



Shalom Connections

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Seeing Jesus in the Next Generation:

Renewing the Vision of Community

*An Editorial by David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship*

The Holy Spirit lit a fire six years ago on a bus ride in El Salvador, a fire that has continued to grow and transform community life at Reba and beyond. With five Reba teens, I was returning from a visit to our sister community, Valle Nuevo. The youth we had met in El Salvador greatly impressed us with their initiatives, leadership roles, and the authority they exercised in their own communities. Sara Belsler sat down beside me and announced that God had been speaking to her about deepening her own experience and understanding of community rather than going on to college. Would I be her mentor?

By that time Reba Fellowship folks had gotten tired of me talking in every meeting about how an intentional community should be intentional about passing its vision on to a new generation. They said, "David, quit talking and write a proposal, so we won't have to keep hearing your hick speech about farms that don't plant seeds anymore." Or something like that.



The Simple Way's house on the corner in Philly

So I outlined how we might invest leadership, attention and money into an intern program, emphasizing "discipleship, service and community." But not much happened until Sara confessed her sense of calling. So we struck up a partnership, and a flame was lit.

Sara was eager to share with other young adults what she had received from God in community, but she was also pained by the

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Books to Read

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

The Beloved Community

The other night I lay down on the couch with a new library book, thinking I would read just until I got sleepy. Well, I picked the wrong book for that! Charles Marsh's *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* captivated me chapter after chapter till almost dawn.

Marsh's account begins with the epic Montgomery bus boycott, where the young African-American preacher, Martin Luther King Jr., reluctantly accepts the call to be the movement's spokesman. Gradually he found his voice and began to proclaim a vision of the beloved community that God has in mind for all his children, black and white, rich and poor.

The writer then tells of Clarence Jordan's vision and Koinonia Farm as a ground-breaking experiment in the beloved community, along with the white racist violence that rose against it. Marsh explores the differences and similarities between intentional community and the civil rights movement as alternate and mutually enriching visions of the beloved community.

The book sympathetically explores how the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) furthered the movement in the early 1960's, beginning with strong Christian faith commitments as a child of the church. But the tension in SNCC

between Jesus and freedom "finally collapsed on the side of freedom; and freedom unfettered by spiritual love produced an unforgiving legalism. . . . abandoning nonviolence, community-based social reform, and the vision of beloved community." The movement floundered with splintered groups fighting one another under more secular and radical notions of black power.

In a chapter entitled "Unfinished Business: John Perkins and the Radical Roots of Faith-based Community Building," the story is renewed in a gospel call for white Christians to join others under black leadership in the struggle for the beloved community, practicing the three "R's" of Relocation, Redistribution and Reconciliation.



Marsh is a historian and theologian who knows—like King, Jordan and Perkins—that there is an infinite difference between God as a category in the philosophy of religion, and the Father of Jesus Christ who makes a way where there is no way, who through the power of prayer can take away fear and cause us to love the worst of enemies. His passion and commitment to the same Jesus give Marsh insights into what he is writing about that other biographers and historians have missed.

Marsh concludes by surveying the current generation of groups to pioneer incarnational community in the most oppressive and violent neighborhoods. Here we meet Azuza Christian Community in Dorchester MA, The Simple Way Community in East Philadelphia, Abundant Life in Charlottesville VA, Desire Street Ministries in New Orleans, and others. The Civil Rights Movement is over, but the beloved community is always possible, and these are the best days to be alive to pursue it.

12 Marks of the New

Monasticism

This timely book exposes us to a spiritual movement that is giving birth to radical Christian communities in our day. The idea for this book sprang from a June, 2004 conference hosted by the Rutba House community in Durham, NC. Members of these young communities gathered, along with scholars and practitioners from earlier generations of Christian community, to tell their stories and explore the resources available in the old monasticism for new covenant communities. The conference discerned twelve marks of the "New Monasticism" movement, and these twelve marks

each became a chapter of the book just published. David Janzen is the author of the chapter on the formation of novices in community. Look for 12 Marks . . . , at Cascade Books, www.wipfandstock.com.

"This book invites us to something that is simultaneously ancient and wonderfully new. By combining first-person accounts of the marks with rich historical and biblical reflection, the various writers provide truthful and hope-filled descriptions of contemporary Christian community. Taking seriously the resources of monastic tradition and the importance of preserving the relationship with the wider church, the authors offer mature, wise, and gracious insight into the practices of faithful living. I heartily recommend this book to anyone yearning for evidence and promise of renewal in the church!"

-Christine D. Pohl, Professor of Social Ethics, Asbury Theological Seminary, and author of *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*

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Shalom Connections

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ways the Fellowship had grown self-satisfied and unwilling to take seriously young people and their insights. Sara and I bounced ideas off each other. She created an intern program manual and a brochure. Soon a couple of interns arrived. One saw how few youth there were here and went back home. Our beginning was slow with many false steps. A few interns came for a summer, caught the fire and stayed on for a year.

We opened our intern seminar, "Values and Practices of Christian Community," to all who attended our Monday night community potlucks. Then philosophy professor Greg Clark arranged for North Park University students to eat the food, wash the dishes and take the seminar—for college credit, no less. The more young people came, the more interesting it was for Fellowship members and neighbors. Our oldest members found they could not stay away from the young people who were honored to have elders listening to them. They and we were getting hooked.

But we struggled with the issues of recruitment. We felt awkward saying to young people, "We wish you would stay. We need you. We need you maybe too much." We went round and round on the perennial debate—are communities of radical discipleship a calling for some Christians, but not for all? If it is optional, then how do you invite people to all-out commitment? Or is recruitment self-serving?

We have found that this theoretical problem goes away if we stop recruiting for Christian community and instead get serious about "making disciples for Jesus, teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] commanded." (Matthew 28:19-20) Every week we get excited, the current interns and I, as we read the Gospel of Luke and let it read us. Once we put ourselves into the story as disciples of Jesus, we discover that faithful witness, peacemaking, mutual service, and community life are everywhere assumed. When we open our own lives to the call of

Jesus to invest everything in the kingdom of God in the context of Jesus' teachings, we don't need to recruit—Jesus does that.

The Beloved Community, quotes John Perkins who discerns a "resurgence of moral energy in many of the universities of North America, most often fueled by religious convictions and inspired by the social movements of the past."

A year ago Reba intern, Heather Munn, heard God speaking to her about how the Reba intern experience could serve God's mission to young people and Reba even better. She proposed that the new crop of interns would sign up for a whole year. They would interview long-time members and write papers about what they learned that might be valuable for forming new communities. You might have guessed that someone who makes suggestions like that would be asked to consider staying on another year as the intern coordinator, to implement what God was showing her.

Called to stay or be sent: Heather accepted the call and persuaded the Fellowship to accept interns for any of the following outcomes: a) We would invite young people to stay on and become novice members at Reba; or b) Band together in covenant with others to begin new communities, the way several young people did at Reba did 48 years ago; or c) Take their experience and join another community—which is what Heather Munn and her friend Paul Rohde are planning to do this summer. The internship is a launching pad for prophetic Christian community where young people are prepared to stay or be sent according to the action of God's Spirit.

This semester our Monday seminar is titled "Stories from Reba: What We've Learned from Community." Our text is *Glimpses of Glory*, the story of Reba's first thirty years by

Continued next page

Seeing Jesus continued

Dave and Neta Jackson. I am amazed that this class taught by Heather Munn, a twenty-three year old sojourning with us, is taking our history more seriously than we do ourselves. As she asks Reba old-timers to tell how they started community by risks and mistakes, living on a shoestring and by faith, the distance between old-timers and new pioneers of community goes away. This way of telling the story has authority and excitement that we could never have come up with ourselves.

As we retell the story of God's work in Reba's foundation, God is planting the seeds of new communities and new commitments to community in a younger generation. But it would not happen if we had not been moved to trust God enough to allow a younger generation to take charge, backing them up with resources and counsel, but letting the initiative be theirs. Spiritual convergences like this are, for me, a sure sign of the Holy Spirit at work.

A similar dynamic is stirring in other Shalom communities. At Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, Tim Locke a young father and budding leader, was told in a similar way, "Stop talking about your ideas for community apprenticeships and do it." The four young people who arrived this fall were given an orientation and then encouraged to begin their own common treasury community within the framework and support of the larger group. Tim calls the participants "apprentices" because they are learning a set of skills and a way of life that they can take to another community or continue where they are. I like the word "apprentice" because it has not been co-opted for every purpose like "intern." "Apprentice" signifies the first stage in learning the skills of a profession, the way into a life-long learning curve in the context of others who share the same commitments.

At Grain of Wheat community in Winnipeg, the generational transition is already ten years old. In two of the founding families—the Este-

brooks and Sawatskys—half a dozen children have stayed, and, with their spouses, are providing leadership at all levels, inviting their peers to new degrees of commitment. The fathers had moved on from community and its struggles, but the children ended up owning the experiment and making it their life.

At Plow Creek Fellowship, the Behrens and Newhouses (see Bill's story in this issue) have recently arrived, attracted by a holistic way of life that dares to give corporate expression to the teachings of Jesus. At the same time, the community is

hundred representatives from about a dozen new (less than ten years old) communities on the east coast. From Reba, Eric Lawrence and Allan Howe, traveled there in a three-van caravan, including a handful of North Park University students who frequent the Reba Monday Potluck and seminar. These are young people who feel an intense call to join Jesus in radical prophetic communities now.

It is not ours to make grandiose predictions of what this movement will amount to in the future, but we do need to bear testimony to what we see God doing. The Beloved Com-



Reba interns, Katie, Eric, Joseph, and Heather, meet for a bible study with David Janzen and David Hovde

struggling with profound questions about leadership, elder care, and the purpose of the common purse. But young families are part of the conversation about God's will for the future. Others are visiting, and by God's grace, the future will be theirs.

Called to nurture other new communities: As Shalom Mission Communities, we have felt a call to be intimately involved with the nurture of other new communities, of which we are discovering many in these days. "The Family Reunion" (February 19-20) hosted by The Simple Way and other groups in the Philadelphia area, gathered about a

community quotes John Perkins who discerns a "resurgence of moral energy in many of the universities of North America, most often fueled by religious convictions and inspired by the social movements of the past."

Telling a Christian community's history is always more than just telling a story. It is an exercise in spiritual discernment and faith, seeing how our story is part of that larger story of what God is doing in our present time, and then investing all we are and have in active participation, because this is the meaning of history and of our lives. Let those with eyes to see, see. □

Plow Creek News

*Bill Newhouse
Plow Creek Fellowship*

Continual change amid ever-present sameness; this seems to be the rhythm of community life. Our family is not communal professionals, as we just moved here to Plow Creek last October (2004), which seems a natural entry point into Plow Creek's current events.

Our family, the Newhouses, has been here nearly four months now, and we are just beginning to settle into community life. We moved from Bloomington, Indiana, as a young, three-member family. My wife, Kate (25), our daughter, Isa (16 months), and myself, William (31) are soon-to-be a four member family. We are expecting a new addition in August or September of 2005!! We are finding life here at Plow Creek very edifying and satisfying to the soul. We are happy to be here.

Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen, who left Plow Creek for service in Argentina, request prayer and support for their mission. Along with regular pastoral visitations among indigenous communities and churches of the Toba-speaking people, Ruth Anne also will accompany women's prayer circles. Richard's focus is with a team of translators preparing a new Toba version of the New Testament. Though they are greatly missed here at Plow Creek, we are overjoyed that they can be of service, God willing, to the indigenous peoples of Argentina.

Jim Fitz has just returned from two months with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Colombia. We expect that he has plenty to share about his time and experiences and look forward to learning of them. Andy Fitz visited our sister community in Valle Nuevo, El Salvador, for

a month during his winter break from college.

Rich Foss is excited about doing one of the Evergreen Leaders workshops (EGL) for the Reba interns in February. EGL also has three workshops scheduled in Porter, Indiana, and another three at Plow Creek this winter and spring. Rich is having great fun designing and presenting these workshops to give ordinary people the tools to help their groups thrive in workplaces, churches, and families. The workshops are: The listening path, The envisioning path, and The encouraging path. As he develops the workshops, Rich is drawing on his twenty-seven years at Plow Creek, twenty years at a secular nonprofit organization, and his family life.



This morning Rich talked to the secretary of the church in Porter, working on the details for the workshops there. At the end of the conversation, she mentioned that she'd like to come to the workshops, but when she realized the cost was \$98 per weekend, she sadly said she couldn't afford it. When Rich mentioned that EGL wants to develop a scholarship fund for people like her, she brightened. If you'd like to make a gift to help someone attend an EGL workshop, make your check payable to Evergreen Leaders, 19235 Plow Creek Rd, Tiskilwa, IL 61368 and mark in the memo section "Scholarship Fund."

Jim Foxvog had a cataract operation, implanting a new lens in his left eye. The cataract was due to a childhood accident. The operation was followed up with a brief laser procedure that will improve the sight in the left eye from 20/200 to 20/40 with glasses. That should greatly improve his depth perception for picking berries, pruning, and weeding. The Foxvog's weekly peace vigil has continued for over three years. Positive responses are growing. Meg Foxvog's mom, Mary Shephard, died peacefully at home on December 24, after a three-year battle with ovarian cancer. There was a beautiful memorial service January 2, in Jamesville, NY, celebrating her life.

The Tim and Carol Gale family will move to Camp Mennohaven in early February as Tim takes on the full-time position of program director of the camp. The Behrens family has moved from Tiskilwa to the Alpha House near the Meadow, but not before David Gale

Other moves and upgrades include the Moore family, who moved from the Alpha House back to the Point House, but not before David Gale and other community members made some major improvements. It was very interesting to work with a few other brothers under the crawl space, placing rolls of insulation onto the bottom side of the floor.

We are in the beginning stages of a relationship with the Peoria-area Islamic community. On Sunday January 30, the Imam from the Peoria Islamic Center will visit Plow Creek. It is neither the intention of Plow Creek nor of the PIC to proselytize. Quite the contrary, it is our intention to declare friendship and unity in the Name and Will of God. We hope to focus on our unity, not our doctrinal differences. It is a gift from the Lord to remember that it is in His will is to establish the Kingdom of God, not the Kingdom of Christianity, nor the Kingdom of Islam.

Plow Creek continued next page

Plow Creek continued

This interfaith dialogue has and will continue to bring up many important questions within both communities, and with our willingness to comply with God's will, this may facilitate some much-needed movement in understanding one another. Let us pray that all involved in this endeavor are led by God and not by human insolence.

Plow Creek is number three in a Google search for "intentional Christian community," and plowcreek.org now gets over 200 visits a day.

I shall conclude on that hopeful note. May we all be open to the ever-unfolding plan of God. Let us, in our every way, both large and small, learn the lessons that lead to a peaceful world. □



The Collective Calling

Bill and Kate Newhouse and their journey to community discipleship at Plow Creek

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Bill and Kate Newhouse, the latest arrivals at Plow Creek Fellowship, invited me over to get acquainted. Bill has tattoos all over his arms, and who knows where else on his body! I commented that these suggest he had a life and a story before he got here. Bill didn't hesitate to tell that story.

"I grew up in a dysfunctional family. My father was often moving around the country pursuing his opportunities as a disk jockey and then as a producer in a recording company." A decade of cocaine use eventually "robbed him of his spirit, so that now there is no one there for me to relate to," according to Bill.

Life with his mother was chaotic in other ways. By the age of fourteen, Bill was homeless and living on the streets. He quickly learned to be tough and on guard against other predatory people--becoming as violent as they. All the time he was on a serious spiritual search, distaining any organized religion, any scriptures--just seeking God directly in the spirit. This search was a fire that lit up his life.

Among the anarchists and their network of relationships, he found community and inspiration because of their refusal to exercise power over others. Bill is capable of speaking in detail about the various branches and tendencies of the movement that includes everything from atheistic dialectical materialists and angry nihilists, to generous mystics and saints.

After the age of twenty, Bill felt his spiritual quest by direct inspiration hit a ceiling, and he began reading the Gospels. He discovered Jesus as this mind-boggling radical whom, in his estimation, respectable Christianity still has not gotten to know. Somewhere in that search he spent six months in an Eastern Orthodox monastery, drawn there by others on a similar journey. They joked about their vocational move "from punk to monk." That place was good for healing life's hurts--of which he has a ton--but he found it too easy, this not living the life of Jesus in the world. He stayed without making a commitment as long as they would let him.

Bill claims that God has gifted him at almost anything artistic, learning to play many musical instruments. Graffiti art, and tattooing are in his repertoire.

In the university town of Bloomington, Indiana, he found a haven with other radical types, and became acquainted with Kate, who was in

college on a more conventional track. His many fears of getting hurt in a serious relationship meant that they took a long time sorting out and working through a lot of transformation on both sides before they agreed to be married. An ex-Amish friend did the honors. They believed that God sanctioned their relationship and honored their intention--what could any Justice of the Peace or a stamped piece of paper add to that?

For two years they lived in Alaska, hoping to get away to some more self-sufficient and authentic relationship to the land, but the economics of that calling proved too steep. They never could accumulate the resources to buy a plot and build their log cabin. Meanwhile, Bill was working in a tattoo parlor, spiritually sustained by the occasional, "holy people" that would come for services. Tattoos are all about expressing your identity, so that line of work would often lead to deep soul sharing with customers. But he was not a very good businessman, and his boss was unhappy when he'd tell boys that they really did not want to get barbed-wire tattoos and go into the Marines to find self-respect.

After two years in Alaska, Bill and Kate returned to Bloomington, Indiana. They read about Plow Creek on the web, visited, and were drawn to it, but decided to first get on their feet economically. "After eighteen months spinning the gerbil wheel," they decided to get off and just come. By this time they had a daughter, Isa who is now almost two. Kate is working at Gateway, like many other Plow Creekers, caring for persons with various mental and emotional disabilities. Bill is at home watching Isa and trying to build up a home business with a recording label of his own. He has many connections in the hip-hop world and is pulling together music in that genre from various international sources. His synthesizer, computer and CD's fill the living room table.

Most of the time I was talking with Bill, Kate was away at a baby shower with other women in the community, so I only got to hear a

little from her. But I sense that hers would be an equally fascinating story of transformation and spiritual discovery. Their gentleness with Isa, and her responsiveness to them is evidence of many hours and days spent under her parents' loving regard.

It is obvious that Kate and Bill have forged a deep bond with each other, having "worked through about twenty years of issues in the first two years of our marriage," as they say. They have a genuine humility and eagerness to learn about community and the way of Jesus from people who have lived a life of discipleship longer than they. They are pained by the ways key biblical words have been stained and corrupted for their generation by presidential rhetoric and superficial American Christianity, where social commitments and politics resemble the human Jesus so little.

They see many people in their generation with anguished lives, drawn to the spiritual quest and to deeper integrity, who are trying to live by the same ethics as Jesus, but have not found a people living this way in sustained and peaceful relationships. The discovery that there are Christian communities with a moral core, and open to all seekers of a similar intention, is tremendously inspiring to them. Bill says about Plow Creek, "I find my spirit becoming a part of this collective, belonging with more and more of myself as my mistrust and wounds are healed." When he says this Kate nods and beams. They have even let Rich Foss marry them, again, this time with a piece of paper. Getting married is so inspiring, they claim, they hope to do it again, soon and often.

One story from Bill reveals his humility, his eagerness to find healing and a more passionate engagement with God's people. "Isa had a poopy diaper, and I was trying to change her. She was struggling against me because the poop made her feel so uncomfortable. If only she would stop struggling, she would make less of a mess, and I could clean her up more quickly so she could be at peace. And then it

hit me," He demonstrated by bouncing the heel of his hand off his forehead, "Duh! So that's how my Creator must be thinking of me." □



Rogers Park News

*Lisa Selph
Reba Place Fellowship*

At the time of this writing, we have just enjoyed a weekend of hosting the Plow Creek youth group. Lyn Fitz brought Joanna and Esther Graham and Daniel Foxvog into Chicago for a joint youth activity. Saturday evening included taking the "EL" downtown, where they explored the new Millenium Park and then headed out for Chicago stuffed pizza. Gospel singing (thanks to the I'm-sure-soon-to-be-famous Redmond sisters from Living Water) accompanied their rather chilly walk, and round robin poetry improv (thanks to always-got-some-fun-up-his-sleeve Doug Selph) kept them entertained while they waited to be served.

The Selph-woods hosted the Creekers overnight, and they attended

worship at Living Water the next morning. I'm sure, as agriculturally savvy folk, they found it amusing to be there for our Lenten window box object lesson. The first Sunday of Lent we had kids pulling up the old dried up plants. On this particular Sunday the kids were called forward, and came in great numbers. When asked, "what do you call the process of preparing the soil for seeds?" there were as many answers as there were kids (including "cleaning," Lyn noticed). Fortunately our more agriculturally challenged youngsters finally did arrive at the word "tilling," vigorously tilled, dumped seed with some abandon, and watered both the newly planted seeds and the carpet. After worship our Plow Creek guests joined the Senior High Sunday School class and heard from David Whettstone, of MCC's Washington office, about selective service and conscientious objection, and also got a tour of the new LWCC meetinghouse construction.

It was encouraging to see SMC kids gathered together – and I hope there will be lots more opportunities like it. It was rewarding to get to know a few youth better as individuals apart from their parents – something I'm embarrassed to say doesn't happen all that often. I hope there will be lots more opportunities like that as well. □



News from Church of the Sojourners

Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners

It's Valentine's Day, and spring has arrived in San Francisco, bringing out the daffodils and the plum blossoms and causing all non-native San Franciscans to predictably remark on how early it has sprung. It's refreshing to walk down our urban streets, so relentless in the proliferation of concrete and cars, and get a sweet delicate whiff of something blooming. A single daffodil flowering in a 2'x2' square hole in the sidewalk, having pushed its way through the litter and dog doo, can bring as much joy as a whole field of them in another context.

The year got off to a great start with IvaJo Otto and Jon Pedersen's wedding on January 2 in their hometown of Ukiah. Being just after Christmas, the sanctuary and reception hall were decorated with dozens of fragrant evergreen trees, making

a kind of indoor forest. IvaJo and Jon have set up their newlywed digs on the top floor of the Blue House, and seem to have settled into the rhythm of married life quite happily, report housemates Tim Otto and Rick DiMicco.

Baptisms always feel like spiritual food for the Body, and Kevin Casey's was no exception. After several weeks of preparation, including reading "Death and Life, An American Theology" by Arthur McGill and having questions posed to him such as "So, Kevin, what is the Good News?" he was immersed in the Pacific Ocean on a lovely Saturday morning in January. Dan and Kelly Zazvorcka came out from Nevada for the occasion, Dan being Kevin's chosen baptizer. The seriousness with which Kevin wants to take his journey of faith is an encouragement to us all.



Tim and Jenny Lockie's newest edition, John David

Naomi Hare had a joyful and emotional reunion with her birth mother, Nasonia, over the Christmas holidays. Naomi, being one of the most articulate and self-aware five-year-olds I've ever met, had expressed a very strong desire to see Nasonia, whom she had not seen since she was two months old. The meeting between them was filled with mutual delight, as they spent time together talking, exchanging gifts, and playing hide and seek. The photo of their initial encounter as they soak up each other's presence in an embrace captures layers of story and feeling in a single snapshot.

On President's Day weekend, each household will go on retreat, making room to spend special time together. Two weeks later, we will have our first "Nature and Purpose of the Church" seminar for 2005, mostly for Mission Year participants currently on the field in inner-city Oakland. This has become an annual event for us and has cemented strong ongoing ties with Mission Year, an extraordinary ministry whose motto is "Love God. Love People. Nothing Else Matters." (You



Nasonia and Naomi joyfully reunite



Dan Zazvorka baptizes Kevin Casey in the Pacific Ocean

can find out about them at www.missionyear.org)

Judy Alexander visited over Christmas, absorbing as much of her new grandson John David Lockie's presence as she was able in two weeks' time. Her work as a missionary in Taiwan continues to go tremendously well, as she is able to touch the lives of many students and share the love of Christ in her work as a teacher at Christ College. If you would like to write to her, you can reach her at judy@churchofthesojourners.org.

Hannah Zazvorka is also thriving in her missionary year in Mexico. You can write her at hannahzaz@yahoo.com.

Louise Harris has been through the agonies of job uncertainty and the frustration of bureaucratic systems as she has struggled to go back to work after over a year of disability since her back surgery. Though she did not end up with what she was hoping for, she did find a job within San Francisco General Hospital. Please remember her in your prayers as she (and her back) makes this transition.

Steven Braney brought a piano home from his Christmas family visits, renaming the entryway of their

flat where it now resides "the Conservatory." His first piano recital was attended by several Sojos and his continually improving piano playing is a blessing to our worship teams.

Matt Creeger recently moved back into Sojo housing, this time as an adult rather than as the son of members. His desire to make his life about following Jesus has been an encouragement to those around him.

The Sunday morning Ultimate Frisbee game, initiated by Matt Toney and a few others last year, has now become a huge, multi-generational Sabbath activity, attracting as many as 30 players, so I'm told, and a warm and friendly place to invite friends.

Baby Rebecca Gish continues to grow and thrive, almost eight months old now. A neighborhood drama involving an abusive single mother next door had created a somewhat threatening environment for the Gish family, but as of this writing it seems that the situation is resolving. Please remember Melissa, the single mom, in your prayers as you think of it.

Edith Bernard has just completed training to become a hospice volunteer, and it seems this will be an

excellent context to use some of her many gifts.

Church of the Sojourners has embarked on the next subject in our ongoing attempt to articulate our commitments, practices, and disciplines: Money. As we review and receive teaching on some of our commitments -- sharing our finances and other resources (such as cars), choosing to live at a similar standard of living to one another regardless of income, having a spirit of generosity and helping those in need -- we hope to be re-energized in those areas as well as open ourselves to the Spirit moving us to deeper insight and practice.

Of course, there's much more that could be said about what God is up to at Church of the Sojourners, but I will let these few evidences stand for the rest, and end with a quote from C. S. Lewis: "All joy... emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings." □





A look down the block at the Simple Way, Philadelphia, PA

The Simple Way and Camden House:

SMC Encounters a New Generation of Community

*Eric Lawrence
Reba Place Fellowship*

Mid-January: Three persons huddled around a lone--startlingly ineffectual--space heater in a commodious partially-renovated rowhouse in a run-down neighborhood of Kensington in North Philly. Around this threesome gathered a larger circle of sisters and brothers, bundled in winter coats and hats, transferring warm wishes and fervent prayers through the laying on of hands. Why had twelve representatives from five Shalom Mission Communities gathered for a weekend to huddle in such splendid misery so far from home?

On Friday, January 14, the Rebites--Heather Munn, Penny Lukens, Allan Howe, David Janzen, and I--landed at the Philadelphia airport where we

found Joe Gatlin (from Hope Fellowship, Waco) patiently sharing his expertise with two cell-phone-challenged women. Moving on to the curb, Amber Christis (long dark hair, natted up into formative dreadlocks, a big smile with prominent dimples, a thick silver nose ring, and a classy Philly accent) arrived to pick us up in a glossy 15-passenger rented van, to which she had just grown accustomed.

Cruising along the Delaware River, we passed huge industrial plants, dozens of intimidating military and commercial transport ships, as well as mountains of waste products barged in from east-coast factories. Further on we viewed the pride of Philly in its skyscrapers and sweeping suspension bridges.

However, closer to our destination the architecture turned toward decay and devastation, remnants of an antiquated industrial age that no one cared to update. We were reminded of the areas in Chicago burned out in the riots following Martin Luther King's death, where no one now dares to invest in anything but liquor and drugs. Row-houses lined the Kensington streets, built a century ago to accommodate thousands of workers for quick transport to the factories all around. But the factories now are boarded-up shells, victims of labor outsourcing, and the dwellings are but a reminder of an-

other era--housing vagrants, unemployment, and hopelessness.

Upon arrival we met Marv Hamm and Irene Wiens, from Grain of Wheat Community in Winnipeg, whose flight preceded ours. We all got a quick tour of The Simple Way's two colorful abodes on Potter Street. Interior walls had been painted with child-like bright colors (some were, indeed, painted by children), and banners from political protests festooned an open room and stairway. A photo hung on a bare brick column reminded us of what the trashed and abandoned house had looked like before several years of effort.

"The Simples" began renovating their second house by cutting a hole in the roof and dropping down with electric tools powered by 300 feet of roof-top extension cords plugged into their first house at the other end of the block. They didn't want folks on the street to know the house was inhabitable. Permission came from their sense of calling, rather than the city bureaucracy. When telling the story, Mike and Shane got wide-eyed and giggled with bewilderment, saying, "I can't believe we could accomplish this. Actually we didn't. God did!" On the banister that lined hall were painted the words, "I am because we are. We are because Christ is." This statement summed up a communal mentality that makes The Simple Way's insurmountable tasks but part of the daily joys.

The Simples had stenciled "LOVE" on the boarded-up windows on their street along with purples, pinks, and blues, and a silhouette of a person leaping for joy--an aesthetic contrast to the trash blowing in the street, cracked and shifted sidewalk chunks, and shoes hanging from telephone wires. The community has been in this neighborhood for eight years now, befriending the neighbors, playing with children, opening a recycle shop in their front room, welcoming suburban youth groups for workdays and reality tours to see America's underside. Among the thorns of corporate greed, broken families, material poverty and the persistent social evils

typical of many urban centers, a mustard seed of hope has sprouted and has grown into a shrub that allows us to come and perch, shiver, and see the kingdom of God.

Still missing a few SMC delegates, we sat down to spaghetti and introductions, joined by Shane and Amber from The Simple Way. Shane was clothed in, say, a potato sack about five sizes too large for him and a leopard-print sweater underneath. Blond dreadlocks peeked out the back of his dark-blue bandana, setting off the thick black-framed glasses that rest approximately on his nose. Loose clothing befits someone who laughs and gesticulates so often and so wildly.

Flight-schedule snafus delayed, but finally could not prevent Rick Reha's arrival from Plow Creek, and the Church of the Sojourner contingent—Matt Toney, Tim Otto, Tim Locke and Alexina who rolled into our first meeting on her father's wheelie suitcase.

After our first meeting Allan Howe and I headed back to The Simple Way's headquarters for extra sleeping space. Amber was in the kitchen, chewing on frozen strawberries, putting off her homework for massage-therapy school. "I've frozen my insides," she said as she scooted over to the couch and wrapped herself in a blanket to begin the thawing process. Meanwhile Allan sifted through the Simple's library, picked up British economist, E. F. Schumacker's *Small is Beautiful*, sparking a fruitful discussion on how Reba and The Simple Way envision and develop local Christian economies.

Justin and Ashley joined us by the

time we were hotly discussing The Simple Way's IRS classification. The Simple Way's unusual design caught Allan off guard as he probed their economic structures. "Are you an undercover IRS auditor!?" Shane exclaimed and immediately burst into laughter. "No, but I am interested in your operation. At Reba we keep looking for creative ways to carry out our mission and give as little to Uncle Sam as we can." As we parted all the Simples expressed gratitude to Allan for sharing his understanding of IRS procedures, and his wisdom in the field. We then retired to bed, excited for what was to come.

Saturday after dinner, we got to meet Mike and Michelle, core members of The Simple Way who were married and 8 months pregnant. They discussed their recent decision to move a few blocks away to an area that is a little safer and to have some of the other members join them. The split in living arrangements was a change they were still getting used to.

*"I am because we are.
We are because Christ is."*

As each community presented the stories of their beginnings, in chronological order, it became abundantly clear that The Simple Way is a relatively new adventure in the saga of intentional Christian communities. SMC community birth dates from 1957 took Mike aback, he noted that the oldest member of their community was still in utero when Grain of Wheat was born.

The Simple Way members first came together over eight years ago as university students organizing in solidarity with scores of homeless people who were facing eviction from St. Edwards, a vacant church that they had occupied in the cold of winter. When we heard the spectacular story of the Simple Way's "St. Edwards" beginnings, Tim Lockie strongly encouraged the Simples to write down their history, not only because it is an amazing story that everybody needs to hear, but because our histories are so important to understanding our-

selves. Telling our history provides solidarity, a sense of God's calling, and a general argument for the community's way of life.

On Sunday morning we headed for Camden, New Jersey, to participate in a mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, led by Father Doyle, a friend of the Berrigans and co-conspirator in certain Plowshares actions. We had been invited by the members of Camden House community. For all of us the mass was the most participative and lively experience of community any of us had encountered in a Roman Catholic church. During communion the entire congregation flooded the isle in anticipation of receiving the body and blood of Christ. The beauty of Christ's people gathered in worship contrasted starkly with the scene of devastation that met us in our walking tour of the neighborhood.

We first came to a park where Camden House member Chris Haw taught a gym class and others helped create a garden for the children. And just beyond the park's limits were large factories, each notorious for spewing their own particular contaminating funk into the air. Chris told of how he can tell which way the wind is blowing by the particular smell, one of those smells being the odor produced by placing a nine-volt battery to your tongue. This is an example of environmental racism, he explained, where polluters are concentrated because they believe the neighbors have no weight in the political system.

Camden is plagued by deep problems: pollution being the salient example. 62% of the children born in Camden suffer from respiratory diseases, mainly asthma, caused by the air-borne pollution of the surrounding factories. The city is a combination of super-fund sites and brown-fields. Super-fund sites are areas so deeply polluted with radiation and heavy metals that to clean them up Federal funds are needed. Brown-fields are a step below a super-fund site, but can be cleaned with more conventional methods.

As we walked around to the Cam-

Simple Way continued next page



Simple Way continued

den House backdoor, Penny took notice of the creative “plumbing park” where plants grow in sinks, toilets, and the like. Camden House folks do not use their front door, leaving it instead to the neighbors for hooting and hollering and loitering. Before the community’s arrival a few men had staked out the stoop as their R and R area, and the Camden Housers couldn’t kick them out—it just isn’t right—after all, they were there first.

Once inside we gathered in the spacious upstairs sunroom, lined with couches and began to discuss our community life. Amazed by the determination and initiative of these young people, the SMC elders prodded for more stories. Chris told that when their group of young friends had approached Father Doyle for a place where their intentional community might land, he handed over the keys on the second meeting, offering the house without rent. Other project-minded groups had tried to get the house, but Father Doyle was waiting for a people who would be committed long-term to work in and for the city, people who were prepared to stand up against the environmental racism, the poverty and violence—the systemic problems, and the circumstantial problems of their neighbors.

During the World Wars, the Navy had created of Camden a city with the highest employment of the entire country. They produced everything from toilet seats to battleships. Many of the streets are named after the famous battleships built by Camden residents. Father Doyle explains the total turn-around came when the Ben Franklin Bridge connecting the city with Philadelphia, encouraged mobility. Along with that mobility most of the employers and their workers left. Now the employment rate in Camden is one of the lowest in the country. Day and night, prostitutes and drug dealers wait on the corners. Camden doesn’t even have elected officials or representatives anymore; they have a chief operating officer that is appointed by the governor to conduct business on their behalf.

A visitor from Princeton’s Seminary eagerly absorbed all that he was hearing in this exchange between SMC and Camden House residents. He spoke of the seminary’s distaste for the community way of life and how the teachers treat it as a poison to true Christian freedom. All he wanted to know was how to embody the values that we were speaking of, without being exclusive. He knew that one day he would be the pastor of a typical congregation, most likely in the suburbs, but that God was calling us all to an intimately connected way of life.

This is exactly why we live in community. We are called to share the gifts of God’s extravagant love, seeking the beloved community where all types of humanity have a place.

Some of us are going to the “Family Reunion,” hosted by The Simple Way, Camden House and others on February 18th to continue the dialogue and show support. Shalom Mission Communities leaders have invited representatives from these two communities to come and speak with us at our Shalom Camp Meeting at Plow Creek August 4-7. We pray that these visits will continue to bless us as we reflect on the stories, but also in a much more practical way, we want to be in contact with these younger communities in intersecting circles of mutual support. □

“Rejoice in Hope”

*by Lauren Barron, Jan ‘05
Hope Fellowship*

I know a farm that was failing,
Fields standing silent and bare.
Now it’s a place with acres of grace;
We rejoice in Hope.

I’ve seen a crib with no baby,
Toys that had never been touched,
A home in despair. Now a baby lives there;
We rejoice in Hope.

I found a friend in a stranger,
Raising two children alone.
Once on her own, now the church is her home;
We rejoice in Hope.

Somehow together He guides us,
Unsteady, uncertain, unsure.
We struggle and stray, still He shows us the way
We rejoice in Hope

Chorus

We rejoice in Hope,
One Body one Spirit one Calling.
We rejoice in Hope;
He dares us to dream for what cannot be seen;
We rejoice in Hope.

Last Chorus

We rejoice in Hope,
One Body one Spirit one Calling.
We rejoice in Hope;
He dares us to dream for what cannot be seen;
We rejoice,
Come and rejoice,
Let us rejoice in Hope!

Hope Fellowship News

*Joe Gatlin
Hope Fellowship*

On the heels of celebrating our 10th anniversary last year, our theme for 2005 is a Year of Hope. We hope for new birth in spirit, in vision, and in our life together. We have begun the year with a time for our 17 members to re-examine and reaffirm our membership. Five others who have been with us for a year or quite a bit more are also considering membership. We will come together for a time of recommitment at the end of March.

done even as we seek to explain it and understand how community can be lived out in new forms.

Meanwhile, we are continuing to see new leadership step up at different places in the life of the church. Ruth Boardman-Alexander has brought together a "fellowship team" that is meeting regularly and helping with scheduling and celebrations. Nancy Gatlin, Luis Matias, and Barbara Bridgewater each lead a worship team, and the three of them are providing overall leadership in worship.

Other news:

We have extended Norma's sabbatical from most of her pastoral tasks and continue to pray for health.

Neil Miller recently returned from Haiti and gave a very good report about World Hunger Relief Waco while also sharing a very realistic report of the violence throughout the

and Hannah Zazvorka, who traveled from Cuernavaca to meet them there. They were also able to spend a couple of days in Valle Nuevo. Joe also returned to Honduras on February 12 for a Habitat for Humanity trip, with of course an extra few days to visit Gabriela again. And Jim and Ria Snyder made a January trip to Puerto Rico to visit family.

Meanwhile in Waco during the Christmas season, Hope Fellowship had a very full life with various family members in town and at least four different caroling events.

We have just cut our first Hope Fellowship CD of a singing session with our favorite songs. We will be sending copies to Hannah, Gabriela, and Myra who recently returned to Monterrey, Mexico.

We joke that Hope Fellowship and World Hunger Relief seem to have their own section in the Waco newspaper. It seems like there is a weekly story, either about the farm, about how some of the members (the Bridgewaters) celebrate Christmas, or about what we are doing on tsunami relief (a singing session at the mall and organizing a yard sale with other neighborhood churches.).

Youth and children continue to be a very big part of our life. Nancy loves her weekly time with the Children's Club that has been focusing on circles of peace and how to be non-violent in relationships. J.B. Phillips and Kristi Rowe-Miller provide leadership for the youth group (although we are all involved), and we are trying to bring the issues of discipleship and baptism more into focus for the youth.

And of course we laugh a lot. Our greatest community clown and joke-teller continues to be 4-year old, Evan Boardman-Alexander with his flaming red hair and his "What- Me Worry?" smile. His contribution from this past season: "Where does Santa Claus go swimming? In the North Pool." □



Growth in numbers has partly prompted this work. We recently needed to move to a tri-monthly prayer calendar so we would have enough daily slots to accommodate the 65 individuals we now count as part of the larger Hope Fellowship community. And our geography has grown. Common life in the neighborhood continues to grow in quality and quantity, but we also have attracted people from the larger Waco area and beyond who now worship with us. We celebrate what God has

country and the despair that so many are experiencing. Kristi Rowe Miller also took a trip to Haiti and was able to visit the community where she and Neil lived and served with MCC almost 20 years ago. We are grateful for their safety and continue to pray for the people of Haiti.

At Christmas many of us traveled. Cristina, Emanuel, and Luz were able to go to Puebla, Mexico, to visit family. The Gatlins had a wonderful trip to Honduras at Christmas and great visits with daughter Gabriela

Grain of Wheat News

Marv Hamm
Grain of Wheat

At our members' meeting in December, we started planning a reunion for our 25th anniversary (in the summer of 2006). That's a whole generation! One of the wonderful things about our life together in recent years is that a number of children of the founding members (now with spouses and children of their own) are making their home in the community. Feels like a strong continuity, even though we have changed a lot over the years.

A big deal in our life this past year has been a move to a new worship space. Until three years ago we were worshipping in the gym of a United Church in the neighborhood. That was no longer working for our hosts, so we temporarily moved to "house-sit" a small Anglican Church building about a mile away. (The congregation had folded and the Diocese was deciding what to do with the building). In the year that followed our move there we underwent an exhaustive search for a worship space - with an involved community process of visioning, dreaming, weighing options. Turns out we were not able to find anything that really suited us in the area.

When the church building we were house-sitting sold in the summer of 2004 we moved to a large inner-city Anglican church just outside our neighborhood. We are sharing space with this older Anglican congregation in a somewhat rundown (but still elegant) building. My 5-year-old son described it as a "castle that is ruined on the inside." We worship Sunday at 9:00 a.m. in the corner of this cavernous cathedral. I think we are beginning to get used to the place - but it feels like we are still a little disoriented in our spirits. We commented recently that it feels like we are going through the motions of church and community

life right now.

When we moved to this new place (St. Matthews Anglican) we also restructured our worship time somewhat. Before, we had adults' and kids' teaching times before the worship. Now we have the kids and youth go out of worship for their teaching time, and we have a little longer adult teaching time in the service - but no longer adult teaching outside the worship setting. Maybe this change alongside the change of setting has contributed to the disorientation. We are now in the middle of evaluating these changes in worship/teaching structure. Sometimes it begins to feel tedious to spend so much time thinking about how we spend our Sunday morning time together, but it is a time for carefully discerning what are ways to best nurture our life together and our life as disciples.

As if these changes are not enough, we are approaching a transition in our leadership team. Jarem Sawat-sky and myself (Marvin) are both ending our time on the team in June '05. I have been on the team for five years, Jarem for three. We will soon undertake a time of discerning who will next serve in this role. You can pray that with us that God will bring forward the right people to lead us.

Even in this season of disorientation there are some new things bubbling. One of our seed groups this year (all our members are in small groups that meet every second week around a particular focus) is envisioning and planning for several families to start up a rural community. This conversation has been going on less formally for a few years, but now they are beginning to talk specifics. This could be an exciting new incarnation of Grain of Wheat's longstanding passion for the land and for alternative economic structures.

Another seed group is working toward some form of housing project/ministry, probably to focus in the lower income neighborhood around St. Matthews Church. This is in the early stages, but promises to give us some ways of connecting with the area around our new worship location.

The other new thing I see happening is an interest in reconnecting with Shalom Mission Communities. Feels like we are just starting this exploration, and it's hard to get a sense yet where we will go with this, but I value the chance to connect with and be nurtured and inspired by all of you. □



Reba Place Fellowship News

Eric Lawrence
Reba Place Fellowship

For everything there is a season, turn, turn, turn. The lyrics of Pete Seger lodge themselves in my head during the dark winter months when the lack of sunlight causes me a spiritual drought and a lackluster social life. When everything is looking up, and the sun is shining down, one doesn't need to know that the seasons turn, but in the midst of a malaise, one reaches out to understand the season in which we mourn while looking forward to the season in which we rejoice. Change is inevitable, after all.

Monday Night Intern Seminars: Of course when I speak of darker moments, I do not speak for everyone. There has been considerable renewal within the Fellowship and the Church in the past few months. Some of the North Park students that took Greg Clark's course on Christian community last semester continue to bless us by coming to our Monday potluck/seminar, even after the requirements for the class



allowance in 2005 to catch up with inflation since 1998.

We the People: Virgil Vogt is the new associate conference minister for the Chicago area of the Illinois Mennonite Conference, a job that utilizes his gifts well.

Joseph Marshak, an intern and seminarian, is exploring the possibility of life with the Fellowship. Joseph is looking into membership and taking time to understand group decision-making with the Clearing small group. Joseph is also volunteering with Senior Connections, a group committed to assisting the elderly in spiritually nourishing ways.

Chris Evans, a member of about thirteen years, on the other hand, is moving on to explore life without the immediate guidance of the Fellowship. She plans to continue as our neighbor, to keep producing her distinctive artwork, and to maintain close ties with the folks here.

David Lukens is gradually retiring from his teaching position at Shimer College, but will continue to work a lighter load of two days a week there. With his extra free time, David will take on new responsibilities around Reba, including work at Plain and Simple and the Reba Early Learning Center. Also, he will be teaching a course at the Chicago Art Institute on the history of Geometry. Why an art institute would have a class on the history of geometry, I do not know.

We wish them all spiritual growth and a deep sense of God's call in their new seasons of life.

Vera Stoehr slipped in January on a patch of ice and crushed her right wrist bones in two places, which required surgery. We pray for her continued recovery and healing.

RPDC and ECDA: Reba Place Development Corporation and its partner in the African-American churches, Evanston Community Development Corporation, have been up to a lot of hard work this season developing and marketing affordable housing units. With God's grace and some big grant money that came mid-February, they may soon acquire more properties for the same purpose. □

have ended. There is "a whole lot of intergenerational vitality on those nights," Allan Howe mentioned. Apparently these younger types have invigorated many of the older types in the community.

This semester's seminar is focusing on the story of Reba Place Fellowship by reading through Dave and Neta Jackson's, *Glimpses of Glory*, aided by the personal stories from RPF members. Heather Munn, co-director of the intern program noted, "This is a time when both the Church and the Fellowship are looking toward the future and reestablishing their vision. I hope that drawing from the past, as we're doing in the Monday night seminar, can make some contribution toward that." Indeed it has.

Reflecting on such a rich history and on the original fervency and spiritual brother-and-sisterhood on which this community was founded, has already brought great joy to some of the participating members like Virgil and Joan Vogt, who got a chance to talk about the very first days of the Fellowship's life.

Plain and Simple: This season has also been very kind to the Fellowship's new store Plain and Simple,

which, during November and December, had a significant spike in sales. Covering costs already in the store's third month of operations has been a relief and gives us a sense that this could be a long-term breadwinner.

New Mission Statement: "The calling of Reba Place Fellowship is to extend the mission of Jesus by being a community of love and discipleship, and by nurturing such communities as God gives us grace." This is the new statement that RPF will use to frame the questions of a community resources review in the coming months.

When asked about the Fellowship's welfare, Allan Howe said, "I hate to start off with economics, but I think it is significant that RPF came to the end of the year with a financial report that almost balanced. We had a 3% deficit, compared to the 6% deficit of the previous year. This is a hopeful sign."

Along with the economic review, the leadership team has led us through discussions on poverty, how we identify with the poor, and the Gospel's commands. In a seemingly contradictory line of logic, RPF leaders have increased the member's

“Interpreting the Present Time”



Shalom Connections Camp Meeting: 2005

August 4 to August 7 at Plow Creek Fellowship, Tiskilwa, IL

Who is winning the war on terrorism? Is the economy going up or down? Are media-hyped crises and imperial saviors the meaning of our age?

Or do you wonder what God is doing to reconcile the world? Who, in our day, is seeking to live the politics of Jesus, incarnating in shared lives and public witness, the good news that overcomes enmity? Come and see.

Come for three days with friends where experience meets enthusiasm, and there's a task for everyone.

We'll learn from each other, each generation sharing their gifts, engaging in prayerful activism.

Let's tell our stories, discover new family through worshipping Jesus, and surface our latent talents at the Lack of Talent Show! See you there!

For Camp Meeting information and registration:

SMC % Louise Stahnke
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