

For more than thirty-eight years,
Anne and Bob Lindquist put Christ—and their
neighbors—at the center of their marriage.

A Quiet Determination to Serve

STAN FRIEDMAN

Humility lies in knowing who we are and what our lives are meant to garner. The irony of humility is that, if we have it, we know we are made for greatness, we are made for God. —Joan Chittister

Anne Lindquist was calling from her hospital bed, where she was receiving the latest round of chemotherapy in her fight with ovarian cancer this past January. The sixty-six-year-old Covenanter was making sure arrangements were on schedule for an upcoming Invitation to Racial Righteousness weekend that was being held at her church, the Covenant Church of Easton, Connecticut, in partnership with Jesus Saves Ministries in nearby Bridgeport.

On the other end of the line was Adrienne Reedy, who was working with Lindquist to coordinate the program, which brings together people

and churches of different ethnic groups to deepen relationships. At one point, Reedy asked why Lindquist hadn't waited until the next day, when she would be home from the hospital, to make the calls.

"I wanted to get it done today because I know tomorrow I'll probably have a bad day," Lindquist replied.

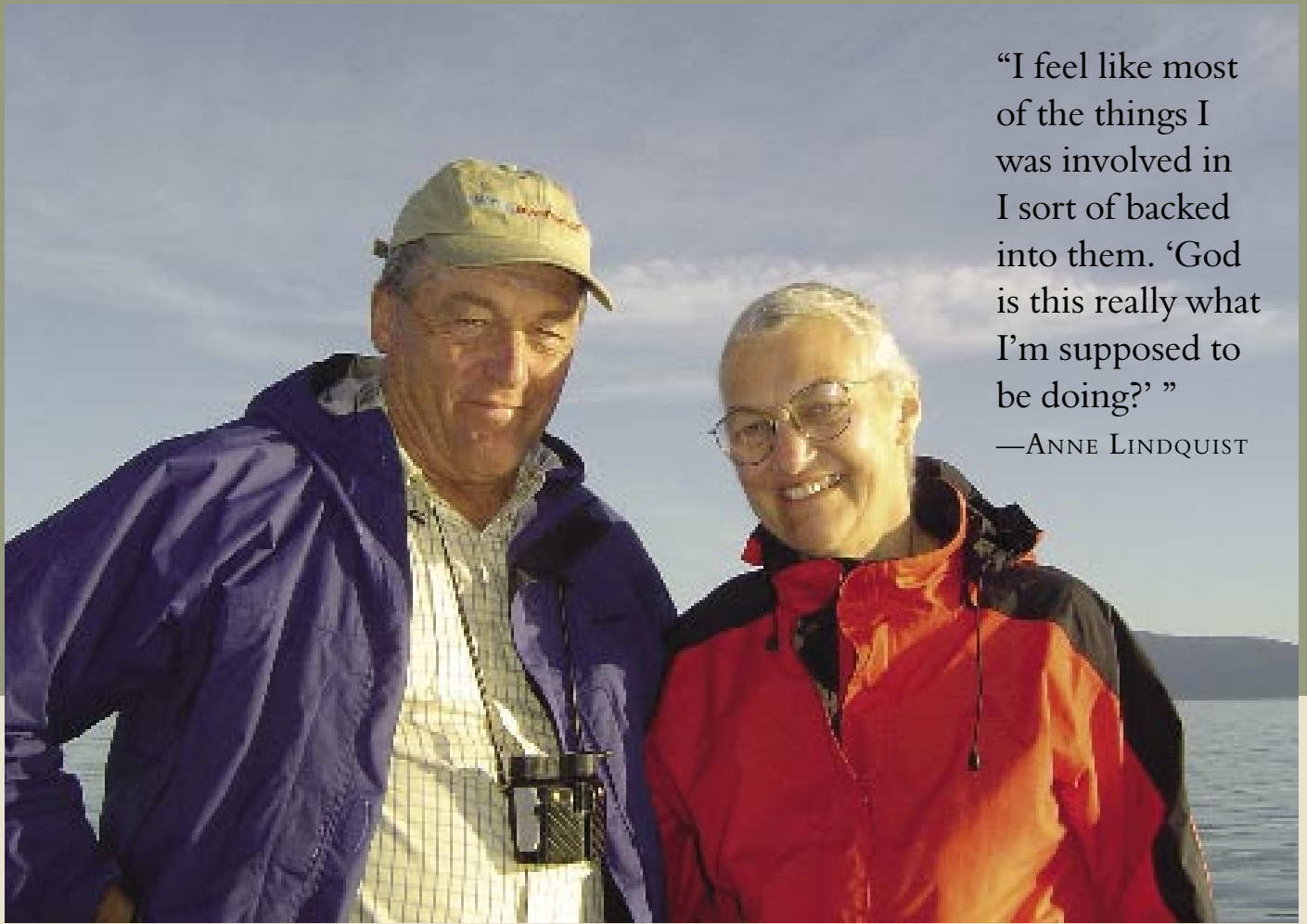
The answer didn't surprise Reedy, who has known Anne and her husband, Bob, for nine years. Anne would not let her illness get in the way of life. Reedy had known that since the Christmas morning two years ago when the Lindquists showed up on her doorstep. There was Bob in his trademark suspenders and flannel shirt and Anne with her oxygen canister. Anne had been diagnosed with cancer, and had a tumor so large it was keeping one of her lungs from expanding fully. Still, the Lindquists had made the twenty-minute trip from their house to bring Reedy and her family some of Anne's prized Swedish bread.

"I still get choked up whenever I

think about it," says Reedy, her voice cracking. "When I think of Bob and Anne, I think of true saints."

Stories about saints are filled with tales that inspire and move us. The stories told about Anne and Bob speak of her organizing a homeless shelter for families, of leading the drive for a new community library, and of working with the poor in countless other ways. The stories recount Bob leading the local Habitat for Humanity to build 100 houses within twenty years, volunteering the entire time; of Habitat naming him 2005 volunteer of the year and the local United Way naming him 2005 community builder of the year; of driving a friend's children to church events when the parents were unable to provide rides.

"If you want to find an example of a true Christian, you need to look at Bob," says Bob Knebel, president and chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity of Coastal Fairfield County. "I'd rate him in the top ten of all the people I've ever met."



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—ANNE LINDQUIST

Ultimately, stories about saints are love stories; stories about imperfect people who live out God’s love—patiently and with kindness, not drawing attention to themselves or boasting, not keeping a running tab of wrongs. The Lindquists’ love has persevered through the most devastating of times. Their love has never failed.

Bob and Anne have been married thirty-seven years. They have kept their vows to one another—loving, honoring and cherishing, in sickness and in health. Ask Bob how long he has been married, and he will tell you, “Not long enough.”

Ask Anne why they can work so well together, and she will tell you, “It’s more fun that way.”

The two first met in the 1960s while each worked for Up With People, an organization that sent young adults on musical goodwill tours across the world in the hopes of fostering better international understanding. Bob was traveling with the first cast, organizing their schedule, and Anne was the

secretary to Up With People’s treasurer in the United States.

The two never dated. Romances between employees and cast members were frowned upon. Besides, the two rarely had a few minutes to themselves. “There usually were 150 kids around,” Bob says.

They did, however, become friends over the course of several years. Finally, Anne says, “He just asked me if I was interested in getting married.”

Anne was able to give her answer immediately because she had been waiting for the question. “I was in love with Bob—I just wondered if he would ever get around to asking,” she says.

The Lindquists proved a good match. Their personalities were compatible, and they saw the world in the same way. Both grew up in middle-class suburban East Coast neighborhoods—she in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, and he in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Both experienced life-changing epiphanies. Anne’s came during a train trip to the segregated South, while

Bob’s occurred halfway around the world in New Delhi, India.

In 1957, Anne was bound for Atlanta with an interracial music group. “We’d see all the ‘whites only’ signs from the windows as we pulled into the station,” Anne says. “One right after another. We saw them all over the city.” The troupe stayed in one of the only hotels at the time that allowed both races.

“Being with people of color at the time had a huge impact on me,” Anne says. “I returned changed.” Back home, she inspired her father to start the city’s first fair-housing group so that real estate agents could not prevent blacks from being sold homes in traditionally white areas.

Bob’s world would be jolted in India, where he was working with a drama team sponsored by Moral Re-Armament, a religious-based group led by Mahatma Gandhi’s grandson. “I had never been exposed to poverty,” Bob says. “In many ways I was isolated from

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—BOB LINDQUIST

a lot of things in the world.”

A fellow worker invited him home for dinner. Bob had no idea that home was a cardboard shack crammed alongside countless others. “I realized that this person who had been helping us probably was one of the untouchables,” Bob says. “By the time I had come out of that place, my whole life had been shaken.”

Those experiences refined their faith, the Lindquists say. “When we got married, we knew that Christ was at the center,” Bob says. “That’s where all the energy comes from,” Anne explains. “The direction.”

That direction also has helped them raise four children who share their same compassion. That seemingly innate passion to serve Christ through serving others also has bound Bob and Anne together.

“What is great is that we can understand what the other one is talking about,” Anne says. “He’s been so supportive of whatever I’ve been involved with.”

The two rarely have worked on the same project, but they spearheaded their church’s work to load a semi-trailer of goods to take to Hurricane Katrina victims last year.

“It was a wonderful experience,” says Anne. “We were always on separate tracks. It was neat that we were able to do something together.”

They each have their own style. Anne is the talker and tends to be out front, says their pastor Craig Carlson. She appears more driven. “It’s hard to say no to Anne—not that you would ever want to. She has this amazing wisdom,” he says.

“She’s a conductor on a commuter train,” Carlson adds. “She doesn’t want to leave the station until everybody can get on the train. She wants as many people as possible on the train.”

Anne says, “I feel like most of the

things I was involved in I sort of backed into them. ‘God, is this really what I’m supposed to be doing?’ ”

When Anne was elected to the Covenant’s Executive Board, on which she served from 2000 to 2005, she wasn’t sure she would fit in. “I didn’t go to college,” she explains. “I don’t have a lot of degrees. I do have a lot of life experience.”

Once on the board, she used that experience as a background for asking challenging questions. “I want people to think deeper,” she says.

“That comes naturally in her family,” jokes Bob, who is known for his sense of humor—and his flannel shirts and suspenders. Bob is quieter than Anne and tends to work in the background, but, Carlson says, “He’s like that old E. F. Hutton commercial: When Bob speaks, people listen.”

Bob sold the family industrial supply business twenty years ago because he saw the economic realities of the market turning against the small business. He has volunteered with Habitat ever since, before there were any paid employees locally.

“He’s the kindest man I’ve ever met,” says local Habitat president Bob Knebel. “He hasn’t been as involved since he’s been taking care of Anne. He knows his priorities.”

The couple determined not to let Anne’s cancer define their lives. Despite being sick, Anne traveled to the South in February with Adrienne Reedy and others on a Sankofa journey. Participants ride a bus over several days through areas of special significance to the civil rights movement.

Anne had been feeling good when she decided to make the trip, but her condition was deteriorating as the date approached, and she considered backing out. Bob told her, “You know this is something that will really mean a lot to you. If you can’t go any farther, get off the bus, call me, and I will come get you.”

Bob and Anne are realists, their friends say. They know Anne’s days are drawing to a close.

“I think it’s not a lot of time, short of a miraculous healing here on earth,” Anne says. “Of course there will be the ultimate healing in heaven.”

As Anne’s cancer spread, her energy diminished. At times, her faith has faltered. “Some days are really discouraging, and some days it’s easy just to get mired in self-centeredness. Sometimes it seems God is far away.”

Still, she lives with a desire to serve Jesus. “Even though I may not feel great elation, I have a sense of keep on keeping on,” Anne says. “If you set your face in that direction during your time on earth, it’s not like it’s an about face.”

Keeping on includes savoring life. “You enjoy the little things,” Anne says. “We went for a walk today, and it was so beautiful.”

Bob says, “It’s hard to say this right, but these last couple of years have been a special time for us. Not to be forgotten.” □

Postscript

Anne Lindquist lost her battle with cancer on February 24, soon after this article was completed.

More than 500 people attended her memorial service, held at the First Presbyterian Church in Fairfield, Connecticut, with Craig Carlson officiating.

Survivors include her husband Bob; children Ellen, Carl, Cindy, and Kirsten; three sisters and a brother.

Peace to her memory.