



COLONY SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting ministries of the members of Colony

Colony's Spotlight On Ministry this week visits with Ken Kitchen. Ken ministers through clowning. Every church should have a clown. When Putt Putt shares the gospel no one frowns or falls asleep.

How did you get started in clowning?

My clowning got started in a Leisure Learning class (The first time I dressed up I looked like something from a Stephen King movie!). Next I attended The Joey to the World Gospel Clown Convention, held every year in Houston at Sagemont Church. Here I met a wonderful bunch of people and learned a little about clown ministry. I then went to the Cheerful Alley Clown School the next summer and began a new journey in my life.

Personally, my clown ministry began by visiting nursing homes. I used to go to a couple of homes in Missouri City and Sugar Land once a month. I would go room to room visiting the residents. Later, Robert Berry and I got together and put on a show we called The Good News Review for churches, usually for family nights, fundraisers for youth groups, some Sunday morning children's services, etc. We specifically had a very strong gospel message combined with the illusions and comedy.

What is your goal for clowning ministry?

When I first started my goal was specifically to share the word of God with children. I had no idea what this meant or how to do it. My goal today has broadened a little. At first sharing the Word was more a literal idea, specific phrases, and specific stories. Today I make sure I let people know someone loves them, and that they are loved no matter what, that we can make mistakes and it is okay, that we don't know everything and that is okay, that loving God is cool and being involved in godly things can be fun!

Would you share an example of seeing God at work?

Working with extremely sick or challenged kids you cannot help but see God at work. I think the best example is how many people and churches are offering their time, their money and their hearts to help out so many different causes. I am always amazed at the people who could be at the ball game, going to the movies, or something for themselves but instead choose to donate their energy, their hearts, and many times, share in the pain for a little while with so many who are suffering.

I always am amazed when I am fortunate enough to visit a prison on family day and see the great work of the various Christian prison ministries. I have seen both non-Christian and Christian ministries; only the Christian ones really share their love and cares for their well being and the well being of their families. They care about both spiritual and physical needs.

What are the difficulties/frustrations in this ministry?

Putting the message in the proper tone and conveying the message in a meaningful way to generally a very varied level of ages in an audience. A gospel clown must be entertaining to establish credibility but also must not become "preachy" or lose the opportunity to share a message that will be remembered. I struggle all the time with this and do not feel I still have it right yet. My greatest difficulty is the balance between comedy and sharing the Word of God in a way that the message can be memorable.

Early on I had some of my greatest difficulties when visiting nursing homes I started to establish relationships with the residents and then when I would show up the next month and find out they has passed on, it became very heart wrenching.

I still have extraordinary difficulty when clowning for severely handicapped children. Many are so unbelievably strong in their infirmities but my heart breaks to see them suffering. Children with burns, cancer, MS, or whatever – working with them is difficult. Clowns are not supposed to cry but I know all of us who do this, have to at times, walk away for a little while.

What victories have you seen?

The all time greatest victory came one night at a Muscular Dystrophy gathering. I was thinking about the kids and then realized how special their parents are. God gave them an extremely difficult challenge in their lives and they go through all the suffering and care giving every single day. For the kids I realized how God blessed them with people who could be strong enough to care for them and endure with them. Not every adult I know could do this, but for their love they are willing. And I am amazed how every one of them I have ever met feels so blessed to have their child, they never feel like they were "cheated" or it "life wasn't fair".

Other small and probably egotistical victories include when a child comes up to you and wants to give you a hug. Or like last night at the circus when a family tells you they not only remember you but you so impressed them with something you did that their kids think you are the best. Like I said, making someone a little happier if even for a short while is an extremely good feeling. I remember a very prominent gospel clown said that we never are clowning just for our audience, we are clowning for God. It changes how you look at what you are doing.

What have you learned?

I have learned that if I keep my eyes and ears open I can see God at work all around me all the time. I just have to want to see his work. I have learned that I can never be satisfied with what I already know if I want to continue to be used. Seems like every time I stretch myself some, along comes a place to use that new found talent or skill. I learned that it can be very easy to get caught up in myself and how "great" I can be. Subtle and tempting is the ego. How much fuller is the joy when I do what I do for others and for Christ. I learned that I love being able to do this.

If someone wanted to learn more about clowning as a ministry, where do you recommend they begin?

Clown School will be taking place this summer, June thru August. If anyone else is interested in finding out if God is calling them to do something a little different, Clown School is worth checking out.