.

So life is short 3 A’s, 3 R’s. They’re in the back of your card, you can look at them later. We must move along.

Life is funny. This is the fun part folks, this is why you came. You know Benedict had a little different twist on it. You know he said in RB 7:59 the Tenth Step of Humility is that “he is not to be given to ready laughter, for it is written only a fool raises his voice in laughter.” One wise St. John’s monk clarified it for me by saying, “Well St. Benedict rose from another anthropology.” That was good enough for me.

My work here at the Institute is, I'm seriously studying the effects of humor and laughter on the human body, whether it's physical, mental, psychological, or social. And it's too big so I'm narrowing it down to are there really good scientific evidences that humor does good things to our bodies? Because it's weak, a lot of speakers go around saying you know you smile and laughter to cure your cancer and all stuff. Well it's good for you. We know that. So I'm doing that work of, with your fabulous library here, drilling down into the science behind those issues to find out if what's there today in 2012, so that's serious the library work. The second part is called qualitative research and thanks to Jennifer, where's Jennifer? For helping me out with this, bless your heart. This part of my interest in humor, is about a
possible relationship between humor and spiritual development or spiritual understanding. Is there a link? To do this research I'm interviewing monks and sisters about their spiritual development. I have seven questions I ask and it's fun and it's all anonymous and so I'm asking the monks and sisters to help me with that. That's just a side commercial.

So in the meantime, funny. Some people say I don't mind if he's funny but he better not be silly. Well, you judge for yourself. This is a portable cow. *standing on chair, holding towel* These are not legs. I grew up on a farm. If you take a cow and you turn it upside down you go *making clucking sound* you have a chicken. Now for you sisters who have nieces and nephews, you should take a towel, you can do this for fun and profit, you roll it all up like this and you roll this like this, and the sad thing is this is the only thing you're going to remember about the whole speech, and you fold it together, pull these out, and you should stick out your tongue when you do this because it works a little better, and then once you get these out you have those four thingies, okay? Then you do the two top and two bottom. If you do it wrong, you'll get alligator, not impressive. You need to turn a quarter turn and then unroll it. If you do it slowly you have a slow-motion chicken. Then you let the legs fly and you point and go *making a clucking sound* and adult will go “ha ha ha ha” or not, you know.

I'm going to have Joel help me with this next one. Young man, will you stand on this chair? Okay, look at the audience, smile big, *audience clapping* stick out your right hand, stick out your right hand. There you go, pull up your sleeve. Now what we have here is a papa rabbit and a mama rabbit. Remember life is funny. You've got to pay attention here. Okay, I'm going to put them in your hand. Close your hand tightly. Okay look at it, look at it. Close your hand tight, close, close go on close. On the count of three, what's your name? Leo, I called you Joel, that's not right, Leo's your name. Okay, on the count of three, I want you to open your hand. Now don't pass out on me. Okay 1, 2, 3, open your hand. Whoa five babies! Congratulations dad! Now will you pick those up for me? Thank you. No, I won't pay you. I'm sorry, it's all volunteer.

And this one is for the adults. I do a lot of flying and on the planes they give you these free bags. They hold stuff and they don't leak either. I sat down beside a nun. Now this is true, she didn't have on a habit or anything, but we got we got to talking and I could tell she was frightened. So I asked her, “What's the trouble?” and she said, “Well I've never flown before and I'm afraid.” I said, “You shouldn't be afraid because you have connections, right?” She said, “Yes, but he's never flown either.” You know what I mean? Excuse, those of you who have seen this before. So I said, “The Bible says I'll be with you always.” She said, “That's not what it says. It says low, I'll be with you always.” *audience laughter* She had a point.

Oh here we go, a deck of cards. Ma'am, we've never met before, have we? I mean we haven't met before tonight. Yeah, no stay where you are. We've not, you seem happy about that. Will you just take this deck of cards? They are invisible. Quickly, catch them, shuffle, real quick. No you got to take them out of the box. She's shuffling the box. Let this gentleman take a card. You mind sir? Real quickly, take a card. Just one. Can you tell one card from another? Because I did this for some Amish boys and they picked the king of queens. That's not a card. So you
have one. Show everybody, real quick we gotta move on. Okay well, I already saw it, that's good. Now turn it upside down and put it back and her outstretched hands. Alright? Ma'am will you put it in the box? Ok now just throw it here, overhand, overhand. Whoa, you're pretty good actually! *audience laughter* Now before I came tonight, I turned one card backwards and one card only. Ooh wouldn't it be scary if it's the same card you saw? Now your pressure is on. What card did you see? Am I going too fast? Just make up something. *man speaking in the audience* Of? Diamonds, three of diamonds! Oooh, would you like to change your mind? Let's take a look. I am going to be so shocked, because three of diamonds is never, never, ever picked. Let's see here, wait a minute, wait a minute that looks like the three of diamonds. Does that look like the three of diamonds to you? Wait, wait, wait, I made sure because it's the only blue card. Thank you for picking the three, that would have ruined my whole trick, and we've never talked about this. So thank you.

Finally, finally, I wasn't going to do this but you'll understand later, right? No, no it's okay. He stays in there, he's quite trained. Don't worry. And one time, remember life is funny, one time I went to a restaurant, a fancy restaurant, with the white towels and stuff, and I took Rufus with me and I said, “He loves to eat lettuce.” He was just eating lettuce, like he loves lettuce. And so the maître d says, “Sir,” you know how they do, “We're not allowed to have live animals in here.” I said, “No live animals? No problem.” He's not hurt, he's just stunned, he's in on the act. Wake up. See? He's just fine. My wife said, “You're not going to do that animal thing, are you? These sisters are very kindly people and they know Assisi so don't you go there.” So life is funny and it turns out, it is good for us and take time out from our stresses.

Finally life is a spiritual journey. It's really quite precarious to come into this room and talk about spirituality. So I won't. You do say in your precepts, or your values, “We acknowledge the primacy of God and seek to follow Christ in ordinary events of every day. The spiritual disciplines, of course, are part of everyday routine for a lot of people from prayers, to meditation, to Lectio Divina, to singing, silence, individual preferences for seeking divine wisdom, understanding.

And the choices I think for people who are seeking joy are simple. You can choose to go a way that seeks and continues to seek in your own way. I cannot tell you how to do it. Because of the great gift of being individuals, we have to find our way to do that, it has integrity. Or we can ignore that kind of pursuit. We can sit on the couch and let days go by, weeks and months, and we have not considered any possibilities of seeking bigger wisdom. Or in this tradition that we're in here, you can seek to understand God as you know him or her, with diligence. Pursue that part of your life. But not really pursue, pursue, but allow, allow it to come to you. So there's all kinds of shapes of how you pursue spirituality.

But I know one thing for sure, you should never say that but I'm fairly certain, that the people who I know who express this thing I call joy, take time to stop and listen, in some fashion. It could be in the forest, it could be in their craft, as Sam is teaching us, it could be simply studying or listening to music. But being quiet and shutting out the electronic noise that crowds in on us each day, that's how I see it.
So this has been a simple little lesson, if you will. Looking at life being a gift and celebrating each day. Just saying, “Yes! So juicy!” Don't let it go by, participate.

Two life is sacred, see it in the other, look for it in each individual, welcome them into you and talk with them

Three life is difficult, find help, seek help, be a helper, walk with.

And then the major part was on life being short. I talked about being available, being authentic, and accepting people. And I talked about Anita, how we recognized her small steps and how we reinforce what she's about, and we really respect each other.

And then I did a little thing about being funny, just because I like to be funny. And it's good for us.

And life is a spiritual journey.

I have two things I like to do to close. One is a trick! A big trick. I'm going to float out of the room. Would that be something that we talked about for a long time? And then I'll close on that serious poem that has become dear to my heart.

*standing on chair*

This is today's New York Times and I want you to look at the pictures and remember, this is easy remember, big face, no colored pictures. A lot of you learn by hearing, right? And a lot of you learn by seeing.

Color, purple. You can't miss it.

Big wristwatch. I don't know in these days and times why anyone need a ten-thousand-dollar wristwatch.

Colored pictures on the front.

Now, for those who learn by hearing, this sounds like it's being torn. Hear the ripping sound?

And for those who see, visually it looks like it's being torn into strips. It does from up here at least.

Some people say, “I could swear you're tearing it up.” I say, “No I'm tearing it down.”

Pieces, scraps, shards.
The man who taught this to me taught it to Lou Holtz and to David Copperfield. True story and it's really cool if I could do it. There's a slight problem, I can't do it. But it looks good so far, you know.

If I could do it, it would look like this. *opening paper* *audience awed reaction*

Now a lot of people clap at this point. *audience laughter, some clapping*

Some don't, you know how it is, they're just so stunned.

So that when it comes all back together, this is truly what my mother worried about.

Let me finish. Let me finish with my poem. I got to meet the author of this poem in Columbus, Ohio and I told her that I use this problem she said, “Fine, don't print it and give it out. Just use it.”

And of course it's Maya Angelou. Everybody closes with Maya Angelou. But this one's special to me. It's called in “Touched by an Angel.” It goes like this:

We, unaccustomed to courage  
exiles from delight  
live coiled in shells of loneliness  
until love leaves its high holy temple  
and comes into our sight  
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives  
and in its train come ecstasies  
old memories of pleasure  
an ancient histories of pain.  
Yet if we are bold,  
love strikes away the chains of fear  
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity  
In the flush of love’s light  
we dare be brave  
And suddenly we see  
that love costs all we are  
and will ever be.  
Yet it is only love  
which sets us free.

Thank you. *audience applause*
Carla Durand:
We have a little time for a few questions or comments, if anyone has anything they would like to share with Jep Hostetler.

Jep Hostetler:
I’d love it. This one article that was in Sojourners, this Sojourners article, one of the things that happens to people who are serious about working peacemaking, injustice, or trying to engage the hurts of this world, is they get really intense. Because they see so much pain, they see so much devastation, and they're invested, we've got to move this forward, we have to be present, and they get tired and weary. So this article is about taking a timeout and it speaks to the issue of Christian peacemaker teams in Colombia who work so hard to get farmland back for the farmers, so hard to bring justice to the scene, and so they don't laugh a lot. And we got to talk to some of them, they finally found a way to crack up. So they sat under this tree and they told stories about their nicknames. And they began to laugh, and it was so cathartic that they laughed till they wept. And that evening they were telling each other about the story and they laughed again and wept again. The next morning the trouble was right there in front of again. You can pick it up and go again, serious work. Take a timeout. So this article is about taking a timeout. It's not a scholarly piece. It's just my ideas about what humor can do to give us a break. Same thing for stress, you can't wipe out your stresses. but you can take a timeout. 

So questions, thoughts?

Yes?

*audience member speaking about someone visiting the monastery*

Jep Hostetler:
That's funny all by itself.

*same audience member speaking*
He said the most important thing he learned from the Benedictines is that life is short.

Jep Hostetler:
Yeah and at our age, my age, one good thing is I know I'm not going to die young. So that's good thoughts about this because when you talk about humor and spirituality, it's hard to mix them. Father James Martin has a wonderful new book called Between Heaven and Mirth and
his take on it has to do with moving away from the use of humor into using the word laughter or joy, because humor is hard to measure.

If you ask a personal question, does God have a sense of humor? Well that, it's hard to get a hold of. That's difficult. Thoughts?

I do appreciate something staying up pretty late, I understand. I read the website. There are twelve of you who've been here 60 years and two of you have been here 75 years, so that's a long run and I appreciate whoever you are coming so. Okay. One question, oh thank you sir.

*audience member speaking*

Jep Hostetler:

Well you look like one. *audience laughter*

*same audience member speaking*

Jep Hostetler:

To make fun. You mean like you don't say something just for jest, and I think the thinking behind that is from the New Testament where it says, “you should not be given to frivolity and let your yes be yes and no be no.” And I think, and in my tradition there are articles about, “You should not be given to laughter” and that means because Christianity is supposed to be a serious thing. You take it seriously.

I'm not, I'm not Catholic nor am I Benedictine so I can't say more about that. Be nice if you ask one of the monks because they have a wonderful sense of humor.

So what do they do with that, his writing? Is that what you're asking?

Yeah I don't, I can't answer that. I wish I could. Father Wilfred is here. He's, he knows everything. *audience laughter*

Do you have any comments on that? He doesn't know, he don't want to get in trouble.

I do know this, that your family background, how you were raised, has a lot to do with how you appreciate humor. And the new research is showing that there's a genetic predisposition as well. That you may be predisposed to be lighthearted. or not so much.
And there's all kinds of physical things we're learning now, perhaps your arteries, what happens to chemicals in your brain. It's really exciting research, so I'm hoping when I'm done, I can write something up.

Thank you.

*audience applause*