



March 2014: Adopting and Fostering within community

Two Women: An Adoption Story from Hope Fellowship

by Michelle Porter

1 Kings 3:16-28 tells the story of two mothers fighting over one baby. When the first mother rolls over on her son while sleeping, she takes her lifeless baby in an act of grief and switches him with the baby of the second mother. The two women present their case to King Solomon who claims he will cut the baby in half with a sword and allow each mother to have part of him. The second woman, the mother of the living child screams for King Solomon to allow her son to live and let the first woman have him. In response, the first woman, the mother of the lifeless baby, says to divide him so that neither of them can have the baby. Solomon correctly identifies the boy's mother as the one who wants the baby to live.

“Are they yours?” is a common question foster and adoptive parents get from total strangers.

“Of course they are!” is what I want to scream. But really, children are never ours to possess, to own or claim. They are a gift in the literal sense of the word. And true gifts are rarely what we expect.

As a mom whose children came to me through fostering and adoption, I have often contemplated and reflected on this story in Scripture. What would I do in the same situation? Would I give up my child? But I have learned from being part of the community at Hope Fellowship, that this is not the question I need to ask. The question is: Can I ever really claim a child as *mine*?

When we began fostering our son as a 3 month old in 2010, we quickly learned how much this would be a shared



The Children of Hope Fellowship perform their Christmas play

experience by our community at Hope Fellowship. Practically and emotionally, it was a journey we took together. Our community gave us basic items such as diapers and bottles. They also had ears to listen and arms to hold us as we laughed and cried during the foster process.

Personally, I needed the emotional support of the community much more than the practical support as I dealt with the relationship and my feelings toward my son's biological parents.

I wanted what would be good for him, but selfishly I hoped that that would mean he could stay with us. I found myself hating his birth parents for many reasons. When people would thank me in public for “doing such a great thing fostering kids,” I felt like a fraud.

Continued next page...



The Boardman-Alexander family at Ellie's surprise party.

I wasn't a wonderful person. I was seething with hate and ill wishes toward my son's biological family.

My HF community helped give me a safe and trustworthy place to confess these emotions and to pray about them. It was a healing experience for me to meet his birth parents part-way through the case and finally be able to humanize them. I won't say that I thought they would be fit parents for him, but I no longer blindly hated them.

Our experience of using consensus decision making at HF and having honest and on-going discussions, helped us at the final stage of our son's case. When it became obvious that his biological parents were going to have their rights terminated, they exercised their legal right to request a jury-trial.

The unknown aspect of going to court, caused us to hire a lawyer. We did not technically have legal standing to fight to keep him, but we thought we might have a chance. When we met with our lawyer, we realized that going before a jury would bring out the worst in all of us. We were willing to go that route if it was our only option, but it felt violent and unnecessary. It would cause all of us to find the worst in

the other and parade the findings in front of the court.

We asked our lawyer if we could try mediation, and he moved forward with this possibility. This route felt much more faithful to the values that we have learned from Christian community at HF. It did not appear that the biological parents and their lawyers would agree to mediation, but we moved forward hoping and praying.

Amazingly, the biological parents accepted the offer of mediation, and we all met together with lawyers, case workers, and family support. It was a beautiful and difficult day as one mother and father signed over their rights to a child that they loved as best as they knew how. I was overjoyed that they voluntarily allowed us to raise the child that I now call my son, but I realized the extreme pain that that decision caused.

For awhile, I continued to see myself and my son's biological mother as the two mothers in the Old Testament who are fighting over the one baby before King Solomon. Was I the mother who was supposed to give him up? If I fought for him, did it mean I was the mother who would allow Solomon to cut the baby in half? Was his

biological mother a better mother because she did give him up?

I have finally accepted that she and I are not the two mothers. We both are the mother who would give up the baby to let him live. Neither of us would allow him to be cut in half. We both realized that we cannot claim him as our own. He is not ours to possess or own. We cannot call him *my* son.

Fostering and adopting within a Christian community has really helped me understand that I cannot claim my children as my own.

I was reminded of this idea at the SMC Coordinators' Meeting in January at Sojourners. A member of one of the communities, in a very natural way, referred to the children adopted by another couple in their community as "our" children. This was not the idea of ownership that I have already described, but rather the idea of the children being part of their community.

Yes, children need specific families and parents that they can claim as their family, but within the context of Christian communities, the emotional, spiritual, and practical aspects of raising children are shared by all to some degree.

I have only been able to recognize and accept these truths because of the life that I have lived in Christian community. Living as disciples of Jesus calls us to lay down our claim to everything, including our own lives.

Just as in Philippians 6:7-8, Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross," we are called to let loose of things that we grasp.

Our journey of fostering and adopting was one of vulnerability, suffering, acceptance, longing, forgiveness, sin, and redemption; the things that I have learned and continue to learn on a daily basis as I live as a disciple of Christ amongst my Christian community of Hope Fellowship.

News from Thirdway

by *Natalie Potts*

Observe the Minnesotan. A reclusive creature in wintertime, whose best efforts cannot prevent chilly winter temps from making their way into the household. To the untrained eye, these creatures have all but slowed to a stop by the time January arrives. However, these Northerners are resolute, and even in -20* temps with a -65* windchill the Minnesotan exhibits continued productivity!! Life burbles quietly as these creatures hibernate. Just as cars, roads, and even the front door are buried with snow, and must be uncovered, so too the signs of this life are buried but can be found.

Signs of life are apparent here in Saint Paul, and more specifically among our community. Just as we shared at the SMC coordinator’s meeting, there has been an increase in prayer in this community, even in the past 2 months! In late January, Bryan Ward led a worship night that invited us to thoughtfully and prayerfully, being led by God, make a plan for our spiritual formation. This was followed by a Saturday morning half-day silent retreat. Those in attendance listened carefully for the ways that God may want to lead us in the practice of disciplines that will shape us for the Kingdom of God.

Also in late January, we began to gather weekly in several different house churches (meant to replace our former small group structure) to share food, read Manna and Mercy together, and dialogue about it. In this chilly region, January is simultaneously an odd and an appropriate time to begin something new--but it has certainly been seasonally appropriate according to the season of this community. We’re gonna uncover the life that is there rather than waiting for a Spring thaw.

We continue to dialogue about how best to serve our children and teenagers. Will y’all let us know when you figure that one out??



Matthew Peterson snowshoes on the frozen Plow Creek in February

Table of Contents

March 2014

Adoption story from Hope Fellowship.....	page 1
Third Way.....	page 3
Sojourners adoption interview.....	page 4
Hope Fellowship.....	page 6
Reflections on the life of James Marcus Howe.....	page 7
Adoption story from Third Way.....	page 8
Plow Creek.....	page 9
Reba Place.....	page 10
Church of the Sojourners.....	page 12
<i>for my sweet pea</i> , a poem from Plow Creek.....	page 14
Two adoption stories from Lotus House.....	page 15

We are soon gonna finish up our teaching series on Romans, and with it, the Wednesday night bible study.

Romans has been a surprisingly refreshing read, and it is transforming us in ways we could not have anticipated when we began the series last fall. Paul urges us in chapter 12 to give ourselves to God. As we pray that for ourselves, we also pray for each one of you, and for each of your communities. We are grateful for the ways God has sustained our life together, and we are blown away at the depth of love that is available to us in the Spirit of God. It is a treasure, buried under the most glittering snowfall, entrenched in the richest soil. Here’s to the incredible work of God that has yet to be uncovered.

Adoption perspectives from Sojourners: an interview with Naomi and Rebecca

by Katie Rivers

Church of the Sojourners is more than a little familiar with adoption. It's a type of identity manifested through five different stories among us. That is to say that there are five adopted kids across three Sojourner families. How do these stories play out in the context of church community? Debbie Gish suggested a group interview with a couple of the kids who are adopted here. That's how I came to be sitting at a dinner table one night talking with Naomi (14) and Rebecca (9) about what it's like to be an adopted kid in the context of Sojourners. We had also hoped that Gigi (12) would be able to join us, but she was sick.

I headed into the evening with a few questions designed to get the girls talking about what's important to them. I was hoping for some solid articulation of the experience of being adopted in community. I found that, but I found a lot more than that. These girls have the capacity to articulate multi-dimensional emotions of loss and joy and to engage perspectives beyond their own.

Letter from the editor:

You may have noticed two things about this newsletter. Firstly, we have a new masthead, designed by the talented Rudy Arnold from Third Way. We are so grateful that he is sharing his artistic vision with the communities of SMC. Secondly, the theme for this March newsletter is adoption and fostering within community. Having never fostered or adopted children myself, I have witnessed with great admiration the relationship between our neighbors, Matt and Angela Adams, and their foster children O and J. I and others in our communities have seen how the relationships between foster child and parent, between adoptive parent and child offer unique challenges and opportunities for joy. I am so glad to be able to hear the voices of those within our communities who are engaged in both sides of this beautiful act of hospitality. Their experiences enrich and teach all of us as we pray to have the hearts, eyes, hands, and feet of Jesus.

—Christiana N. Peterson

Naomi has spoken several times in a formal setting about being an adopted kid and what it has been like for her. This is Rebecca's first time to talk about it so openly.

What is it like to not be the only adopted kid at Sojourners?

R: Better than being alone.

N: I agree. It's better to have people who understand what you are going through than to have to do it alone.

R: It's like if you get really sad or mad or annoyed missing birth parents, with normal people they come over and say, "It's ok, I know how you feel." And it's like, "No, you don't! How can you know how I feel?" It annoys me really bad when they say something like that or "It's just a little thing, it's ok. You can get over it." And it's like, "No, it's not a little thing!"

The reaction to the question is strong, and both girls burst out almost simultaneously that they can't imagine it any other way. Their reaction sets up the stage for a theme that continues through out the entire interview: camaraderie. It is clear that Rebecca, Gigi, and Naomi live into a specific fellowship that some adults in this community, like myself, had little idea existed at such depth. It's like the fellowship of the ring only it's the fellowship of the adopted. The goal isn't to throw a powerful ring into the fire, as much as it to become a whole and unashamed person who can integrate experiences of loss and sadness into joy and gratitude.

What do you think your experiences are like compared to kids you know adopted outside of Sojourners?

N: They are not as inclined to talk about their adoption. I feel like us kids in the church who are adopted, we can talk about it and not be ashamed about it, but they are more ashamed (or they don't feel comfortable talking about it).

How is it helpful to have other adopted kids around?

N: I feel like we always have each other's back's on stuff, even if it's not about adoption, but especially about adoption. Like if Rebecca's feeling sad about something, I can talk to her about stuff or Gigi. And they can come talk to me. We get it. We get what we are going through even though all our adoptions are individual and different, we all don't live with our

Continued next page...

biological parents and that's what we have in common.

R: I think why I talk about it is that it is part of the thing that defines me as me.

N: If you are adopted, it is definitely a part of who you are and you will always have that with you. Obviously you can't change that no matter what, so might as well not be ashamed of it and just talk about it with anyone.



Do you feel like Sojourner adults are helpful?
(The hesitation here is strong.)

N: Kind of, I just feel like it is more the kids. I don't think any of the adults of the church are adopted. The parents of kids have looked up things about adoption and how to deal with kids who are going through adoption stuff. I think it is helpful that they know that, that people know and accept that we are adopted, but at the same time it's not like there an adult that we can talk to that will get it on a personal level.

R: Exactly, it's not really the same. They may know some stuff about how it is, but they haven't actually experienced it. So they don't know how we feel about it.

What do you wish that Sojourners and other people knew about being adopted?

N: I feel like other people don't get that being adopted isn't saying that your birth parents don't love you. Like, they think that saying you're adopted means your birth parents don't love you which isn't true at all. It means they wanted a better life for you, and from what I understand, it means they couldn't provide everything they wanted for you to get the life that they wanted you to have. I feel like a lot of people don't understand that and they just think that they threw you on the street or something like that, which is ridiculous.

You feel like other people your age think that?

N: Yeah, and even some adults too. They think of it as, "Poor Naomi, she's adopted." No. It's like an experience, well not an experience. It's a blessing that I am adopted. God put us in this community for a reason, and it's not something to be frowned upon. It's a blessing like I said before. It's the biggest blessing.

How does being a different ethnicity affect you?

N: I don't look like my parents at all. And so when people see me with my mom they jump to the conclusion of, "Oh, you're half white and half black." Or if I'm with both of my parents, they'll think that one of them is my stepparent.

Everyone talks about San Francisco as being such a diverse place. Our church isn't a reflection of San Francisco in that it's not as diverse as I think it could be. I think if there was more diversity there might be different opinions, and it feels like different cultures could impact the community in a good way. It's kind of hard for me to be one of the only people of color. It's hard but it's not really something that I let bother me that much.

Shalom Connections

Shalom Connections seeks to glorify God and provide a means of fellowship and inspiration among sisters and brothers of the member churches of Shalom Mission Communities and the wider network of intentional Christian Communities. *Shalom Connections* is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Subscriptions are free. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official position of *Shalom Connections*, Shalom Mission Communities, or its member churches.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Publishing Office address, below.

Editor / Publisher Christiana N Peterson

Contributing Artists:

Rudy Arnold (masthead and SMC logo)
Photographs by various SMC community members

**Contributions/Permissions/Reprints/
Subscription/Address changes:**

Contact Publishing/Editorial office, below:

Publishing/Editorial Office:

9295 1925 E St
Tiskilwa, IL 61368
cnpeterson@fastmail.fm
www.shalommissioncommunities.org

Shalom Mission Communities:

Reba Place Fellowship

737 Reba Place B
Evanston, IL 60202
rebafellowship@gmail.com
www.rebaplacefellowship.org
(847) 328-6066 (voice) (847) 328-8431 (fax)

Plow Creek Fellowship

19183 Plow Creek, Unit 2
Tiskilwa, IL 61638
pcmc1@plowcreek.org
www.plowcreek.org
(815) 646-6600 (voice) (815) 646-4672 (fax)

Hope Fellowship

1700 Morrow Ave.
Waco, TX 76707
(254) 754-5942 (voice)
www.hopefellowshipwaco.com

Church of the Sojourners

866 Potero Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 824-8931 voice and fax
http://churchofthesojourners.org
info@churchofthesojourners.org

Third Way

1246 Charles Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55104
http://www.thirdwaychurch.org/
jenmccoy.thirdway@gmail.com

News From Hope Fellowship

*A pastoral letter by Nancy Gatlin,
Joe Gatlin, and Fernando Arroyo
for Hope Fellowship's Annual
Theme: 2014 - Crossing into
Samaria*

*"But he had to go through
Samaria."
John 4:4*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

"May your trip be uneventful." No exclamation point. It's just a simple wish that a trip will unfold as planned. Who wants a flat tire? Or a canceled flight? We prefer to get from here to there with a minimum of fuss, a lack of surprise, and none of the unexpected. Give us a point of departure and a destination with as little of that in-between part as possible. "Just a trip, please, not a journey." One fine morning in Judea, after Jesus had announced it was time to go back to Galilee, the disciples likely murmured these sentiments among

themselves as they stuffed their few possessions into their knapsacks. Going home to Galilee was good. But Samaria? That was crazy! Jews did not travel *through* Samaria even though it was smack-dab in-between Judea and Galilee. Instead they traveled *around* Samaria. It was not so much a matter of danger, but of dirt. And prejudice. The Jews had a long history of disdain for the Samaritans, that branch of the family that dishonored themselves by disregarding the traditions. The Samaritans were worse than bumpkins, worse than the pagans. They were the apostates; the ones who once had been on the inside and then betrayed the faith. This is not an exaggeration: for a Jew to cross through Samaria would be the equivalent of our driving through the garbage dump rather than around it or, when we're taking out the garbage, walking through rather than around the patch of yard where the dog defecates. "He *had* to go through Samaria," the gospel author writes, But there were no external circumstances — no laws, no inclement weather, no bad road conditions — that forced Jesus to take

that route. And apparently, since he lingered in Samaria, he had no sense of urgency that caused him to take the shortest possible route back to Galilee. The *had to* for Jesus must have been internal. He felt *compelled* to cross into Samaria. It *behooved* him to cross into Samaria. No matter how uncomfortable it would make others feel or how many taboos he would break, Jesus had to go through Samaria. It was necessary. And strategic. After all Jesus came to save the *world* (John 4:42; 3:17), not just Judea and Galilee. And eventually he would tell his Galilean disciples that they had to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and *Samaria*, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 4:8) We don't know what "Crossing into Samaria" will mean as a theme for Hope Fellowship. To have the year carefully and fully planned would violate the spirit of journey, specifically our journey as disciples of the Savior of the world. We do know that once Jesus was in Samaria he had an extraordinary encounter with the Samaritan woman that transformed the life of the village of Sychar. Also by the time he and his troop were back in Galilee his disciples had begun to understand a little more that the healing and wholeness of the good news were for the whole world. In the next few weeks in our teaching time we'll look at the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus in Luke 4. We expect that in this year of "Crossing into Samaria" we will hear from the Holy Spirit through our prayers and our life together in relationships, koinonia groups, clusters, teaching times, and meetings where God is telling us we *have* to go. We expect that individually and collectively we will be led to cross borders within Hope Fellowship and outside as well, to move into situations that feel uncomfortable, to build unlikely relationships, to listen more, to learn to hear and speak the languages of others, and as always to bear witness to the love of God that we know through Jesus Christ.



*Dawn from Church of the Sojourners served as hospitality coordinator
at the SMC coordinators meeting*

James Marcus Howe

Parental Reflections from his funeral

by Allan Howe, January 25, 2014

It's hard to talk when you feel like you're just paddling your little boat around on a vast ocean of grief.

James Marcus Howe died on the day before Thanksgiving at the age of 42. Danae called us from the hospital in Pasadena where she had been getting treatment for a bullet wound that disabled her at the time. She made sure we were sitting down before telling us the news.

After hearing it both of us were in shock. About all Jeanne and I knew was that we needed to get to Los Angeles as quickly as possible. We flew on Thanksgiving day and spent the next two and a half weeks working closely with my sister Marcia and Danae and her family to do whatever was needed. We were all in and out of grief and sobbing as we shared what we knew and faced into the consequences of this sudden violence and death. After a large service of remembrance at Calvary Presbyterian Church on Dec. 14, family members participated in a burial service at Forest Lawn/Hollywood Hills cemetery from where there is a striking view of the Glendale buildings where Marcus worked.

We have felt deeply supported by hundreds of you in this area and in Pasadena. We thank you, very sincerely. This memorial service for Marcus is also a rare reunion of many generations who have known him and our family. May the Lord knit us together in love.

We all know the line "It takes a village to raise a child." Proverbs very close to this come from many African cultures. Today I want to describe how it worked for James Marcus Howe when he joined our family.

When we adopted him at 5 ½ months, Marcus was surrounded not only by parents and an older brother and sister, he also had the Julius Belser family who lived across the hallway from us. They and others provided daily care, loving attention, friendship, sensible limit-setting, role models and much more. Since Marcus was very outgoing he thrived on all this attention.

I want to share briefly three themes of his life.

First, James Marcus was an amazingly social person. From the beginning he was a charmer. Foster care providers didn't want to give him up but could not adopt him. When he came into our family, he bonded quickly us and the Belsers next door. He was entertaining both before and after he learned how to talk. His response to boredom was to make things happen. Today we may hear memories of some of those childhood adventures. Later, as adulthood approached, he worked up his courage, overcame his leftover fears of rejection and abandonment, and sought out

training and job experience in the world of entertainment, moving first to Seattle and then (with Danae) to LA and Hollywood. That strong focus and aptitude for building relationships led eventually to opportunities and jobs for the family. The Directors Guild of America has relatively few African-Americans in its membership. It is remarkable that Marcus joined the DGA despite not being an academic learner and having no relatives in the industry.

Second, James Marcus felt deepening gratitude and responsibility. Over the years he made all kinds of decisions, but the one that made the biggest difference in my opinion was that he and Danae decided to commit their lives to each other in marriage. Learning how to function as two quite different people committed to mutual submission for the long haul was very maturing for him, especially amid the widespread difficulty with commitment in his generation. When they learned they were going to have a child, they went through prenatal training and then Marcus was present during the labor and delivery at the birthing center.

For these last four and half years the challenges of being a father were a further source of personal maturing for him. As family and career unfolded day by day he increasingly recognized his need for God's help if he was going to meet the challenges well. He was often explicit about all he had learned at Reba Place to prepare him for adult life.

Third, Marcus had growing seriousness about trusting God and praying in difficult situations. As the obituary notes, looking back on his life, Marcus felt like the baby Moses plucked out of the bulrushes and moved into a palace. During his childhood he had gotten to know church and neighborhood folks of many ethnicities, personalities, ages and stages. He liked the integrated neighborhood and "knew" that he and his African-American buddies could tell quickly—from the comfort level—whether any black or white person they met had had the privilege of growing up in such a melting pot. So he felt unusually prepared to deal with the challenges of being a young African-American whose job was to shepherd dozens of crew members and actors through the tight schedules of filming TV programs. We often talked by phone about how to deal with professional or personal tensions. Those talks usually ended in both of us praying.

To close I want to read James Marcus' words on an undated birthday card he once sent me. It combines his affirmation with his sense of humor. "Dad, your life is a witness to God. Your marriage and family are living proof. The more I realize I am becoming like you, I am happy and honored I can be like you. Sometimes. James"

Rest in peace
James Marcus Howe

A story of adoption from Third Way

by Alisha Gilbert



As Christians, we often ask God to reveal himself to us. We ask God to speak to us and guide us. We ask God to break our hearts for what breaks His.

To be honest, I'm not one who hears from God very often. But when I asked God to give me a heart for what He has a heart for, He sure did. I can look back on my life and see how God had lead me to adopt starting at a very young age.

I began visiting orphanages during mission trips to Mexico when I was in middle school. Our youth group would go every summer for a week. I hated going home after the week we spent there. I felt so helpless. Seeing all these children who so desperately wanted to be adopted into a family broke my heart. I couldn't imagine how these kids felt without the security of knowing that they are desired, loved and chosen. Years later I knew that God was calling my husband and I to choose these children, the orphans, to join our family.

A year after my husband and I had our first daughter biologically, we began the adoption process. International adoption would have been extremely difficult for us due to our ages and stage of life, so we began researching domestic adoption. We quickly came to learn that there was a great need for families to adopt African American infants here in the US. Through more research, a lot of prayer and meeting with both adoption agencies and families who had adopted, we decided that we would adopt an African American baby. After we completed our home study and profile books we began the waiting period. This time was especially hard for us as twice, expectant mothers had chosen us to be the parents of their baby, and both times, the mothers changed their minds and decided to parent after the babies were born. This was devastating to us, but we knew that God was there grieving with us and that He would eventually bring a baby into our home.

One day, Cassie, our social worker surprised us by coming over with pink "congratulations" balloons. We had been chosen again and this time, there was no more waiting. This baby girl was already a 1 day old and her birth mom had already signed the papers. What an answer

to prayer! A week later we flew to North Carolina and met our daughter Eden.

A year later we began the adoption process again. This time, the process went much faster and smoother than expected. Our waiting period was only a few weeks. We drove out to Utah and were able to be there for our son's birth!

It breaks my heart to know that there are so many children, just like my Eden and Rollins, who aren't being smothered with hugs and kisses every day. They aren't being told how special and wonderful they are. They aren't getting stories and snuggles before bed, their artwork is not hanging on the fridge and they don't have someone to call Mom and Dad. Everyone needs to be told how much they are loved by someone who will love them forever. That could have been my Eden and Rollins.

I praise God for the wonderful foster care families out there, and for the many orphanages that are caring for these orphans. They are doing kingdom work! As I give thanks for the options that orphans do have, I still know that these options aren't like having a forever family. It is my prayer that the numbers of kids in orphanages and in the foster care system would start to decrease rather than continue on the rise.

I look back at the way our family was brought together and give thanks to God every day. I feel truly blessed to get to be the mom to these 3 amazing kids. Adoption doesn't come without challenges, especially when your children don't look like you. We have had challenges and I know there are plenty more ahead of us. But I know that God has lead us this far and He will continue to give us strength, patience, wisdom and perseverance as we continue to walk this journey with Him.

Are you called to start a new community?

Josh and Candace McCallister are looking toward Little Rock, Arkansas. We feel called to initiate a model for Kingdom living and lifestyle discipleship in the evangelical south. The fields are white for harvest - folks have heard the good news, but may have never heard of intentional community.

After five years of mentorship at Reba Place, we feel a transition coming: from dreaming about a new community to making plans. Our hope is to call Little Rock home for the next thirty years or more, if the Lord is willing. It seems wise to start this community with a little seed: a small group (but larger than our immediate family) of diverse ages and backgrounds to share life together. This seed group could be made up of RPF members and SMC community friends. Once the group is formed we can talk about the specific stages for relocating.

There are few distinctive characteristics at this point (imagine you're looking at the sonogram right now). Christian discipleship. Urban. Family friendly with small children. Facing racial and economic disparities. Simplicity. Peace.

Please pray for us as the path unfolds. Pray that we find partners to journey with us. Are you also called to this work? Feel free to ask us questions if it helps you to discern your part in this nurturing of a new community.

Josh and Candace McCallister
joshwmccallister@gmail.com

Plow Creek News



2014 Paid Internship Program at Plow Creek Farm

Plow Creek Farm (www.plowcreekfarm.com) is seeking two interns to join us for the 2014 growing season. Our farm's largest crops are strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries. We also grow melons, tomatoes, garlic, potatoes, winter squash and raise grass-fed beef and pastured geese. Interns will work with all aspects of crop production, harvesting, and marketing, including selling at weekly farmers markets and helping to run the farm's u-pick operation. While most of the learning will take place in the field through daily hands-on work, there will also be some opportunities for structured learning on topics related to organic agriculture (soil management, organic fertility, weed control, crop rotation, cover crops, marketing, etc.) during weekly meetings. The program will last 3-4 months, from May to September. Compensation includes \$700/month, on site-housing, and food from the farm. Go to www.plowcreek.org/farm/intern.htm for a full job description and more information about the farm or contact Matthew at peterston@plowcreek.org

by *Matthew Peterson*

Reading through a farmer's blog last winter I was struck by the following quote:

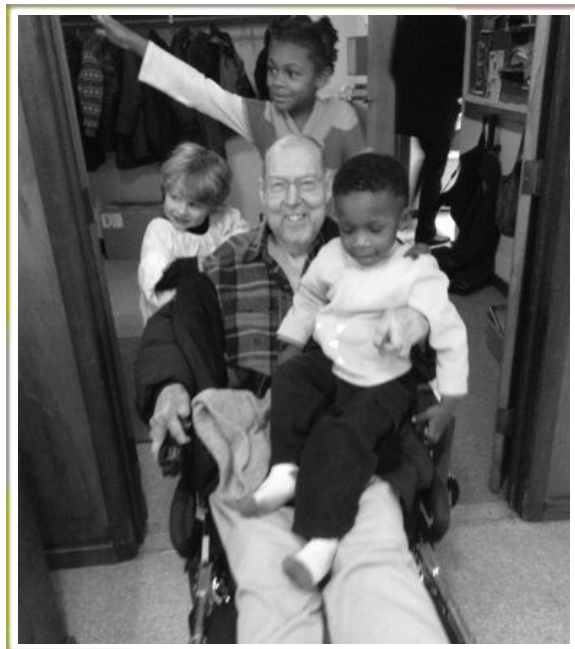
"The troubles in your life may be many, but they cease to be important when the cows are out."

I can attest to the fact that the worries and troubles of tomorrow momentarily cease when a 1,000 lb cow is on the loose and you are trying to get it back in the fence. Or when a flooded creek is raging through the property wiping out fences and roads and flooding your fields as happened last spring. Or when it is 2:00 a.m. and you are trying to start up a 40 year old irrigation pump to protect your crop of strawberries from a late spring frost. The last five years of working on Plow Creek Fellowship's farm operation has certainly provided plenty of opportunities to worry about today rather than tomorrow. And while the worries of farming are with you daily and are many, so are the rewards. Like last summer when a good strawberry crop, good weather, and a good u-pick crowd combined to enable us to harvest 2,000 lbs of strawberries in a single day. Or of harvesting nice, fat blueberries last year from branches that were at times sagging from the weight of the berries. Or of watching our herd of our grass-fed cattle graze on nice, lush grass produced by the same rains that flooded our creek and damaged our roads.

It's February. It'll be -6 degrees later this week, and there is still a foot of snow on the ground, but the sap started running in the maple trees last week, and we planted our first tomato transplants, so spring can't be far away. Preparations are fully underway for the upcoming farm season here at Plow Creek.

There are some new developments on the farm this year which we are excited about. We are planning to experiment raising a few hogs here this summer in hopes of developing a pastured pork enterprise for the farm in the future and a way of using grain we are currently growing on the farm. We are excited to begin harvesting raspberries from an new acre we

planted last spring which should start come into production this season. We are in the process of becoming "Certified Naturally Grown," an alternative certification program to the national organic program which follows very similar guidelines and will hopefully help out with the marketing of our products. Finally, after taking a break for two years, we are also starting up our internship program again this summer. In addition to the two interns which will hopefully join us for the summer, we are excited to have Natalie Potts from Third Way who will be coming back to work with us again this summer as our Farm Assistant. It looks to be an exciting summer and if you have interest in joining us for some of the above mentioned worries and rewards, we'd love to talk more with you about it.



Sarah Foss holds Ian Munn; The children of Plow Creek take a ride with Rich Foss

Reba Place Fellowship News

by Susan Kauffman

Dorothy Konsterlie's memorial service was held on December 8, with stories of her life and transformative experiences at RPF. Upon her wishes, her ashes were to be scattered between the RPC building and the Metra tracks. Paul Burson, former RPF member and Reba Apartments manager, passed away the first week of January. RPF sent a letter to be shared at his funeral in Minneapolis.

Alan and Becky Gallivan joined RPF as full covenant members on January 21. Their small group favored us with a skit about Alan and Becky spying on the Giants of Rebaland and deciding despite the dangers that RPF produced amazing fruit and would be their new home. On Wed, Feb 5 at 6 a.m., Andrew Duke Vaughan, a tall and healthy boy at 8lbs 2oz, 20" was born to Stephanie and Adam, joining Seth and Adrian.



Adam and Stephanie Vaughan welcome their baby Andrew Duke.



Jolyn Rodman makes good use of the snow, skiing on retreat at Emmanuel Lodge.

We are having two all-RPF meetings per month as of January (after a one-week postponement due

to snow and bitter cold) to facilitate our LGBTQ discussions. We have been assigned into small discussion groups and issued purple folders to help us keep our myriad handouts together. In the small groups we have so far shared answers to various questions about sexuality and discussed our reactions to Romans 1:18-32. The Sermon on the Mount discipleship class module concluded in December. In January and February, the module theme is Belonging: Companions on the Discipleship Road, with teachings on a "one another" approach rather than competition, and "Inclusive Community", among others. Several RPC and LWCC members are also participating in and enjoying this series.

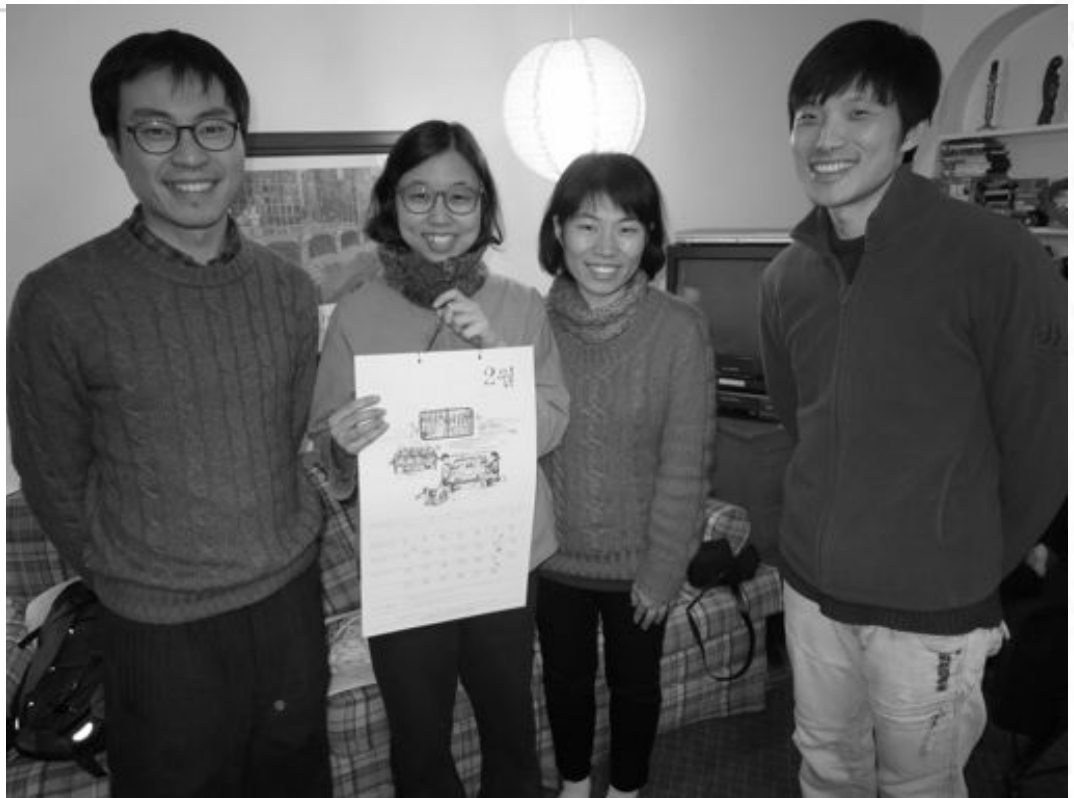
Virgil and Joan Vogt included all of RPF and many neighbors and friends in the celebration of their 60 years of marriage and ministry. Many of us would not have guessed that Virgil (as we learned from Joan's sharing) was once kicked out of college choir or that Joan was

praised by Virgil's siblings as having "straightened him out." Several of Joan's quilts and books were on display. We enjoyed an ample potluck with the occasion and were treated by the anniversary couple to way-above-average ice cream bars for dessert.

Many in SMC have heard the sad and shocking news that James Marcus, the adopted son of Jeanne and Allan Howe, was shot and killed in a mid-day forced entry attempt at his home outside L.A. the evening before Thanksgiving. The RPF/RPC family mourned with Jeanne and Allan and prayed for them, daughter-in-law Danae, and grandson Sterling during the holiday season and beyond. Allan and Jeanne spent several weeks in California helping with the many tasks that needed to be accomplished. The memorial service here in Evanston on January 25 was attended by many Reba neighbors, with much sharing of stories from James Marcus' days in the RPF neighborhood.

On January 27, Ric and daughter Rachel Hudgens shared at the Monday night seminar about their participation in the 2013 Freedom Ride in December. On Feb 10 Monica Laytham (our newest practicing member) and David Janzen shared about their respective visits to Jubilee and communities in Toronto.

A group of 12 Greenville College students came in early January with Prof. Rick McPeek and had some good discussions here. Graceland University folks also visited; that college is part of the Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Russ, Christina and Zac paid RPF a visit from



Above: Members of the Aredumdaun Maeul Community in Korea share their rural community's self-drawn calendar with Reba hosts; Below: Gabriela and Sage receive a book of poems about El Salvador to help prepare for Valle Nuevo delegations.



Jubilee Partners in the days preceding and following our Jan 13 all-RPF potluck, sharing about their work with refugees and gaining perspective on their community by learning about ours. Mark Clotfelter of Capernum House and two other friends from Springfield visited the Clearing spontaneously over lunchtime on January 30.

In early February we enjoyed a visit from Areumdaun Maeul Community, a 20-year old urban & rural intentional Christian community in Korea. These visitors enjoyed meals in various homes and included Seung-hwa (or "Suha"), a woman from South Korea who lived at the Clearing for six months several years ago. After the Sat., Feb. 1, Korean meal the group prepared, there was a cultural performance with Tae Kwon Do, singing and drumming.

David Hovde, David Janzen, Josh McCallister, Megan Hering, and Sally Youngquist attended the SMC Coordinators meeting January 17-20 at Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco. Ronn Frantz requested and was granted a short sabbatical for approximately January through March before beginning new work. He spent January in a wood-heated cabin in Michigan and is currently foreman at a Mennonite Disaster Service site in Alberta, Canada.

Allan Howe had cataract surgery and Vicki Caleb had a knee replacement, both in December. The most recent Senior Lunch Bunch focused on affirmations for Valentine's Day and on the topic of safety and driving.

Church of the Sojourners News

by *Katie Rivers*

At Sojourners, we like to start the year off with a bang. Weekend

through much pain. Also we have discerned with Nate that he will be going on sabbatical from September to Februaryish. But in the mean time, besides the kidney stone, he has been

Edith Bernard just spent several months with her daughter and family in Australia. Her new grandson, Jonas, was born towards the end of her trip, but she managed a couple of weeks with him before coming home. One of our apprentices, Daniel Boettcher, recently participated in a theological dialogue in Pennsylvania called *Oriented to Love*. People from all views on gay marriage and sexuality participated. I was inspired when I heard about the kind of non-judgmental listening that happened from people on all sides of the issue. As a church we are continuing to look at our history and practices as part of a re-visioning process. One of the first things we are doing is looking at our communication habits in depth. We want to make sure we can communicate before we start talking about all of our longings and callings. We are spending quite a bit of time using a concept called differentiation in conjunction with belief that our identities are centered in Christ to help us build a platform for healthy interpersonal communication. (I won't leave you hanging. Differentiation is the ability to maintain and communicate one's own thoughts, emotions, and preferences in the presence of another person while remaining emotionally connected.)



number one: Epiphany. Weekend number two: Katie's 30th decade karaoke birthday party. Weekend number three: SMC coordinators weekend. I think we are all giving up church community for Lent. And, I'm just joking... not funny?

Well, let's get newsy then.

First up, Community Visits. Ben Fisk just departed in the beginning of February for an internship Koinania. He'll be in Georgia for three months before returning to us. We will miss him while he is gone, but I know the natural world is a much needed break from the SF concrete jungle. I would also like to report that Debbie Gish and Jeff Hare went to the northwest Ekklesia project hosted by Church of the Servant King in Portland, Oregon. They will also visit COSK friends in Eugene. And of course, I don't want to leave out the fact that SMC peeps were here with us for a great weekend!

It turns out that Nate Pequette spent some time with a kidney stone. I sincerely hope that by the time you are reading this it has passed. (While I am writing this, it is actually still within him, but I used the past tense hoping that it would go ahead and help cast out the stone.) Nate has had a great sense of humor about it. Seriously, he has been persevering

working with the youth on a weekly basis. Three of them are preparing for baptism. Zoe Mullery received word this month that her job of over 20 years as admin help at her parents church is ending. Please keep her in your prayers for what's next and for work that fits with Sojourners and motherhood.



Above: Daniel, Zoe, and Ben finish the Sojourner Epiphany Mural; Sojourners follow the star for Epiphany

Next we move into some conversation about Adoption Day, celebrated on the date the adoption was finalized. All the adopted kids at Sojourners celebrate this day with their families.



Leo breakdances while Nate karaokes

How do you feel about adoption day?

N: We celebrate it by going and doing fun things as a family. It's not like a birthday; we don't do cake or presents or stuff like that, but we definitely do remember that it's not just about the one person. It's a day to celebrate the whole family being together, and recognizing that for us it is more about how God put us together.... Sojourners is a part of my family. So I'm celebrating that I'm not only with my family, but also with the family of Church of the Sojourners. We don't usually celebrate it as the whole community... everyone together, but I think it is important that I am in this church and that they are a part of my family as well.

R: Adoption day has morphed into something really normal.... It's just fun. It's a day to remember. It also has its downsides to it. I usually cry three gallons of tears or more... It's one of those happy-sad days.

Do you think community is a great place to raise an adopted kid?

N: Yeah, because you have a lot of people to talk to about adoption with different perspectives. For me, the church is like an extended family, and it's good to always have people to be with and talk about your adoption with. All the adopted kids, we're raised together, and I think it is good if you have other adopted kids in the bunch.

R: Totally agree. Totally agree. For me, I don't know how I would manage it without other people, especially Naomi. I think if I mentioned the word, I would probably start crying. For me it has become so normal, it's not that bad anymore. Being able to talk to other people who have gone through the same experiences helps it morph into normal.

What do you appreciate about each other's stories, and how well do you know each other's stories?

N: I was five when Rebecca came to Church of the Sojourners. I knew she was adopted and I can remember her coming into the church. I really envy her adoption in some ways because she knows about her birth father, like I don't. She also is in more contact with her birth mother, which makes me envy that, but not envy like I don't like her for that; I appreciate it. And I am glad to know that she has the opportunity to know her birth mother and to visit her some times.

Rebecca doesn't know the in's and out's of Naomi's adoption story as well, but that hasn't stopped the two from living into each other's stories. For a time, Naomi and Rebecca were the only two adopted girls at Sojourners. Rebecca's birth family has always been very intentional about visiting and keeping up relationship. Naomi remembers that Rebecca's birth grandmother, Jama, took her under her wing too back in those early days. Jama used to intentionally spend time with Naomi when she was little. Naomi recalls that this was both helpful, but also hurt as it caused her to wish her own birth family was more involved in her life.

Even though Gigi wasn't able to be at our interview, her story must be mentioned as it is obviously a source of encouragement to both Naomi and Rebecca.

N: Gigi's story makes me more emotional than my own story, because her story is really hard. She's very brave for getting through everything that she's been through and still remaining with a happy attitude.

R: I think it's interesting that she has been through all this hardship over her little life. I can't really imagine how she is still such a happy and jolly, upbeat person. I've never seen her get mad or sad.

N: I think that her story is not a usual story. I mean there's not really a usual story, but there is also the extraordinary story. She was all over the United States, and by a miracle she happened to land here. That's big for me. All of us girls are like sisters in the church, but me and Gigi have this special friendship. And she just makes me really happy; she's like a great friend to me. When you look at Gigi, you wouldn't be able to tell all the things in the past.... [Her scars] made her better instead of breaking her down. I could be wrong, but I know it was hard for her. For all of us, it's going to be hard the rest of our lives.

Naomi and Rebecca agreed that they live with a loss and a gift all the time, at the same time. They spent the final part of our time together exploring the ways that they have personally experienced pain in their stories. I won't quote all of this, but please allow me to tell you that I was honored to witness these two girls respectfully explain to each other how being adopted leaves holes in different ways for each of them. Rebecca wishes she knew less about her birth father because it would be better than knowing just a little bit and not knowing more. Naomi knows nothing about her birth father and wishes that she knew at least one thing. We came to the understanding that no matter how much you know, it hurts that you don't more. It hurts differently. Whose loss is worse is not really the question. What will you do with your loss? That's a worthwhile question.

for my sweet pea

by Angela Adams



it would be so easy to lie to you.
tell you
she'll be coming soon
taking you home
she'll make good choices and
everything will be okay-
no, more than okay
everything will be what you deserve.

it would be so easy to lie to you.
an old soul at five, but
instead i tell you
about change
disappointment
the power of words
healing tears
the value of silence and moments alone to sort things
through.



it would be so easy to lie.
say i'll miss you, but i'll be fine
when i don't have to scurry at 7am to get you dressed for
school
when i go to bed without a warm head to kiss goodnight
without small, always cold hands around my neck; small,
always cold hands holding mine
when i wake and the yellow room is once again empty
when you're gone
but i can't lie, not about you whose name means telling the
truth

it would be so easy to lie.
secure my mask, steel my nerves
move through this space as if i am not already mentally
packing up toys
move through these days as if i am not already mourning,
trying to commit each moment to memory
feeling my heart break each time you say mommy
put up a wall of strength and anger and power and keep
this deep sorrow at bay
promise myself i will be okay
protect myself and push you away



but you, my dear, are worth it.
every day i've fallen down half dead wondering if i have
the strength to do it once more
every twinge of pain from hours spent upright braiding
hair
every fight over wearing boy pants and eating yucky food
every bath when you were a duck, an old man with a
beard, or a smoothie-maker
every begged-for bedtime story
every mispronounced word
every smile, every song

you are worth it.
and i'd do it all again
to be your soft place to fall.
i'd do it all again
to be home for you.
i'd do it all again
to call you daughter
to have some more time with you.

*Photos from the SMC coordinator's meeting
in January in San Francisco*

Two adoption perspectives from Lotus House, novices of SMC

Adoption as Vocation

by Alden Bass

Even before we were married, my wife and I knew we wanted to adopt. At that time (we were still in our teens), we thought we would like to adopt a couple of children and have a couple the old fashioned way. Once we were married and began to think seriously about kids, the desire to reproduce biologically diminished until we became convinced that we were being called to grow our family exclusively through adoption. I use the word “called” because this desire came from outside ourselves; at that time we knew of no one who had made adoption their first choice. When we began discerning this “call” with family members and friends, most of them discouraged us from adopting first; they suggested we have a couple of our own, then adopt later. Even other adoptive families recommended this course. Still, we felt strongly that we should adopt first. So we cast a wider net, reading as many Christian adoption books as we could find in an effort to locate someone else who had a comparable calling. What we found was a bunch of books which began with chapters on “grieving the loss of the children you couldn’t have.” These books – most of them very good otherwise – assumed the priority and normativity of biological reproduction; they recognized that adoption is a second choice for most people. Finding no parallels to our own situation, we felt alone and uncertain.

Despite our hesitations, we could not ignore the call, and in 2012 we adopted a sibling group of three through a local agency. As with any adoption, there have been ups and downs, but we have never looked back on our decision to adopt first. As we talked with more and more people (including some of you!) we



Megan and Thirza share a couch for SMC Coordinators' sharings.

discovered others who, like us, felt alone in their desire to grow their family through adoption. In order to encourage others, I am writing a book for all those with a vocation for adoption. I would love to include other stories of the call, from both parents and children. If you’d like to contribute your experience, please let me know.

A Non-Adoptive Perspective

by Daniel Gray

Living in community and witnessing Alden and Candace’s calling for adoption was certainly an experience of growth and learning for me. Being a single guy in my 20’s gave me a limited focus on what community could look like. The idea of living into community generationally was something that didn’t set in until after I began

interacting with other SMC communities and seeing the richness that comes from people in different stages of life living together and supporting each other. Having Alden and Candace’s children in my life for the last two years has been a huge influence in my spiritual development. I now have a much fuller picture of what the kingdom looks like, and how we were meant to live alongside one another, sharing in each other’s joys and pains.

Adoption is a clear theme in the language of scripture. While we were still lost in the way of death, God gave of himself and adopted us as his sons and daughters. God calls us to a way of life that leads to richness and joy. What better way to share that joy with children in the same way that God shared all of his richness and fullness with us.

Shalom Connections
9295 1925 E St
Tiskilwa, IL 61368

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The Shalom Mission Communities are an informal network with no revenue beyond the dues of member communities. We are glad to make this newsletter available to anyone who wants to read it. You may read the newsletter (including back issues) and sign up for email notifications at www.shalommissioncommunities.org.

If you or your community are receiving this publication and are not an official part of SMC, we would ask you to consider giving a \$12 annual contribution to cover the costs of publishing the newsletter.

Please send donations to:

SMC % Reba Place Fellowship
P.O. Box 6575 Evanston, IL 60202

If you would like to stop receiving a physical copy of the newsletter, please email Christiana at cnpeterson@fastmail.fm with your name and address so we can take you off our list.

Thank you for your interest in Christian intentional community and your encouragement of Shalom Mission Communities.

