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A Quarterly Newsletter of Shalom Mission communities

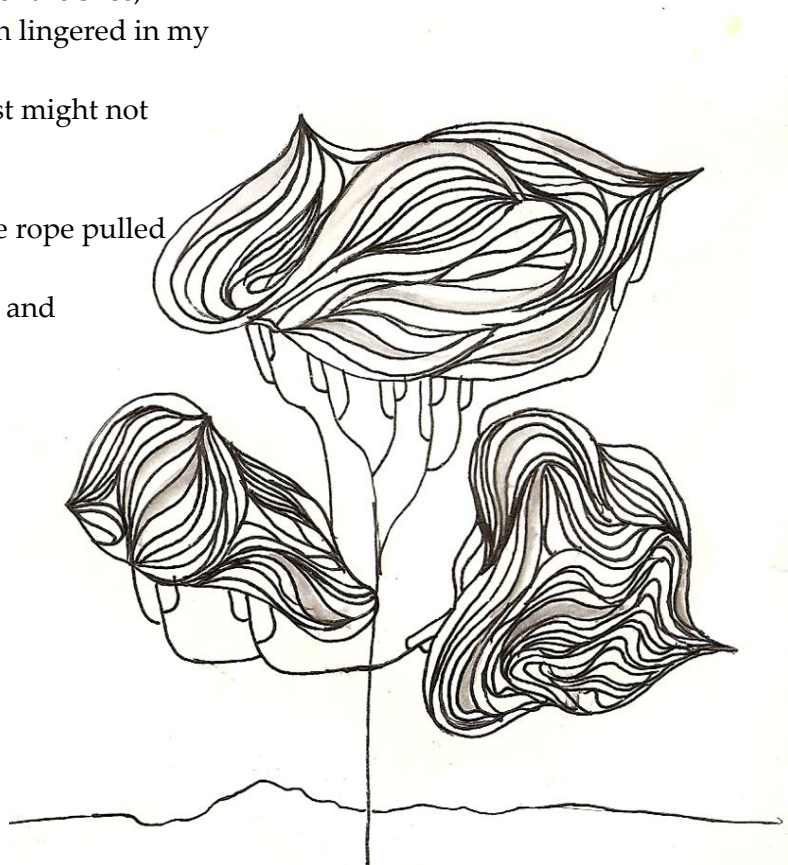
Number 4

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December 2007: The Art of Community

One Day of Atonement

i think repentance might be easier
if i saw the azazel.
if i had first-kind sight of the knife, of the slice,
if the putrid smell of blood and flesh lingered in my
nostrils,
if the possibility existed that G-d just might not
forgive me for my transgressions
this year, next year, ever.
if i heard the bells cease and saw the rope pulled
taut,
if i was not allowed to walk right in and
throw myself upon mercy.
if i had to take a vow
if i had to feel the coal
if i had to count
on someone else to intervene.
if i had to cry, to wail
instead of simply say
"Please forgive me"
"Please"
"Forgive Me"
"Please"
"Forgive"
"Please"
and know it is all
taken care of
once and for all



The Artist's Story:

Hilda Carper

by Hilda Carper

Ever since I was a child I dabbled in the visual arts, but never very seriously, since I was supposed to be the musician of the family and my older sister the "artist." When I joined Reba in the 60's I began making banners for our worship space. Finally I became too old and stiff to crawl around on our Meeting House floor (my work space for the up to 12 foot creations), so I gave that up for 4"X 5" paper collage designs as note cards for friends. Then about 10 years ago Reba helped establish a Ten Thousand Villages store in Evanston, and I was asked to make cards to sell. Since then I have been doing art in a more deliberate way.

The Fellowship has provided me fine space for a studio. I also do some watercolor, but my favorite medium is collage, using a variety of thin, acid-free paper which I paint with watercolor. Cutting or tearing shapes out of those sheets and layering them gives the effect of watercolor, but the creative process is much freer and more serendipitous. I also use non-translucent papers from nature calendars, National Geographics, etc. I find that as I "play" with the papers, they tell me what to do with them...Oh, here are



Collage by Hilda Carper

mountains in the distance with a lake tucked in among the nearer hills...A landscape emerges that I can stroll around in or just sit and enjoy as my hands make it come into being.

Collage, in comparison to watercolor, is a very forgiving medium. You just keep moving things around until your solar plexis tells you it's "right." Then you paste it on with small dabs of glue stick, which can be removed if it's not quite right after all.

I also make larger pieces for framing. Recently I had the opportunity to exhibit 33 of my favorite "collage paintings," as I call them. The show was a great success, because many

Reba friends, past and present, showed up at the opening reception. The gallery manager, whose wine and cheese ran out before the evening was half over, exclaimed, "My, you have a lot of friends!" That's community for you!

My art as a calling from God? I haven't thought of it that way. Like many good things that have come about in my life, I sort of wandered into it as I walked The Way. Serendipity. I believe if God created this wonderful, wild, delightful, strange world "for his pleasure" and us in his image, it seems only normal that humans should be creative, too, don't you think? □



Hilda receives payment for her artwork at the recent Reba Place art show—and looks pretty excited about it!

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Shalom Connections

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Art of Community

--an editorial by David Janzen

This Shalom Connections issue is about artists in Christian community. But more importantly, it is about Christian community as a divine art form in which artists find their true calling and fulfillment.

We have heard the truism that God, as creator of the universe, is the original artist and God's image within us will issue in creativity as well. But creativity is not in itself a Christian virtue. Contemporary media and technology are relentlessly creating new things, harnessing the cleverness of artists and scientists, usually for trivia, but often for corrupt and destructive ends.

In good art you see something new. However, great art will cause you to see everything in a new way.

The creation of the world is the prelude. The Law and the Prophets are the first movement in which we already see God's favorite theme unfolding--the formation of a people that will demonstrate God's radical love to the world. But Jesus is the masterpiece, the center of the concerto, embodying and fulfilling what was promised of old. And we, the church, are the unfinished final movement. Christian artists find their place and meaning when they see themselves as part of a larger divine creation and performance, where their lives in community overflow in works that result in praise to God.

Jesus, the consummate artist:

Whatever you may think of Jesus' divine or human nature, he was a consummate artist. Anyone who studies his parables will discover a radical economy of words conveying unforgettable images and sayings that have become the vocabulary with which twenty centuries have made meaning of our world.

"Blessed are the poor in heart, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs."
"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Jesus' sayings shock us, stick with us and help us see God resourcefully at work to save humanity, especially those who are broken and hopeless before the powers of this world.

In a similar way, many people who

visit prophetic Christian communities are startled; longings awaken in them and they can no longer be at peace with the status quo. They are called to a new way of living, and they are touched by the power of God that makes such life possible. This power of calling people into a new kingdom where Jesus is Lord, this is the true art of community. Of course, in this art, the community is the material and the instruments, and the resurrected Jesus is the artist.

The witness of community: This witness of community is, I believe, what Jesus had in mind when he said to his followers, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of people, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven." Matt. 5:14-16.

When we practice art in the manner of Jesus, the natural response will be praise to God rather than glorification of some gifted persons or a group. How does that happen?

The apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12) says that God gives a variety of spiritual gifts, not for individuals, but through individuals for the edification and joy of the church community. Similarly, Christian artists in community have a role to

(Continued, following page.)



This image is from a series of wire face sculptures that Mike Creeger, from Church of the Sojourners, did a few years ago. Sometimes the community uses them in their Stations of the Cross on Holy Saturday, just before Easter. During this time, they redo their worship space with art to help one another meditate on the reality of the cross.

The Art of Community

(Continued from Previous Page)

play in this witness as they are called by God to join with others in making all things new—which is something quite different than creating novelty or being creative.

Christian artists do not need to produce something that looks “Christian.” How do you build a Christian table? I can’t imagine. But I have built tables with love for those who will use them in a city on a hill.

Christ-filled artists, in their work, point to something greater that is going on, and at the same time they participate in this new thing that comes from God and is inspired by Jesus.

Flannery O’Connor’s novels and short stories etched in her readers’ minds grotesque characters who attempt to find or to evade redemption in a God-haunted landscape. Her readers could not help wondering, what kind of life and convictions would give rise to such stories?

About her vocation as artist, she wrote, “The human comes before the art. You do not write the best you can for the sake of art but for the sake of returning your talent increased to the invisible God to use or not use as he sees fit.”

Art rooted in a community: Thomas Merton’s Seven Story Mountain was one of the most relevant books to the generation of post-WWII seekers, not because he tried to be relevant, but because he dedicated himself to live the

truth that he found in communion with God. He submitted his immense and unruly artistic gifts to a Trappist monastery in that search, and in bearing witness to that search for others.

Writing teachers always instruct their students to “Write about what you know.” Peter Fuller says in Art and Soul that “Good art can only be realized when a creative individual encounters a living tradition with deep tendrils in communal life.” Like Jesus, Dorothy Day, Wendell Berry, and Thomas Merton were writing from a specific place that they knew and loved intensely.

Commitment to a community feels like dying to self, and it is; yet, with all its limitations, this is the soil where roots can sink deep and lives bear fruit that lasts.

On a recent visit to Plow Creek, I asked Lynn and Rick Reha what makes an artist? Lynn affirmed “Everyone is an artist in some area of life that really blesses others.” Rick offered, “Art is any work you feel called to do as well as you can and are miserable if you fail to practice it.”

In this view, art is both a gift and a calling from God, a service to others, a skill to be developed. It is in some way within the reach of everyone. Thus there is no distinction in status between the practical arts and the fine arts, between making your living as an artist, or doing art when the opportunity affords. Making beds for guests, putting love into a new or an old piece of furniture, designing a spread-

sheet with care for those who will use it again, painting for a commission, teaching children a new song, or preparing a liturgy—all can be done with the love of Jesus that results in a community of thanksgiving to God.

Our Shalom Gathering “Lack of Talent” Shows are a way to break down the barriers that cause some to think that “My gifts are second rate and so I’ll not share them.” The body of Christ is deprived if you do not share your gifts. Since these talents are gifts from God—even though we practice, take lessons, develop our skills—the gifts are not personal possessions. They belong to the body of Christ. In this way we do not need to be tangled in false humility or hidden pride as if these were “my gifts” and my status is at stake in how people receive them.

Rather, we are privileged to live in communities of shared goods, shared gifts, and shared needs. Each of us offers what we have and asks for what we need because Christ has welcomed us, forgiven us, and called us into the action. Both our needs and our gifts build up the body of Christ, and when we offer them to each other, the world sees Jesus in how his followers love one another.

Does being an artist make one a better person? I heard an author on NPR make this observation: “The process of putting down a first draft and then progressively squeezing out the bullshit makes me, not just a better writer, but a better person.” I think he is referring to our tendency to fall in love with our own creation so that we can’t bear to cut out what is inferior or extraneous. By analogy, we can purify our own lives in a similar fashion as rewriting a text.

I can see serious pursuit of art making us better persons if our goal is to experience union with God, to become a saint. Then everything we do comes from a whole heart—washing dishes for guests, building a house, listening to someone in trouble, painting an icon—and can serve the purpose of squeezing out the false self and making room for God. There are many other motives for producing art—like getting famous, creating controversy, or seeking aesthetic pleasure for its own sake—that can move one to become a better artist, but not necessarily a better person.



Apples and Pears. Chico Fajardo-Heflin. Mixed media on cardboard.

Art for its own sake is a kind of idolatry, elevating the process of creation, as if it were the center of meaning. This constitutes a loss of perspective and ultimately glorifies cleverness rather than substance; it results in admiration or criticism of the artist, which separates us into geniuses and “the rest,” rather than uniting us in love and shared joy. Art for its own sake does not result in the discoveries that nourish our souls on the journey to union with God, creation and one another.

Good art sees into reality, discovering insights that partake in the thoughts of God. Like science, good art is integrative, and discovers simplicity at the heart of diversity. Good art, like good work, participates with God in the creation and recreation of the world.

Much art in every age has been devoted to flattering the wealthy and the powerful, sometimes with exceedingly great skill. But excellence in an evil cause eventually comes under judgment.

God gives gifts to individuals for the sake of the church community. When we think the artistic gifts we’ve been given are for our own glory, then they have been prostituted just as surely as artfully flattering others for pay. It took me several years in community to realize that achieving admiration is not the same as being loved—which was and is my real need. But as I was loved in my sin, I could let go of my ambition for admiration and become a more human being.

Art as dialogue: Thomas Aquinas maintained that God proceeds like the artist, in that a formative idea precedes the actual creation of the thing. The idea forms the object, and is not formed by it, which would be a kind of imitation.

Who am I to disagree with Aquinas? But I do. The artist always works, it seems to me, in a dialogue between the idea and the thing. That is why an artist never gets it right on the first stroke, the first draft, the first effort. The musician listens to the music and hears how it can be done better. The clay tells the potter what needs to come next. In the same way, creation is not finished in one stroke, it is ongoing.

Salvation history is not a perfect life that is then put on a pedestal. Jesus continues to labor with us until the Kingdom is come in its fullness. God seems to like



Communion. By Hannah Zazvorka.

the challenge of working within the frame of time, accepting limits so that our freedom is real and our love toward God can be un-coerced.

The Kingdom of God is the ultimate work of art, and it is in process. It is a resourceful recreation of what has gone wrong, but ultimately will come out right because God and good are more resourceful and creative than Satan and evil.

Art as worship: Ingmar Bergman was raised in the home of a Lutheran pastor, and his films explored his tensions with the Christian faith. But in his old age he said, “Art lost its basic creative drive the moment it was separated from worship. It severed an umbilical cord and now lives its own sterile life, generating and degenerating itself. In former days, the artist remained unknown, and his work was to the glory of God. He lived and died without being more or less important than other artisans: eternal values, immortality, and masterpiece were terms not applicable in his case. The ability to create was a gift. In such a world flourished vulnerability and natural humility.” (Ingmar Bergman, *Image Journal*, Sept. 7, 2004.)

In this spirit, I want to say a few things about the place from which I have been called to write, and work and serve.

Living in Reba Place Fellowship, I am supported in writing, and yet I am supported in many other things, so that writing is only a part of my service. Becoming a saint is my full time job and art is what sometimes spills over.

I am not a very creative writer, but a laboring rewriter of essays and editorials. My first draft is often a hurried attempt under deadline, trying to squeeze out a few thoughts that have pestered me. Once down on the page, I can begin to see the shape of what I have been given. My tenth or twentieth effort sometimes is blessed. I pray and struggle over, run away from, and come back to these projects because of a calling to express what I see God doing at Reba, or in the network of communities that makes up the People of God. When Joanne or other friends are involved in proofreading and commenting on the work, it turns out a lot better.

I don’t aim to produce “art.” Such an expectation seems elitist to me, and becomes a needless burden on my spirit to produce something exceptional out of my own resources. I believe if we do our work with our best attention and in harmony with God’s purposes, the work will also reveal harmony, truth, and beauty. Working in the love of God and with love for you all is reward enough. Let others decide if the result is art.



The Art of Community

Art, Peace and Community: Jim Harnish Tells His Story

As told to David Janzen

I was born in 1922. That makes me 85 years old.

My Father was a Mennonite lay mission worker in the City of Peoria. Then we moved to Eureka where Father served as a lay pastor in the Roanoke Mennonite congregation. I was there till I graduated from high school. To earn a living, my father was a painter. I grew up in it and worked for a painting contractor for 30 years.

When I was growing up we'd have revival meetings. One time I made a confession of faith in my teens. There were times when, you might say, I was a bit of an agnostic. But creation, I find, is so awe-inspiring, you have to go beyond the mundane to explain it.

I was in Alternative Service during World War II because I was a Conscientious Objector. I worked at soil conservation, forestry service, and then in a mental hospital. The time I spent in the C.O. camp was an education in non-violence. In that way the Bible made sense to me from beginning to end. Even the places in the Bible where there is war, it is never redemptive. At the end, (in Revelation) it is only the Lamb that is able to open the Book of Life. I developed quite a peace and justice library with books about the Quakers and their peace witness; and later John Howard Yoder's Politics of Jesus was important to me. I learned to know a Quaker, Larry Gara, who refused to register for the draft. He went to jail a year for that. Larry later taught at Bluffton College.

I met my future wife Donna in this way. One of Donna's brothers was in my Alternative Service unit. I loaned him a devotional book that he took home, and then his sister, Donna, took it to college. Because she had my book I wrote her, and



she wrote back. This went on for two years before we ever saw each other. We married and had two children.

After the War was over, I went to Bluffton College to get as much art as I could. Bluffton did not offer an art major, so I got a major in English Literature instead. But I learned everything I could from the art teacher, John Klaassen, a Russian refugee who came to the U.S. in the 20's. He was trained in Berlin. He did not believe in class distinctions and refused to wear a cap and gown at graduation ceremonies. He got me working with clay. I loved pottery because it was so elemental--earth, water, air and fire are all involved. In the firing, clay is vitrified and can no longer be reduced to clay.

Over the years I have produced pottery as much as I could in my free time. I got back into it seriously after my retirement. I did lots more here at Plow Creek than before we got here. A lot of my stuff comes out of my Biblical heritage. See those three lidded jars resembling the magi who visited the infant Jesus. Over there are a couple of high-relief tiles on the beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers," and "Blessed are the meek." Here is a small bust of Menno Simons. I've done lots of mugs, platters, communion cups. I gave Linas Brown three communion sets over the years that must be at Reba somewhere.

Because of arthritis my legs have failed me and I've had to give up my

potter's wheel. I gave all my equipment to another potter from Plow Creek, Tim Gale. I get around now with my walker. Jim Fitz pushes me to church in a wheelchair.

Donna and I were 50 years old when we came to Plow Creek community. Here is how it happened. For years we went to the General Conference Mennonite church at Washington, Illinois. Donna played the organ, and I taught Sunday School--even was a deacon. But we were not happy in a church where most of the young men had gone into the military during the War. We wanted a church that was interested in peace and justice. Then we became part of a house church. Our parents were upset. Donna's father called us "church tramps."

Years ago I heard Art Gish speak at a workshop about his book, Beyond the Rat Race. In our small town I didn't feel like I was in a rat race. I liked working with my hands. But we heard about Reba and the other Shalom Communities from Art.

Mitch Kingsley and I met on some church conference committees. He heard about our search and invited us to visit Plow Creek. We visited and decided to move that spring, in '74—one of the best decisions we ever made. Donna's Father was unhappy we joined, but when he visited Plow Creek, he affirmed us. He could see we weren't writing off our Mennonite history, but taking it more seriously.

I continued working for the same painting contractor till I retired. At work we talked about a lot of stuff—guns, parenting--anything. One worker, when he heard I'd been a C.O. during World War II, wouldn't talk to me the rest of the day. One of the company owners was very unhappy with our move to Plow Creek and reduced the amount of my hours. When the guys at work heard I had a college degree, one asked, "Then why are you a dumb painter?" I loved working with my hands and worked in some very beautiful homes, which I enjoyed.

Nature puts me in awe. Here at Plow Creek we have Daisy Hill, a remnant of the Tall Grass Prairie. Someone said, "Oh, it's just a bunch of weeds." But we were thrilled to find that remnant out there. It's called Daisy Hill because of all the

purple cone flowers among the tall and short bluestem, clover, and other plants. Bob Guth catalogued some sixty plant species on that little hill.

I have learned from and appreciated those Mennonite artists in my me-

dium of clay who have won acclaim. I especially appreciated Paul Soldner from Bern Indiana, who was world renowned. Paul Friesen who taught many years at Hesston College influenced me. No way did I become as skilled as they, but I did go as far as I could in that particular medium. I think you become a better person by relating to better people. You learn from them.

We had a son who had many emotional problems and who died in 1991 of a heart attack. He had left home before we came to Plow Creek. Our daughter was in high school, and when we talked about coming to Plow Creek, she was "rarin' to go." She and her husband have had ten children. At Donna's memorial service, our daughter came with three granddaughters. I have one daughter, 12 grandchildren and six great grandchildren. □



Reba Place Church communion service, by Jim Harnish.

One Thousand and One Egyptian Nights, by Jennifer Drago

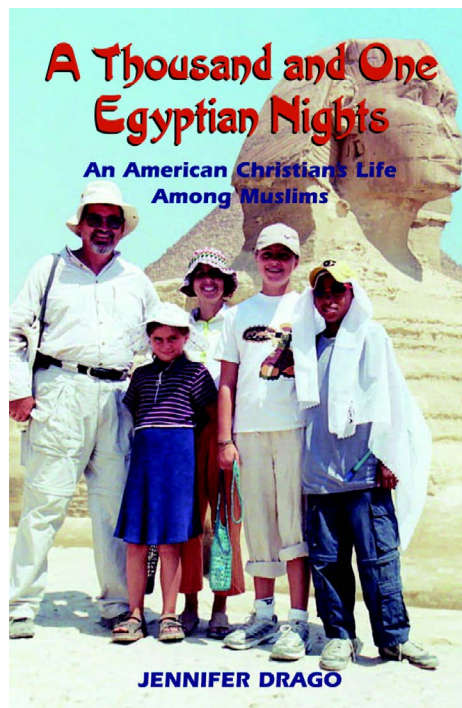
Reviewed by Annie Spiro

One Thousand and One Egyptian Nights is the story of one family's adventures and trials while living among Muslims and Coptic Christians in Beni Suef, Upper Egypt.

In 2003 the Drago-Smith family answered God's call to serve a three-year term in the Middle East with Mennonite Central Committee. Heads filled with lofty ideas of bridging both American-Arab and Christian-Muslim gaps, Jennifer and her family optimistically headed overseas.

They very quickly found themselves far, far away from the Jubilee Partners community, of which they were long-time members.

Among the typical challenges of mastering a new language, learning



to enjoy new foods and settling into radically different daily schedules, Jennifer and her family also confronted what often seemed like insurmountable cultural differences. For example, while the Muslim faith does not technically condone spousal

abuse, in much of Egypt these things are not discussed openly. There are no programs, and women are not allowed to live alone. The woman who marries against her parents' wishes can expect to find no help from them if her marriage sours.

But while much of life in Egypt was originally difficult and strange, Jennifer and her family found joy, stability and contentment as their time there stretched on. Where once they were confused by the bartering system, frustrated by seemingly pointless restrictions and frightened by much more immediate violence and poverty than is witnessed by the average American (let alone intentional-community dweller), Drago and her family slowly learned to navigate the vagaries of Egyptian life.

By turns amusing and heart-wrenching, One Thousand and One Egyptian Nights is an eye-opening journey of discovery and growth, stretching and Spirit. □

The Art of Community

CPT Depleted Uranium Delegation

by David Hovde

From October 26 to November 4, I participated in a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation to Jonesborough, Tennessee. On the outskirts of Jonesborough is Aerojet Ordnance Tennessee, the only plant in the U.S. making weapons that contain depleted uranium.

Depleted uranium (DU) is a heavy metal that is radioactive. It is a waste product from the process of preparing uranium for use in nuclear power plants, and in making nuclear weapons. Because it is very heavy, and cheap, it is the preferred substance the U.S. army uses in tank armor, and to coat bullets and shells. It has been used since the first Gulf War.

When a DU coated weapon hits a hard surface, it ignites and produces a radioactive dust. When inhaled, the dust particles pass through the lung/blood barrier and go all over the body. This can cause cancer, and can even cause birth defects in the children of those who have been contaminated. (From 1990 to 2001, in Basra, Iraq, an area heavily bombed in the first Gulf War, birth defects increased from 3 per 1000 births, to 23 per 1000 births.)



Julie Lonneman

Our delegation's living arrangements and schedule had been worked out ahead of time by Cliff Kindy. (Cliff was not with us, though, as he had left to go to northern Iraq with CPT.) Our group of four stayed with the local Church of the Brethren congregation. My teammates, Mabel Brunk, Juanita Shenk, and Lois Dickason, collectively had CPT experience in Jonesborough, Iraq, and Palestine.

Throughout our time we worshiped together, shared meals and meal preparation, processed our experiences, and shared our life stories.

On October 27, we participated in an anti-war rally at a park, which about 400 people attended. There was much unity among those attending, but there was also opposition to the rally. A motorcycle group of veterans rode loudly around us, carrying signs that read, "Support Our Troops." Police searched all those who entered the park. Our team carried a sign which read, "Radiation Kills. Yesterday: Hiroshima. Today: DU."

We met with many different individuals throughout our stay: activists, veterans, V.A. hospital workers, pastors, a scientist, a former Aerojet employee, an environmental epidemiologist (person who studies environmental diseases), and someone from the local representative's office. We spoke about DU and its effects with those we met, and listened to them tell about their experiences. We even went to military recruiting centers, where we were met with friendliness and interest.

At the end of our stay, we organized a worship service across from Aerojet. We held signs that read, "Bread, Not Bombs", "Bombs into Ploughs", and "Love Your Enemies. Pray for Those Who Hurt You." We sang, read, prayed, and had communion using donut holes. We then took a box of donut holes across the road to the plant, and left them outside the locked door, with some brochures.

I came on this delegation because I was moved by the stories of Cliff,

Peggy Gish, and Kathy Kelly, who had been to Iraq and witnessed the suffering and violence there. I had also participated in the Occupation Project, where groups go to senators' and representatives' offices to try to persuade them not to vote for war spending. As I prayed and talked with others about what more I could do, coming on this delegation seemed like the next step.

I was aware of God's providential care on the trip. At one point, I was going to be let go from my job if I chose to participate in the delegation. I decided to go anyway, but then later my supervisor told me they would love to have me return to my job when I got back. The family of one of my housemates, Andy Ross, lives in the Jonesborough area. Two of us on the delegation team were able to attend Hopwood Christian Church, where Andy's dad, Tim, is the pastor. (Former Reba people, Aaron and Grete Scott, also happened to be there that Sunday.) Tim joined us for our worship service across from Aerojet, and also had our team over for dinner with his family. I even got to see my brother's family, who came an hour's drive to see me from their home in North Carolina.

Our local contact, Linda Modica, an activist who organized the rally we participated in, told us that CPT's presence was encouraging to the locals. CPT is respected for its objectivity and credibility. CPT was also able to bring together diverse people concerned about DU. Linda said she wants CPT to keep sending delegations. So does John Paul Hasko, a former Aerojet employee who was contaminated by DU in the days before the plant took more strict safety precautions. He has helped lead a strike over health concerns for the workers at the plant. 15,000 pages of evidence on the hazards of working at Aerojet were finally submitted to the Supreme Court after twenty-two years, but were rejected with one sentence. John Paul treated us to breakfast, gave us gifts, and led us on a tour. His gratefulness to us for listening to his story was obvious. □

Rogers Park News

By Sally Youngquist

We are enjoying God's masterpieces of creativity reflected in babies Kylie Doran and Delaney Dahlaw, who get passed around to their admiring fans within our group and the wider church. And speaking of giving birth. . . former practicing members Tim and Patty Peebles and Eric and Katie Dahlaw left the Fellowship of Rogers Park in order to start a new cell group at Living Water Community Church this fall, organized around the study and practice of the 12 marks of the New Monasticism. They have requested their core group become an "apprentice community" to the Fellowship of Rogers Park. They plan to stay connected to mentors in FRP yet exercise the freedom to develop their own practices of shared community life amongst the many 20-somethings who have shown up at LWCC. While we miss them from our weekly Tuesday meetings, some of us are participating in their large group meeting Wednesday nights to study the 12 marks. Occasionally we are asked to give input from our experiences in RPF or So-journers.

We're pleased to have Tim Doran and Sharon Moriarty become novice members along with their 3 girls. Nieta Jones continues with us as a practicing member and we are welcoming Judy Friberg as a new practicing member. We are explor-



Photo courtesy of Hannah Blackwood, on a recent exchange-program trip to Barcelona. She enjoyed the unique architecture - some ancient, some modern and whimsical - and captured over 800 digital images!

ing ways to have more shared life beyond our Tuesday meetings. So far this has resulted in continuing to sponsor a Wednesday night potluck for the LWCC community, sharing a meal once per month as a communal group, eating Monday lunch together with whoever is available, and more of us joining the Frantzes for Sunday night prayer on the corner of Pratt & Ashland.

On meeting nights, several of us can be seen stitching quilt squares for various LWCC members' anniversary quilts and for Hilda Ginny Frantz and Kevin Casey's wedding quilt (intended for a wedding planned next June). We have marked significant rites of passage with our older offspring. Tikva Frantz got a job as a bilingual Chicago public school teacher and moved out of the family home to a nearby apartment. Hilda Ginny Frantz moved to San Fran-

cisco to take up a baking job in the bakery where she did her internship. Bethany Blackwood left home to start studies at Messiah College in Grantham, PA. And Carol Youngquist moved to shared housing with fellow female Christian engineering students at U of Illinois, following an enjoyable summer in the RPF internship program. Even Hannah Blackwood, age 13, flew the nest for a few weeks as part of a student exchange program to Barcelona, Spain.

RPF and LWCC members celebrated Lisa Selph's 50-year transition with a surprise contra dance on Nov. 24. Through creative tributes in song, scripture (the new Living Water translation of Proverbs 31) and best-out-of-three "Lisa tales" competition we expressed our appreciation of this outstanding sister-servant in our midst.

Ronn Frantz makes common work available to RPF and LWCC members through Reunion Property Management employment. This helps create community among those of us who live near the corner of Ashland and Pratt. Ronn's visionary skills have led him to sponsor discussions among LWCC folks about the possibilities of car sharing and purchasing buildings for shared housing. He recently joined the RPF Leadership Team as secretary. □



RoPo babies Kylie McKenna Doran (L) and Delaney Sue Dahlaw (R) - with partial heads of Nina Frantz and Katie Jean Dahlaw.

The Art of Community

Hope Fellowship News

By Nancy Gatlin

"God taught me to sing a new song, a song of praise to our God." Psalm 40:3

We are learning to sing a new song of praise to our God through many good-byes and several hellos.

The most poignant good-bye has been to our sister, Ramona Lea Ryan, who left our side to be in God's full presence on Saturday, November 10. Many of us had the honor of surrounding her at this time with hymns and prayers. The wider community had the opportunity to celebrate her life at The World Hunger Relief Farm on Sunday, November 18. We were all blessed by the wonderful music played by the Central Texas String Academy as well as the pieces that Luis and the children played in Ramona's honor. Music was one of Ramona's passions and loves. She understood it as a universal language. Her children Gwendolyn, Paloma and Gerson will continue this legacy that they've received from their mother.

David and Hanna Heddy moved to Vancouver, WA the middle of October. The Barrons and several World Hunger Relief interns have also left. All of us have been impacted by these departures. Even as we miss them we recognize God's provision in the new brothers and sisters, neighbors and interns that are becoming a part of us. So we continue singing new stanzas of the Kingdom song.

Hope Fellowship continues the journey of the calling to go deeper into Christ's one new humanity (Ephesians 2:15). This has been the focus of our teaching time in the past two months. The theoretical becomes specific and practical as we seek to understand how the An



glo and Hispanic cultures become the new humanity in matters of perception of time, hospitality and straight talk, to mention a few. We look forward to having George

Yancey, author of Beyond Racial Gridlock, come speak to us on January 5.

Our new leadership and ministry plan is finally up and running, lending some helpful order and decision-making structures to our life together.

Our women's retreat the last weekend in October was a time of renewal as we took time to study and practice prayer with the theme: "With Open Hands... Ready to Receive".

Hope Fellowship assisted Fernando and Carrie Arroyo, who participate in Hope Fellowship's life, with helping Amnesty International bring The Journey of Hope to Waco. The stories of forgiveness from family members of murder victims challenge all of us to love our enemies.

Our church was strongly represented in the last Peace Seminar put on by Every Church A Peace Church of Central Texas. Though not the only voice, we find ourselves being one of very few voices for non-violence in Waco. It is a privilege to give witness to this

way of peace through the ever-other week silent peace vigils that are held on a prominent intersection in town.

Though we may sing off key at times, we continue singing the new song that Christ is teaching us. As we walk with each other through joyful times and trying ones too, we Hear the Kingdom tune beckoning us to harmonize.



Why write?

Reflection by Marcus Rempel

Why write, why pile up more words, when there is nothing new under the sun?

Well, the sun comes up every morning to see what's new, and tells a spell-binding tale every evening when it sets. Creation speaks. As the Psalmist writes, "Day to day pours forth speech and night declares knowledge." Endlessly, wordlessly, there are prayers, poems and parables rising up from the earth. Writing deepens my listening and anchors my memory of the snippets of the creation song that I have caught. Like an infant cooing on the brink of language, I know my babble is only an approximation, only a fraction of the depth and breadth of the communication going on all around me. But I can't help but try to join the conversation. At the crimson song of sunsets and orioles, at the flying V of wild geese, at the dip, glide and hover of dragonflies, my eyes go wide, my ears strain, my pulse quickens; it means something! How to reply? Like the infant, I care less that my excited cry lacks intelligence than that I want to be in relationship. And as alienated as my culture is from creation and Creator, I'm willing to hazard that it's a cry worth sharing.

Reba Place News

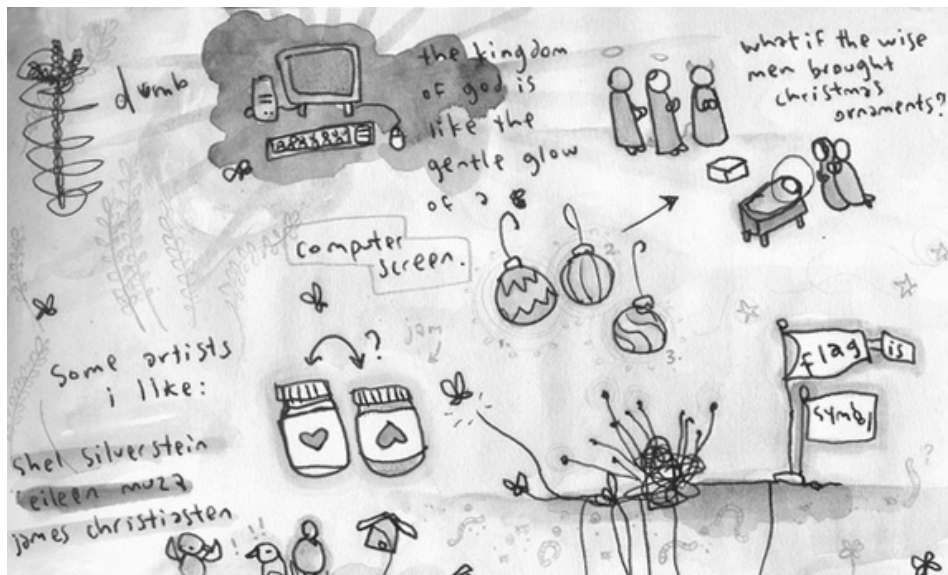
by Annie Spiro

It's the day after Thanksgiving, and I'm sitting in the Reba Place Fellowship office reveling both in having the place to myself and the Christmas music which is finally, starting today, seasonally appropriate.

Out my window the sun is shining for the first time in well over a week, the last of our first real snow is melting, and a sharp breeze cuts through the air like a knife. Advent is nearly here, and with it, time to meditate on an eventful autumn for the Fellowship.

Some of our most exciting news is the welcoming of Adam and Stephanie Vaughan into RPF as novice members. They first felt God calling them to join at Reba's 50th this past August, witnessing how God has worked in this body. They have great peace about their decision, and we look forward with joy to watching God continue to work in their lives.

In addition to this new novice couple, we have also welcomed three new practicing members: Johnmark Hatfield, formerly of Greenville College, Abby Nafziger, formerly of Goshen College, and Jesse Miller. If



Watercolor, ink, and pencil image by Chico Fajardo-Heflin.

that last name already seems familiar to you, it is because Jesse has changed from novice to practicing member in order to give more consideration to his relationship with Roselyn Wilson, who is the Reba Place Church secretary, but has no official relationship to the Fellowship at this time. Welcome new practicing members!

One great cause for thanksgiving is the speedy recovery of Peggy Belsler, who suffered a small heart attack in early October, followed by emergency multiple bypass surgery.

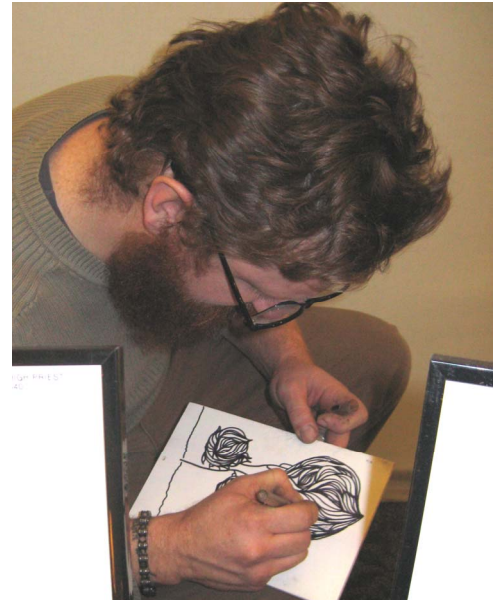
But, thanks be to God, within a few weeks she was able to see visitors. Soon after that, it was possible, while walking through the neighborhood, to pass Peggy, supported by Julius, on a walk around the block. She continues to heal apace. Thank you also to Anali Gatlin, on loan from Hope Fellowship and currently an apprentice here, for stepping up in the Clearing Household to take on many of Peggy's tasks. Anali's presence and hard work has made life in that household, and indeed throughout the community, more comfortable while Peggy was indisposed.

As David Janzen's administrative assistant, I have had a busy few weeks while David has been on a whirlwind trip to both India and Germany, from which he returned this morning. In India David spent some good time with Das and Doris Maddimadugu, longtime friends working among the poor there. According to an email he sent home, David was able to accomplish many of his goals. He has taken lots of pictures, engaged in many meaningful conversations, and finally been able to indulge all the finger-eating he was denied as a child. Upon leaving India, David then spent several days with daughter, Natasha, and her family in Berlin, Germany. We are thankful for this opportunity for world travel, and the renewed connections it has brought.



Stephanie Vaughn cultivates a new trade—basket-weaving! - while husband Adam, along with Chico and Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin, looks on. These four and several others spent a recent Saturday together at an RPF Novices Retreat.

The Art of Community



Over the first weekend of November, roughly twelve young people from both Reba and Living Water coordinated a conference called Cynicism and Hope: Reclaiming Discipleship in a Post-Democratic Society. There, participants and speakers asked, “what it would look like if we, as social-justice minded Christians, were honest about our disillusionment? How we can live out God’s call to prophetic witness in an apathetic and disempowered society? How we can nourish our hope for the kingdom of God?” Very inspired, but relatively inexperienced, we were able to come together as a team, hopefully providing a space for honest reflection and discussion. Thank you to our congregations and to the Fellowship for the use of facilities and wisdom. We

couldn’t have done this without you.

An undertone to all of this has been the turning of the season and corresponding thoughts of winter food preparation. In many households, but especially the Patch (household of young people), much time has been dedicated to the blanching, freezing, bagging, boiling, and canning needed to ensure that some of summer’s bounty be available through the colder months. Over the past several years Reba has seen more and more returning to the old ways, to a desire for the healthy and sustainable, to a commitment to earth stewardship. Thank you very much to those among us who are doing so much work, and thank you also to Plow Creek, whose Community Supported Agriculture program has enabled so much of this food to enter our community.

Lord, you are so good. Help us to feel your presence among and within us as we move into this season of Advent. Help us to have more faith in you today than we did yesterday, and help us to have more tomorrow than we did today. □



Clockwise, from Above Left.

1. *The Cynicism and Hope Conference served as a reunion of sorts for Reba-folk from all over. Pictured—2007 Summer interns, Nehemiah Rosell and Nathan Wehrmeister.*
2. *Matt Adams creates new art during the Reba Place 2nd Annual Art Show and Benefit.*
3. *Johnmark Hatfield strums quiet melodies during the art show. Behind Johnmark is “Crucifixion,” an installation piece by Australian artist, Chrissyie Heinrich, which has been on display in the Meetinghouse for fifteen years.*
4. *Ruth Johnson and Camille Hobbs, part of the smiling kitchen crew during C+H.*



Sojourners News

by Katie Piché

For our life together we celebrate... and celebrate! We keep a church calendar together which includes regular celebrations. Celebrating holidays together is part of how we become family, specifically God's family, and practice gratitude. This year we entered into the holiday season with a "here Thanksgiv-ing" (we alternate Thanksgivings between church family and biological family every other year). We cooked and ate together as households, inviting friends, family, and neighbors to join us. We then gathered as the larger body for desserts, thanksgivings, and singing. I think that we enjoyed this time, but our singing was somewhat subdued from full bellies.

From Thanksgiving we flow into Advent. We light one advent candle each week in our gathered worship service and in our households at mealtime. We accompany the advent candle lighting with "O Come, O Come Emmanuel". Each year for Advent someone in the church selects a series of daily readings and meditations that each person does on his or her own time. The climax comes when we celebrate our Christmas Eve service, which is actually a few days before Christmas Eve. Then we go on church break in order to rest and/or be with family, reconvening on January 6



Mary Toney, celebrating the big 3-0.

with a large Epiphany celebration.

Our church celebrations are not limited to holy days and holidays, but include decade birthdays. In November, we were pleased and honored to celebrate 30 years of Mary Toney. Matt Toney (her husband) and Krista Creeger (her longtime friend) planned a party that celebrated Mary and her pastimes and created a way for the church to have fun together. We played a friendly tournament of badminton, ate a relaxed dinner of pizza, held a jam session of songs from our worship book, and closed with Holden Evening Prayers.

Gathered worship on Sunday eve-

nings is perhaps the most important meeting we have as a church, and music is essential to that time. There are some new and renewed sounds coming out of gathered worship these days. Nate Pequette, one of the apprentices this year, is playing the piano for us, bringing new life and new songs such as "God of Wonders." Karl Scholl, who some of you may know from the Chicago area, now lives in San Francisco and has been getting to know Sojourners. It is not uncommon to find him leading out on his mandolin or harmonica during worship. With the return of Tim Otto earlier this year has also come the return of a Taize worship service on the first Sunday of the month. Joining the Taize worship team is our in house flautist Jenny Prosa; she has been with us for just over two years now.

Church of the Sojourners has been working alongside Rebuild Sudan this year. Zoe Mullery and Tessa Richardson are helping Michael Kuany, a lost boy from Sudan who is living among us, to get this project up and running. The goal is to build a school in the area of Sudan where Michael is from and to support Bishop Philip and his Diocese in southern Sudan. Zoe and Tessa made a trip at the beginning of the year to Sudan with Michael and got to know Bishop Philip. Tessa ran in



Ruben and Mateo Langston, playing badminton at Mary Toney's birthday party.

The Art of Community

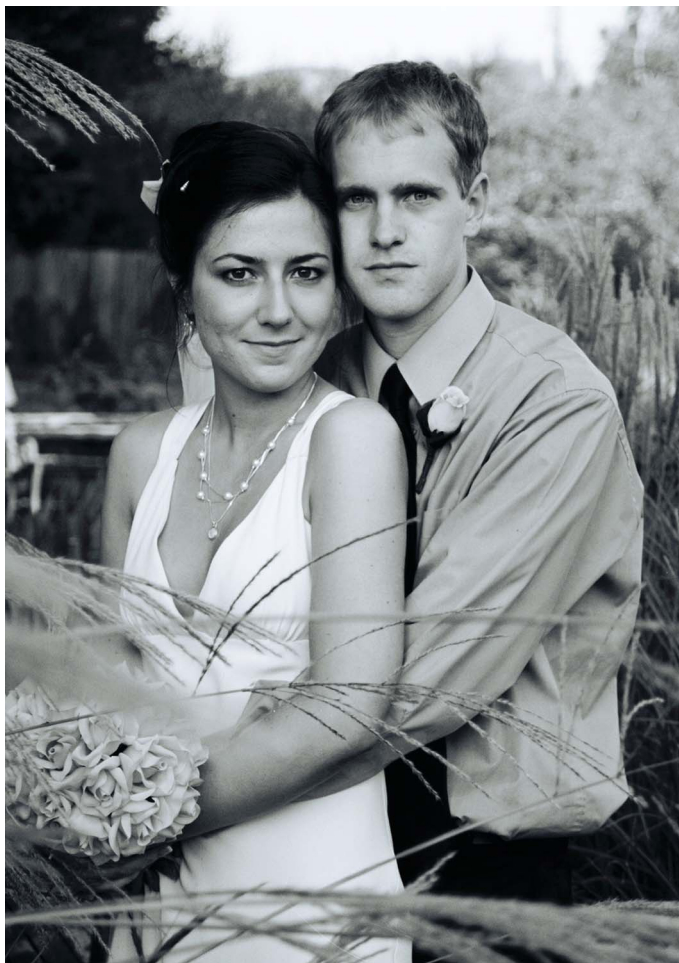
the Chicago Marathon (in 90 degree weather!) on October 7 to raise money for this project. She finished the race before it was called off due to the extreme heat.

This fall Mary Toney and Tim Otto led the church in a study of Freedom of Simplicity by Richard Foster. This study has been important as we think about what we consume in resources, the food we eat, reconciliation, and remembering God in daily life among other things. We have spent some time this last month on reconciliation over little and big things between us. In early November we put pictures of each person and scriptures on the wall of our worship space. We proceeded to have a silent time for people to pray for forgiveness and reconciliation as they went around the room and looked at each person's photo. God seems to be at work in this area of our lives.



Photo by Zoe Mullery.

Rubén and Mateo Langston are Sojourners newest kids. They are twin sons of Dawn Langston, one of the apprentices this year. They are a lively and cheerful addition to our body, and remind us of our call to welcome one another. Part of the way they use their energy is through ballet. □



Jadie Mollier and Ian Creeger married in September.
Photo by Hannah Zazvorka.



Rebecca Jane Gish. By Hannah Zazvorka.

Plow Creek News

By Rich Foss

This fall Plow Creek has been blessed by the teaching gifts of Rick Reha and Greg Clark. Greg, a Reba Place Fellowship member, is at Plow Creek this school year while on sabbatical from his philosophy professorship at North Park University.

Rick and Greg have been doing an overview of the Old Testament this fall during the adult teaching times. Their enthusiastic teaching has folks among us reading parts of the Old Testament for the first time.

When they began the series, I wondered if they would dodge the sexiest book of the Bible, one that I don't think has ever been taught at Plow Creek—the Song of Songs. Greg devoted an entire Sunday to the Song of Songs and did a great job of covering both the sexuality and the spirituality of the book. A little known fact he mentioned: more commentaries have been written on the Song of Songs than any other book of the Bible.

At a recent PCF members' meeting Mark Stahnke read a passage about Elijah and said that Rick's recent teaching had inspired him to read both I and II Samuel and I and II Kings. We have been blessed as Greg and Rick share their gifts for teaching with the body at Plow Creek.

The fall of 2007 has been a time of goodbyes at Plow Creek. We said goodbye to Bill and Kate Newhouse who moved to Pennsylvania and to Bethany Davis and her children who moved from the farm to a house in Princeton as Bethany pursues joining the Catholic Church. We still have the joy of connecting to the Davis clan at Friday night common meals. In December we will say goodbye to Kevin and Lorie Behrens and their three children as they move back to Michigan. They came in January of 2004 when Kevin served as an Evergreen Leaders intern and then stayed to serve as the farm marketing manager.



Sarah Foss at an October 20 protest in San Francisco, along with others from the Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship conference, calling for affordable housing to prevent homelessness. Photo by Rich Foss

We also said goodbye to Dan and Katie Piche from Church of the Sojourners who spent a farm season at Plow Creek, February through October, so that Katie could learn gardening from Erin Kindy and Dan could learn guitar building from Rick Reha. Dan and Katie jumped right into church and fellowship life while they were here. Each of the people who moved this fall were a gift to us and will be missed dearly.

Goodbyes and welcoming new people are part of the rhythm of community. We've also welcomed back Paul and Heather Munn after they did a five-month pilgrimage/walk from Boston to Florida. They are now beginning to develop their spiritual retreat ministry for people in recovery programs.

We are looking forward to the February wedding of Erin Kindy and Carlos Mucú. Erin and Carlos will be living on the farm after their wedding.

With the moves we have a couple of apartments open and we're looking forward to welcoming those whom the Lord sends to explore with us being a global village practicing the peace of Jesus.

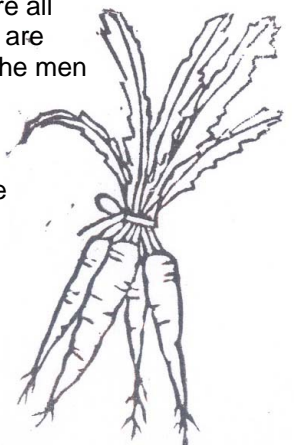
Speaking of peace, Jim Fitz did a west coast trip in October and early November speaking 25 times in

Oregon and California. He spoke at the Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship conference in San Francisco that Sarah and I also participated in.

After giving a presentation to four classes at Mission High in San Francisco, Jim contributed books to the school library. "These books about peacemaking will be great for our library; I've been thinking that we need something along this line," said the librarian. Wherever Jim goes he plants seeds of peace.

Correction. In a previous Plow Creek report I said that Katie Piche started morning prayers here. Katie gently let me know that it was Lynn Reha who started it and Lynn humbly did not correct me.

And that's the news from Plow Creek where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.





school for conversion

Special Events

Inhabiting the Church Conference:

March 1-2, Portland, OR

Contact Mike Munk: michaelmunk@earthlink.net

Lenten Retreat with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Chanequa Walker-Barnes

"Beloved Community Beyond the Color Line"

Birmingham, AL (Mary's House Catholic Worker)

Contact Shelley Douglass: shelleyd9@juno.com

School for Conversion Classes for 2008

SFC 101: Intro to Christianity as a Way of Life

SFC 101: Jan 11-13, Pasadena, CA (Mission Year Alumni)

SFC 101: Feb 8-10, San Francisco, CA (Church of the Sojourners)

SFC 101: April 18-20, Philadelphia, PA (The Simple Way/Camden House)

SFC 101: May 9-11, Springfield, MA (Nehemiah House)

SFC 101: Sept 26-28, Comer, GA (Jubilee Partners)

SFC 101: Oct 17-19, San Francisco, CA (Church of the Sojourners)

SFC 102: Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope

July 26-Aug 5, Brazil (SFC Latin America)

Contact Sam Ewell: s_ewell@yahoo.com

SFC 103: New Monasticism & the Church

July 18-20, Arnprior, ON (Galilee Centre) - info@galileecentre.com

The School For Conversion provides theological education and practical formation for the sake of conversion into a new way of life. In a recent Christian Century article, "Seminary 2050" (Feb. 21, 2006), Brian McLaren wrote that "seminary programs should be one part monastery, one part seminar and one part mission agency." SFC is an experiment in just that kind of education. Based in Christian communities of neo-monastic discipleship, SFC facilitates study directed not toward the production of good papers, but rather toward the creation of new community and ministry opportunities in the abandoned spaces of our world.

For additional information and updates about School for Conversion, please visit our website:

www.newmonasticism.org/sfc

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