

Dear Guys,

Merry Christmas to you!! ☺ I'm not a fan of Christmas letters, they seem so impersonal, but I want you to know that we think and pray for you daily – you are never far from our thoughts!! You are very important and we expect great things from you, because our Lord has chosen you and that is very special in and of itself!

With our recent move, I have fallen very far behind in letter writing, and I am beginning to feel that I won't be able to catch up.

We have moved! The new address is: 8026 E. Willetta St. Mesa, AZ 85207. It is a large home with 6 bedrooms and 7 bathrooms. The great room, dining room and kitchen are all huge and designed perfectly for our needs! Can't wait for you to get home and see it!!

So...what has been happening here you might ask? It took us 3 days of loading and unloading the truck to get all of our stuff moved. Although we were all quite exhausted, no one lost it too bad. I think it made us a stronger family...I did hear a couple of comments about having too much junk, but now that it is all getting put away, I think my junk is being more appreciated...of course, I could just be dreaming and they still think it's junk? Nah!!

The guys are working on the first big Aerie Services job – getting the old house ready for resale. It's a lot of work and they have been working hard for a couple of weeks now. They think it will be done in a couple of more days, then we can put it on the market. The proceeds will help us get another house to fix up, providing more work. As soon as we have saved enough to afford to keep a house, we will look for one that probation will approve for SOs and rent out the rooms. The plan is to eventually have Aerie Services able to provide steady income, in a safe environment for a work crew of released men! We have a couple of monthly jobs already, doing yard maintenance. When we are not busy on a job, the guys take out fliers to businesses looking for work. They have had some success, but it is slow going.

Maricopa planning and zoning suggested we talk to all of our neighbors bordering on our property about what we are doing here and many of our friends have asked us to have an open house, so... We are having an open house this Saturday. In preparation, Steve and I hand delivered invitations to the neighbors with a letter on the back of the invitation telling them what we are doing and why on Saturday. A couple of the neighbors invited us into their homes to visit for a while – one even gave us water and homemade cookies. We came home feeling really good and praising God about the whole experience! Yes, this is how we felt about a week ago...

Last night, Tuesday, a sheriff showed up at our door. The neighbor (the one with water and cookies) had called the police, sheriff, probation, parole, and zoning. She had gone all the way up to the top of the state in those organizations. She reported to them that we were incorrectly zoned and had 15 unregistered SOs living here. The sheriff was so kind and polite that I didn't have time to get upset. He asked if that was true, but didn't seem to be accusing at all. We were all in the meeting room with him and told him that this is it – just 3 registered men, the 2 of us, and Joshua's grandparents. He asked how long Joshua's grandparents will be staying and we told him that they were supposed to have already left – he thought that was quite funny and laughed. After that, we had our normal evening meeting to read the Bible, talk, worship, and pray. Sekou was the leader last night. He said, "The battle is already won, we just need to walk it out." That is so very true. The powers of this world have already lost the battle and have no 'real' power over us. As long as we are walking with God, we have nothing to fear and the battle is already won! All we have to do is take the next step that God puts in front of us...

We are looking into the possibility of becoming a church right now. We had planned on officially starting an adult only church in a couple of years. Our plan was to start it now and use the meeting room (great room) until we out grew it, then rent a store front until we out grew it, then find a church building and become official somewhere along the way. It seems that a church can be located in a residential neighborhood and it sounds like we would just have to comply with the fire department requirements. Exit signs over the doors, ramps for handicap people, fire extinguishers, a paved parking lot, etc... So far, that seems like the safest way for us to proceed. We will keep you posted on progress and would REALLY appreciate your prayers! We want to be absolutely certain that we are doing exactly what God wants us to do!

We got some lawn games for the guys for Christmas (please don't tell them, if you write). We got the ladder game and the bean bag game. The ladders have 3 rungs and you throw balls attached to ropes at them. You get higher points for some rungs than others. We usually play teams when we play with my family. The bean bag game is similar – you throw bean bags at a hole in a board for points. We usually play teams when we play with my family for this one too! Both are very fun to play, but I usually watch, because that is more fun for me.

We have been getting to know some of your family members better. Aman's Mom goes to our church each week and comes over for all Eagles' Nest events. Rick's Mom has also been over a couple of times. We totally love them and the dynamics they bring to the family!! Thank you for sharing them!

By now, you have probably realized that the letter above is a bit old...especially, if you have been watching the news. We have been served with a cease and desist letter from Maricopa County Planning and Zoning. With the uproar of the neighbors, we have been told that it would be senseless to proceed with trying to get a special use permit. Our church, To the Least of These Adult Only Church, is incorporated; the approval papers came on Saturday. We are working on the bylaws and statutes now. We have put both houses on the market and are looking for a place to relocate.

We have heard from many of you – you are praying for us. Praying is so very important and we are honored and grateful. Please continue! Pray that we will always have confidence in knowing God's next step for us and that we will be filled with His confidence and love. Please pray for our neighbors – that God will soften their hearts and calm their fears.

Anyway, better get this into the Christmas cards and send it to you!

May God bless you abundantly above and beyond your imagination!! We love you!
Steve and Deb Schmidt