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“How to Live as the People of God” Two Reviews of John Alexander’s *Being Church*

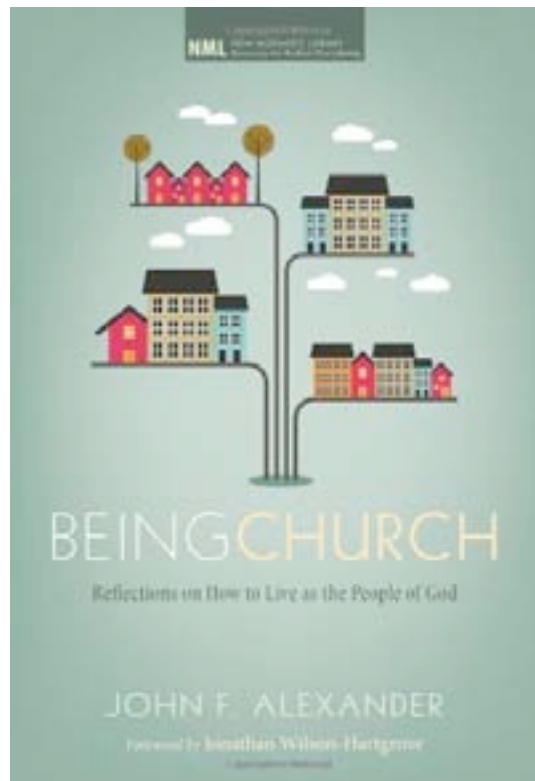
By Josh McCallister
Reba Place Fellowship

Being Church is a book about living into the vision of New Testament Church as a community within and in contrast to the broader culture. I was not privileged to meet author John Alexander personally before his death in 2001, so reading this, his magnum opus, has been a real getting-to-know-you opportunity for me. Wipf and Stock has published *Being Church* posthumously as a part of the New Monasticism Library. John Alexander was highly educated and served several communities in his lifetime, giving the last ten years of his life to Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco. I am grateful that he wrote so casually: his voice is funny, transparent, and often vulnerable. Most of all, I appreciate how he never gave up on the church as God’s instrument for transforming the world through a people.

I first read an earlier manuscript of *Being Church* while I was working for a church, and for me it was a cool drink in the desert. I was working for a mainline denomination but planning for life in intentional community. Alexander said a lot of things I was thinking, and the affirmation was a great encouragement. Full disclosure: I want you to read this book.

Being Church is divided into five sections. The first is on “The Nature of the Church.” For many Americans, the practice of church means commuting to a building and joining for an hour in

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Josh McCallister's Review from page 1 continued...

song and story with people who mostly agree about the main tenets of the faith. Alexander argues that this commuter church model contradicts the concept of “being church.” Rather than a once a week gathering for worship, the church is the people of God gathered as a community 24/7. Not many who read this SMC publication would disagree with that. To explain his critique of the contemporary Western church, Alexander uses the parable of a baseball team that comes to the field and plays tiddly-winks instead of a ball game. It’s not that they’re playing badly; the problem is they are not playing the right game! The right game then, what we should be playing, is making disciples of Jesus and, as fellow Sojourner Jack Bernard would say, becoming saints. Alexander suspects contemporary churches are missing the “grandeur of Paul’s vision (an extravagant and beautiful community of love), made concrete in the church” (13). When I think back on my formative years in several congregations, the concrete extravagance of well-formed saints living in unity is not what comes to mind.

For Alexander, commuting to a congregation that suits my interests and is convenient for my lifestyle is not morally neutral. To become a saint I need to learn to function as part of the Body of Christ. This requires a reinvention of the church in our time and place.

Section two of *Being Church* names obstacles churches must contend with in modern Western culture. Three of the obstacles to embodying the church are individualistic approaches to faith, affinity groups that attempt to fill a need for belonging, and careers. We must renounce both individualism and an affinity group so broad we don’t always see it: nationalism. By living within the same borders, we as citizens are convinced that our country is better than others and become unified by ethnocentrism. Often the pledge of allegiance to one flag can generate a spirit of blind support for what “we” do, over and against what non-US citizens think about our actions and policies. In fact, the daily reciting of the pledge by students is an indoctrination toward national affinity.

Reading this book during the election season helped me keep a healthy distance from the concerns of earthly power. (I’m a slow reader, so I heard the 2012 Republican and Democratic National Conventions and all debates as I read!)

Alexander takes an extreme position on what the role of the church is in politics, and just how significant is each person’s contribution. “I suppose my claim is that being a good president of the United States will have less impact than being a properly functioning member of a local body of Christ” (76). His point is that no career or endeavor will matter more than being a contributing member of the Body of Christ.

For Alexander, the dedication we Americans have to the perceived importance of our jobs is a direct hindrance for church communities. If we really believe the church is God’s primary tool for redeeming the earth, we cannot rightly put much stock in our little careers. Many of us were raised to believe that we could be heroes who could change the world for good, heightening individualism and minimizing the communal



Being Church: Worship at Plow Creek in the Stahnke's living room

tenets of the Jesus movement. In chapter six, “Why Your Job is not Your Calling,” Alexander argues boldly that God’s call on your life is service to the Kingdom of God in your local church. In fact, your calling has nothing to do with money.

I think Section one on “The Nature of the Church” would have been enhanced by a discussion of the challenges religious institutions inflict upon their members through hierarchy and clergy distinctions. Denominations often reinforce this distinction between clergy and laity in the organization of their leadership. With the clergy / laity divide we squeeze out many gifts of the spirit waiting to be loosed through our congregations. Until those gifts are welcomed through a participatory congregation, the church is not functioning well.

The book’s third section deals with church structures, especially how house churches and small group models within congregations can work toward more deep and significant connections among the members. The various models mentioned all have strengths and weaknesses: some are easy programs to get running but never reach an intensity that allows koinonia to thrive. Other designs, like a live-in church, are meaningful connections that only a few western Christians are going to consider joining. Clearly, we in a transient culture need to restructure our lives with stability before we see the maturity in long-suffering that produces a saint.

This section contains one of the more precious gems in the book, found in chapter eleven, “On Becoming an Apache.” Worth the price of the book! Mr. Alexander and several other

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Shalom Connections

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Sojourners developed an analogy of the church as a culture. A new member needs to go through a process of acculturation before their interest in membership can be confirmed. For a native tribe (Apaches) to receive a white man (for example) as one of their own, there would need to be real evidence of conversion from what he used to be. He'd need to speak Apache, dress like an Apache, eat, live, think, hunt like one of the tribe. And to claim membership without a real change in lifestyle would either speak poorly of the tribe or of the man. This is because the tribe is rich in tradition and distinct from other tribes. Likewise, a local congregation ought to be rich in tradition--songs, celebrations, foods, images. In our communities we have the opportunity--maybe the responsibility--to create deep traditions. At Reba we make quilts when people get married, for example. There should be rich rites of passage as our youth discover who they are, as our young adults figure out how they can best serve the whole, as our elders begin to prepare for death. It requires a careful and attentive eye watching as people transform, and some celebrations will need to be created. Here again, we see the emphasis on congregation as a contrast society. Joining is serious conversion.

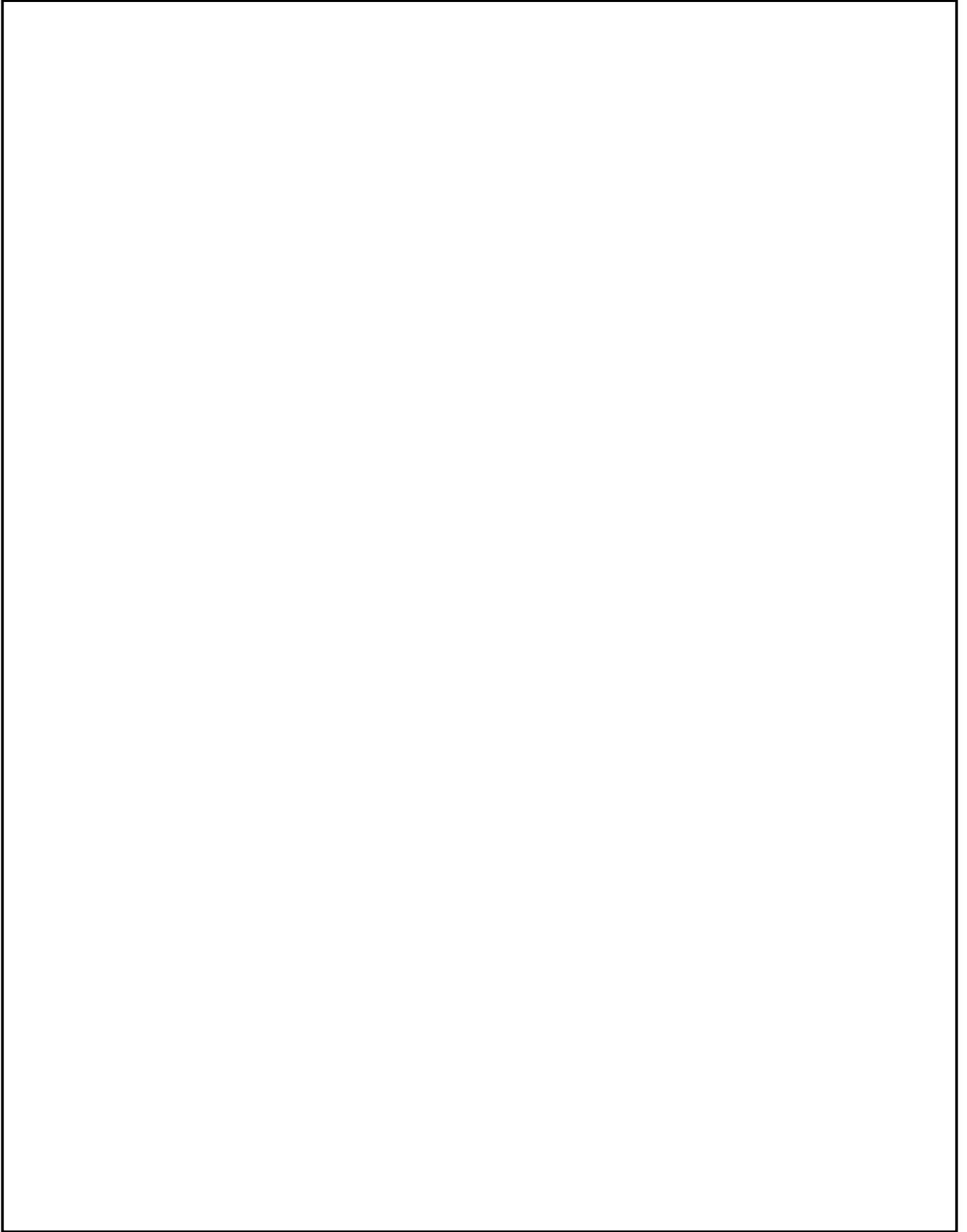
Being Church, Section Four suggests that the way we do church is a form of lived theology and introduces some doctrine for living in a communal church. Living in community is a method for killing the ego and learning about service to our brothers and sisters. We become honest about our imperfections and realize we can be hard to live with. As Alexander writes, "The biggest problem in missions almost always is that the missionaries don't get along with each other." (182) It is exciting to think that living in the moment as a servant and getting fulfillment through being a servant to the people around me is a means to thriving and living a satisfied life. Instead of dwelling on the past or waiting for a future pay-off, I can serve my actual neighbors in community and find purpose and meaning in it. Maybe Alexander would say, "give up your rights, serve people, and you will find the spirit of unity."

The book's last section, "The Mark of the Church (Love and Unity)," points to love as the game we ought to be playing. We will certainly do a bad job at times, but it's the right game. We love God and we love each other with deliberate practices. Our visible love for one another becomes a key component to any mission outside of our congregation. Showing love through appreciation is also a key component of life within our congregations. Noting the work of Dr. John Gottman, Alexander says praising each other is a love act that strengthens community. He writes that we ought to give words of appreciation at least five times as often as we correct or confront each other. He mentions young communities with lots of zeal that are passionate about confronting each other but don't have enough love together to make it last. Appreciation aids the reconciliation of a relationship under stress.

This section also talks about submission to the wise members of your church, as elders who have a kind of authority that comes through life experience. Cooperating with folks who have wisdom instead of being rebelliously independent can produce the fruit of a spirit-filled and reverent unity.

A valid critique of this book's model of church may be that community or live-in-church can be insular. When the members put all their effort into caring for one another they will have no time left to reach out in service to the neighborhood. Those of us living in intentional community are familiar with this concern. *Being Church* does not attempt to balance out the time spent "inside the walls" with ways a church will benefit the neighborhood outside. I think we are all counting on Jesus' promise that the world will know about Him because we love one another.

The very last chapter is about Sabbath rest. Most American Christians don't take the Sabbath commands very seriously. Protestants and evangelicals have big convictions and a sense of duty to accomplish things for God. So do communitarian, kingdom of God people. Making sabbath a routine somehow, subtly and quietly over time, helps us to believe God will do what he needs to do. The work of running a community or church is not all up to us. God will sync our group to the Kingdom if we let him. I wonder if someone like John Alexander needed to put this chapter in as a reminder to himself - with all the important doctrine, theology, and good ideas in this book - to remember that God creates and sustains and redeems community. ☞



On the Same Page

Thirdway joins the Shalom Mission Communities!

By Natalie Potts

Come on people! We've been talking about this for two years already! That's what I was thinking at the time we started having our first controversial community-wide discussion about our decision to join SMC. That conversation took place in the parlor of Hamline Church (our Sunday Meeting space) in the summer of 2012. We were nearly two years into our "practicing membership" with SMC, and suddenly the topic had become very relevant for our entire community. It became relevant because we, as a community, needed to pull together our dues for SMC. Third Way hasn't had a lot of money in these few early years as a community—we started largely from a group of students and young families. In past years, we've struggled to pay church staff members, even though we affirm them in their roles as paid staff. We've been fortunate not to pay a penny for meeting space on Sunday mornings, or any other day of the week for that matter. I knew the conversation about SMC dues would probably be a big one, but I didn't really know how we would navigate through it when I brought it to our Covenant Member meeting last summer.

That first discussion was a lively one (for some people that means frustrating and round-about), and at the end it seemed clear that folks were in three different camps: 1. I think we should spend our money elsewhere (local outreach in particular). 2. I don't understand what SMC is or why we want to join it. 3. I've had some experience with the other SMC communities and I think it's worthwhile to put our money towards this relationship. We needed to have another meeting.

Early September brought us a Covenant Member meeting outside on the front lawn of Hamline Church. We re-visited the SMC conversation, which brought very little movement or shifting of folks' perspectives. As a stalwart advocate of our association with SMC, I sat through that meeting very frustrated, and feeling like I had failed in my attempts to communicate what these SMC relationships were all about and why they hold so much value for us as a community. I realized that our situation is very different from when we started our exploration of SMC—the main change being that so many more people are active in Third Way than had been when we initially began this relationship with other SMC communities. I hadn't recognized the need to re-communicate and keep communicating about why we wanted to be part of SMC! That was, for me, a personal growth moment relating to my skills as a leader.

That meeting ended with the

suggestion that one person head up a small team of people who would commit to being involved with the Shalom Mission Communities, with the intention of leading the rest of the Third Way body to recognize the value of these cross-community relationships. This small group of "pioneers" would financially and relationally support Third Way's association with SMC. Folks agreed with this idea as a way forward through our dissension. We were all sick of talking about it! And though I was less than pleased with the conclusion, it was far better than a firm "no." Several people raised their hands to express interest in participating on this team, and that seemed to end of discussion. I figured we were being faced with a new leadership challenge—how would we bring the rest of our community onto the same page with us in the coming years?

Fast forward a few weeks—We had done some work to organize ourselves as a team, and gotten some money together for the dues, and spoken together about hosting the upcoming SMC coordinator's retreat. A week or two later, I received an e-mail from a couple in our community, Brooke and Matthew, who had some questions about our decision-making process. They asked to meet with Seth (our main community leader) and myself because they had some questions. Some freakin' good questions too. For instance, was this a true discernment process? They didn't feel like it had been. And other questions: what would happen in two or three years if there wasn't anyone willing or able to lead this "pioneer" team but we had already committed to membership

Continued on page 7



*Representatives from all FIVE SMC communities at the Coordinator's Retreat in January
Back: David Stahnke, Benjamin Anderson, David Janzen, Sally Youngquist, Josh McCallister
Front: Nancy Gatlin, Bethany Smith, Natalie Potts, Katie Rivers,
Dawn Beutler, Megan Hering, Josias Hansen*

News from Thirdway

By Jessie James

Hello SMC Friends! It was so delightful to see many of you in our hometown of St. Paul MN for the annual SMC coordinator's retreat that we hosted in January! I thought it would be fun to have this quarter's community updates from the perspectives of some other Thirdway members, so I sent out an e-mail to a handful of folks with 4 questions to answer and was delighted with the responses! Here you will hear from Brooke Rody and Danny Churchill, who are also pictured in the photos. Enjoy!

What exciting things or events has Thirdway been up to in the last three months?

Danny Churchill: One of the things I appreciate about Thirdway is that we are willing to try new things. A few weeks ago, we helped host a Filid in place of our standard morning gathering. "Filid" is an old Irish word which, when translated, comes out as a mix between poet, story teller (often through song), and prophet. Celtic Christians would actually commission people as "Filid," sending them out to tell stories, sing songs, and speak truth in creative ways to the people in the outlying towns and countryside. With their various expressions, they tried to help others see God, themselves, and their world in new ways. I was fortunate enough to partner with my friends Jessica Smith & Joel Mason in writing musical pieces for this event. It was a huge success! I've talked with many folks who were impacted by the music & poetry shared that morning.

Above: Thirdway's Danny Churchill; Below left: Thirdway's Brooke Rody



Brooke Rody: It feels like we've been really busy: we have hosted the SMC retreat and a Filid, put on our first ever Christmas pageant, and gone through the process of discerning whether to officially join SMC. Also it seems like our small groups are in a good place and have been meeting long enough now to try some new things and explore what we like doing best.

How did you get connected to Thirdway in the first place? How do you participate in life at Thirdway?

Brooke: Some friends knew I was looking for a Mennonite church, and mentioned it to me in 2010. When my (now-husband) Matthew moved here so we could keep dating, we visited together and both decided it had a lot of qualities we liked. So we kept going. It played a big role in our first year of marriage. I am now on the Hospitality Team, and recently was asked to join the Leadership Team.

Danny: I have been connected with Thirdway from the very beginning. I started working at a church called Woodland Hills about 5 years ago. I was primarily working with a group of young adults who, over the course of a year or so, started to wonder if there was a different way we could be the church together in our own neighborhoods instead of driving 20 minutes away to meet in a building. Woodland Hills is a FANTASTIC church and I still work there, but we were longing for something that hit closer to home. We strategically began moving into the same neighborhood. The areas we

chase were the Hamline Midway neighborhood and the University Corridor. Some friends of mine and I started a community house and even more folks began moving into the area. The rest is history. The main role that I'm in with Third Way is helping lead musical worship at our Sunday Gatherings and bi-monthly Worship Nights. I also serve on the Leadership Team helping to give care to the staff members as well as the overall health of Thirdway.

What projects are you currently working on or envisioning with Thirdway that you are excited about?

Brooke: The Hospitality Team (Daleen Ward, Natalie Potts, and I) just finished organizing the SMC Retreat, our biggest ever event in terms of hosting folks, and we really drew upon the generosity of so many people in our community; it felt like something of a turning point. On a more personal level, Matthew and I are hoping we can represent Thirdway in the delegation to El Salvador this summer, and we're both very excited about that!

Danny: Next month we'll be going on a short leadership retreat where we (the Leadership Team) will work closely with the Staff and help them set goals for the year. I'm really excited about this! Too often we can get stuck in the humdrum routines of sameness. Setting goals, asking God for vision and looking forward can help us break out of monotony and bring out God's best in us.

In what areas would you like to see Thirdway grow this Spring?

Danny: An area of growth I see for Third Way this Spring would be the ways in which we reach outside ourselves as a community. We recently formed an Outreach Team! I can't wait to hear how the Lord is leading them and to see the ministry of reconciliation come to life within myself, our body, and our neighborhood.

Brooke: Solidifying and living out the new rhythms we tried to put in place last year in terms of life together; defining how a person moves from casual visitor to covenanted member; more baby dedications and baptisms; forming new small groups; defining how decisions get made and who does what. And living in greater Love, of course - always that!



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in SMC? How can we make this decision in a way that will be sustainable for years to come? These questions helped me to see that our decision-making process had been inadequate for the magnitude of the commitment that we were asking our community to make. Seth and I both realized that we had been a little hasty in pushing the community to a decision. We had just wanted to get it out of the way! Matthew suggested some ways to go about a discernment process, and offered helpful concepts for the way discernment ought to take place in a community like ours.

I saw the light! And pretty quickly we set in motion a process to re-make this decision. This process may sound familiar to some of you, as you may use a similar process in your communities. For us it looked like this: first, information about SMC was distributed to our covenant groups. Each covenant group of 5-8 adults received a packet that included a "Frequently Asked Questions" sheet for SMC, stories of previous interaction with other SMC communities, and the visitation report that we received in May of 2010 as part of the Nurturing Communities Project. Also included was a proposal about how paying the dues would work and who would take responsibility for coordinating the relationship to SMC.


Over a two week period, covenant groups read through the information and weighed the case. Most groups had a question or two about how this or that would work out, and in the end all groups responded affirming that we ought to join. The covenant groups' recommendations combined with the recommendation of the Heart Team (the committee that has taken ownership of the SMC relationship) were submitted to Third Way's leadership team (elders) for review. The leadership team affirmed the proposal!

Wonderful as it is to have a decision finalized on this topic, I'm even more pleased that we learned a peaceful and helpful discernment process that works for our community. We hadn't yet had to make a decision like this before. We learned that the covenant group was a sensible context in which to work it all out. Groups are small enough that there is time for each person to contribute to the conversation and time for us listen well and understand each other deeply. Our Covenant Member meetings often have too much agenda to dive into anything very deeply, and this topic needed thorough discussion.

I learned a thing or two about communication as well. I've read in leadership books that it's better to over-communicate than under-communicate and now I have learned that lesson concretely. We may have felt redundant talking about SMC so much—SMC, SMC, SMC!—but others may not have heard us the first time, or may not have been around long enough to understand what it's all about. For the sake of clarity, it is often better to be redundant and achieve "same page-ness," as we say here at Third Way.

How grateful I am that this process ended up being a unifying one and that we set a precedent for future decision-making. I'd like it to be our DNA as a community to carefully weigh and patiently include others' perspectives in situations like this.

Third Way hosted the January Coordinator's Retreat and that was a positive experience for us, and hopefully for all of you who attended! We had a lot of fun getting to know more folks from the other SMC communities, and we hope you all had fun getting to know us.

Please celebrate with us! SMC has grown one community bigger! We're excited and eager to continue forming relationships with all of you. These relationships have thus far held immense value for us, and we look forward to more years of shaping by the Spirit of God and the body of Christ. 

Church of the Sojourners News

By Katie Rivers

Well, I smell faintly of marijuana, not because I have been smoking it or even come within 100 yards of it. No, it's not that at all. I have made my first attempt at conducting the transformation of palm branches into ashes for Ash Wednesday. So far my alchemistic ways leave a little to be desired. It turns out that it is hard to burn the palm; it doesn't want the fire and the fire doesn't want it.

Ash Wednesday leads us to Lent, and Lent at Sojourners leads us into the life of Jesus as presented by the gospel of Luke. Only time will tell exactly what will come of this exploration, but I expect that whatever comes will be unexpected. We just read through the first couple of chapters of Luke (it's like Christmas all over again) which speak like spewing water fountains of God's unexpectedness: Mary did not expect to get a baby in her belly, Zechariah did not expect his wife to get a baby in her belly. And I have to ask, did Simeon at some point start to suspect that he would not find what he was looking for, so that when God appeared to him as he had always hoped, it was delightfully unexpected?

Lent is about embracing emptiness. There is a time to be full, and there is a time to be empty. In our emptiness we find space, and we turn ourselves to God our Sustainer.

God made us full when we celebrated Epiphany this January. Alan Chan lead the way in preparing a delicate Indian meal for 40! I have said it several times and I will say it again: Alan makes edible art. Glory be to God.

At age older-than-most-of-us, Edith Bernard has taken to telling more jokes more often. She is grateful to her Florida House housemates who go along with such antics, especially Tim Otto who,



Tim Otto, Katie Rivers, Nate Pequette and Lee Kuiper ran in support of Rebuild Sudan

apparently, understands her jokes the best. Edith is not alone in her comedic ways, though. Her housemates Greg Shaffer and Renata Browne regularly pull pranks of fun, and even recommend that pranks be pulled upon them. Within this Florida House lies the quest for a smile.

It's decade birthday time for Laura Todd Hare and Debbie Gish-

50 years! Even during Lent we will celebrate these lives.

Naomi just celebrated her 14th annual adoption day with her family. Good.

Tim Otto, Lee Kuiper, Nate Pequette, and I ran in a 5K/ ½ Marathon to raise money for Rebuild Sudan. It worked: we brought in over 2K. Thank you to those of you who are on the Rebuild Sudan journey with us. ☺



Skot Rock and Matt Toney Cheer the 49ers

News From Hope Fellowship

By Michelle Porter

For Hope Fellowship, 2012 was a year of major changes for individuals and the whole community. We welcomed babies, grieved deaths, and started meeting in clusters for worship. It was an exhausting year for many, if not all of us, and we ended the year expectantly awaiting the arrival of new life to our community.

This new life came figuratively and literally in the form of babies. As we celebrated Christmas and remembered the birth of our Savior Jesus, we also welcomed life in a more tangible form.

Carrie and Fernando Arroyo welcomed the birth of their third child, Eden Luz Arroyo, in December. And to begin 2013, Sarah and Lucas Land added a third child to their family, Dorothy Jane Land, in January.

As Lucas so eloquently (and exhaustedly!) stated, “With a new baby, there’s a feeling of chance for new life and possibilities, a total beginning. There is hope and a bundle of possibilities with Dot. I’m sleep deprived but refreshed.”

This metaphor also accurately describes the start of 2013 for many of us at Hope Fellowship. We feel “sleep deprived” after a year of so many changes, responsibilities, and tasks, but we also feel refreshed as we start a year full of new life, hope, and possibilities.



Lydia Blue and Kohen participate in the Hope Fellowship Christmas Pageant

After several years of discernment, prayer, discussions, and consensus meetings, the members of Hope Fellowship decided to start meeting in four clusters since we had outgrown our Meeting House. After a year of worshipping in smaller groups, many of us experienced the benefits of the clusters’ more intimate size: people felt the freedom to share more often and more openly; children had more space to participate in worship;

and many of us felt that we were cared for really well by our cluster members.

But all of us experienced grief and loss as we saw less of people we have close relationships with and value as part of our church body. This year, we are exploring and experimenting with ways to help us re-connect with the larger body and live out the unity that we have chosen to walk in together. While last year we focused on worshipping and caring for each other in smaller groups, this year we will focus on finding ways to re-connect with the larger body.

One way that we hope to experience more unity as a larger body is through a shuffling of the clusters. Instead of meeting in four clusters this year, we will be meeting in three that have been named a color or an object related to the house. The Meeting House (green house), Joe and Nancy Gatlin’s house (warm toast house), and Gabriela and Anali’s house (the oak house—for the oak tree out front).

K-groups will also see changes as some groups dissolve and others take on new members. The pastors have also asked the groups to focus specifically on discipleship this year, helping and supporting each other on our Christian journey. To help us disciple each other and be disciplined well, our community



Annali Smucker-Bryan with her three art students: Jonas, Lydia Blue, and Easley

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The Intentional Christian Community Handbook: A Review

By Ric Hudgens

A handbook. That's where we begin in reviewing this work. A handbook is a collection of practical instructions meant to provide a ready reference to some particular topic. In this case the topic is "intentional community" and particularly intentional Christian community. Author David Janzen defines this as "a group of people deliberately sharing life in order to follow more closely the teachings and practices of Jesus with his disciples." Ironically the audience for a book like this is smaller than for popular Christian fiction or the latest "God is doing something new in my ministry that has never been done before (or as well)!"

The Intentional Christian Community Handbook is derived from years of practical Christian experience. It is a work primarily aimed at those beginning their engagement with intentional Christian community and written by those who have already been doing it -- some for only a few years and others for a few decades.

That this book is authored by "David Janzen and a community of friends" is a key to its strength. It is a work by community for community. With six parts and twenty-nine chapters spread out over 352 pages it is a weighty handbook. David (I have to use first names here since it would be ridiculous to pretend that we have not been rubbing elbows at Reba Place for over twenty years) doesn't set out to write down only his own thoughts on community but invites, welcomes, and reflects the narratives and contributions of dozens of others. The great distinctive of this book is found in these personal stories.

As David mentions, there is no blueprint or one right model for community and yet that does not mean that we are without wisdom or clarifying counsel about what things bode well (and often better) and what things bode ill (and often worse). There is direction in this book both for individuals and for existing communities.

In the Preface, which introduces and sets the tone for the book as a whole, David underlines that a major conversion of life has always been necessary for authentic community but is especially necessary today when so much of our society is a toxic environment for the values that community seeks to embody.

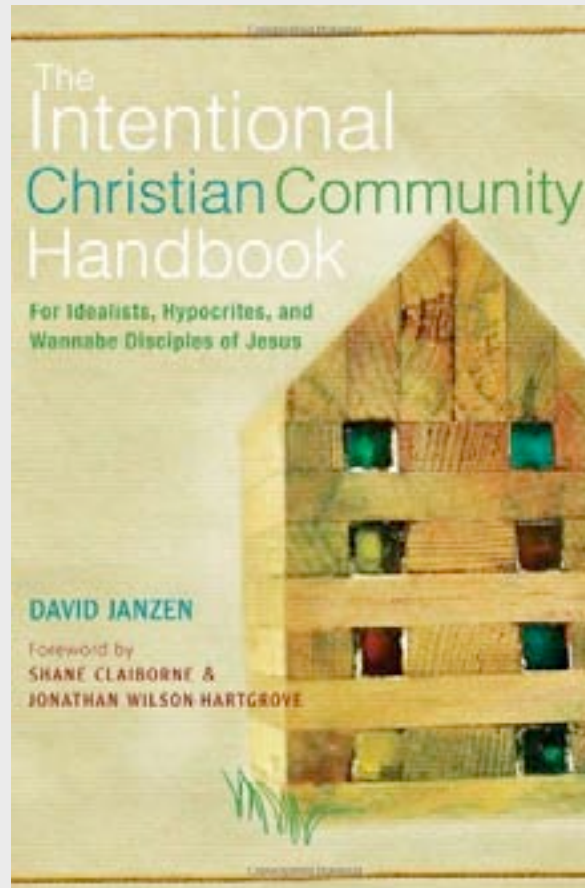
Intentional Christian community seeks to be part of God's "large project" to renew all of creation. This large project has a history that preceded both our own existence and the existence of our own favorite community. David writes "Community pioneers do not build community; they do not even plant the seeds of community; but they are called to nurture a garden that God has planted in the unique persons and context of shared life."

Part one of the handbook is on discerning one's own call to community and the personal, often psychological hurdles that get in the way. Part two is a very practical set of chapters on discerning your commitment to a particular community and how to go about testing that call. Part three examines the challenges of starting a new community including the issues of interpersonal conflict, commitment issues, location, race, and gender. Part four, with its discussion of more practical aspects of daily life in community including the need for structures and organization, clearly reflects the perspective of an older generation that has learned the hard way: by actually doing it! Part five looks at the tasks facing a growing community as they begin to think about levels of commitment, material needs and comforts, or dealing with interpersonal alienation. Part six is directed toward the challenges facing more mature communities.

This is indeed an indispensable handbook that needs to stay in print for at least a generation. Anyone and everyone interested or involved in Christian community needs to read it. However, a reviewer is also paid (ha!) to mention a few dissatisfactions with a

book and mine are few but significant.

I've found Joanna Macy's "work that reconnects" to be an indispensable part of my own spiritual journey. In her book *Coming Back to Life* Macy describes the three major fronts in the "great turning" towards sustainability that our planet is undergoing: (1) holding actions to save lives and prevent further destruction (2) alternative structures that model a new future and (3) a shift in consciousness that sustains our communities and their mission. I have labeled these fronts OBSTRUCTION, CONSTRUCTION, and INSTRUCTION. The Christian communities that are springing up all over the world right now are manifestations of alternative structures (#2). A handbook like the one David and friends has written is a concrete example of




our shifting consciousness towards new forms of solidarity that lead towards abundant life (#3).

What troubles me in this book and in most of the Christian communities that I know is the low priority that activism, holding actions, and OBSTRUCTION has in our life together (#1). The dangers of activism to common life are indicated at several points in this book, but there is little here on the necessity of activism. My fear (and increasingly it is a fear and not just a "concern") is that we are multiplying communities at the same time that our neighborhoods, our bioregions, and our global climate are disintegrating. We will have to begin engaging with other solidarities (religious, governmental, corporate) or we will find ourselves like the band on the Titanic playing "Nearer My God to Thee" while the waters rise all around us. There is little in this book on how to do that.

This fear is also related to what I would call our communal obsession with individualism. I am less and less certain that "individualism" is the nemesis that authentic community must oppose. I suspect that what we are faced with in our world is not an atomization into isolated personalities, but seduction into competing solidarities. In other words the danger is not that people will choose their own individual and distinctive lifestyle that will outweigh their call to community, but that they will be captive to a competing group identity that even authentic Christian community cannot shake. One of the most insidious and demonic of communal captivities is whiteness.

David quotes John Miller of Reba Place Fellowship who defines the enemies of community as Mars, Mammon, and Me (91). However, in chapter 12 Anton Flores reminds us that Martin Luther King labels racism, militarism, and materialism as America's besetting sins (135). Miller's and King's assessments have some similarities, but in Dr. King's analysis, racism has to be one of the three biggest hurdles to forming true Christian community. I have often wondered what Reba Place Fellowship or Shalom Mission Communities might have looked like if we had set up our life in opposition to racism rather than individualism. By structuring ourselves to resist individualism we reinforce our own cultural identities as a predominately privileged white majority.

These lingering questions should not detract from your need to read this book. It is a book meant to unearth questions both of the mind and heart. It is a book meant to unearth the weeds that choke out the gospel before it has time to take root and grow. It is a book meant to unearth the life of God buried deep within each one of us, but only achieving maturity as we grow towards maturity in Christ – together as individuals. Take up and read. 

theme for 2013 is "Toward Healing and Wholeness as God's People." Some of the ways that we hope for healing and wholeness are:


- Growing in maturity in our corporate and individual relationships with God
- Healing of personal relationships
- Emotional and physical healing through prayer
- Being faithful when it seems there is no healing
- Reconciling racially and culturally diverse relationships
- Growing in creation and environmental care
- Healing of and with the community and the neighborhood
- Healing within family and extended family relationships

We will explore this theme during our Sunday teaching times and perhaps during our "Last Friday" events, which the Council started last year as a time for the whole body of Hope Fellowship to come together to discuss various topics, share stories, and enjoy being the people of God together.

Another way that we will encourage a broadening of our interactions with each other this year is a monthly members' meeting. Members' meetings have taken on various formats during our church's history. There have been times when individuals have sought discernment during meetings, periods when meetings were open to all participants of Hope Fellowship, and times when only members attended. In 2013, the meetings will not be periodic business or consensus meetings as they were in 2011 and 2012; rather, the purpose of the monthly gatherings will be to affirm, support, and encourage each other as people who have committed to the vision and life of Hope Fellowship by means of membership.

Many of us at HF have become weary of meetings. But the February 3 members' meeting specifically addressing members' meetings reminded us how much we enjoy being together. We spent the meeting affirming, worshiping, discussing, and dreaming together. As we shared ideas for members meetings, some common threads arose: discussing Anabaptist theology, sharing testimonials and stories, laughing and playing games together, and many other wonderful ideas. But Billy Lawson summed up the mood and feelings of many of us when he said, "It's so good to be together again. I don't care what we do as long as we meet."

In March, we welcome David Janzen and Sally Youngquist from Reba Place Fellowship and Rusty Bonham from the Springwater community in Portland for a visitation. It will be a time for us to reflect on the life of Hope Fellowship as we get insight, counsel, and a prophetic word from our visitors.

By the time I write the next update, we will have welcomed two new babies, celebrated Easter on our annual retreat, and had countless meetings, worship times, and various other activities. We hope we will still feel the excitement of new life and with it all of the possibilities for the Spirit to move within us as we continue following Jesus as disciples. 

Reba Place Fellowship News

By David Hovde

Simeon McCallister was born at home in the Reba village on November 15. He was baby Jesus in the Christmas Eve play at Reba Place Church. Leah Warner and Johnmark Hatfield were Mary and Joseph in the play. Like the Biblical characters, Leah and Johnmark are engaged to be married. More exciting news: Susan Flecke and Tom Taylor also recently announced their engagement. Still more exciting news: Dan and Camille Walker announced that they are expecting. And yet more exciting news: Peter and Celina Varela announced that they are expecting too.

We celebrated Dorothy Konsterlie's 92nd birthday at February's RPF meeting. Before that, Dorothy was in the hospital and then a rehab center for several weeks. With help from Zawadi Silas from Living Water Community Church and Barb Grimsley, the Vaughan family, Eric Gustafson, and others from RPF, Dorothy is getting along well back at her apartment. Besides assisting Dorothy and others as RPF's Senior Care Coordinator, Barb supports us during health crises, such as recently nursing the members of the Clearing Household through a bad case of the flu.

Continuing in our year-long theme on the Bible, various RPF members continue to give teachings on stories or themes in the Bible at our monthly meetings. Gus Roddy and Megan Hering, and Derek Jung, have shared their original worship music with us at our meetings. At our February meeting we affirmed Stephanie Vaughan as a new member of the RPF Leadership Team and Jesse Miller as a new member of the RPF Board of Directors.



RPF enjoyed hosting Jesus People USA Elders Tom Cameron and Neil Taylor at our January 25 potluck, along with visiting Korean pastor Sunil Bang

The year began with guided silent retreats held simultaneously at

Emmanuel Lodge (led by Rachel Daley) and in the Reba



Some Kedzindale Community members from further south into Chicago joined RPF's January potluck for some good inter-community relating: Travis Clark and Jeffrey Camealy, shown here with David Janzen.

neighborhood (led by Adam Vaughan) on the theme “Called Out” and “Called Together.” The RPF apprentice group (Rachel Daley, Eric Gustafson, Jason Brown, and Kyle Maab) put together a Lenten devotional for us to use in these coming weeks leading up to Easter.

Alan and Becky Gallivan and their sons Joseph and Solomon, from Johnson City, Tennessee, visited Reba in the fall, and moved to the neighborhood in January. We are blessed to have them here and blessed by their strong interest in RPF. We are also blessed to have the Bang family from a Christian community in South Korea visiting with us this week after spending two months at Jesus People USA in Chicago. Neil Taylor and Tom Cameron from JPUSA spoke at our last RPF potluck. Members of the Kedzingdale Community in Chicago also joined us at the potluck.

Some more visits and other news: A group from Reba recently visited the Parkside Community in Glen Ellyn, a Christian community of mainly former Wheaton students who live in an apartment complex occupied by many recent immigrants to the US. A youth group from the First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids recently visited a Sunday morning service at Reba Place Church then interacted with a panel of Reba people afterwards about their experiences in Christian community. RPF was the focus of a several minute segment on a public television show called “Jay’s Chicago”. RPF plans to host a School for Conversion March 8 – 10, using The Intentional Christian Community Handbook as the text. ✍



A Few Photos of Life at Plow Creek Fellowship this Winter

Above: Heather Munn smoking a deerhide, the last step in making a buckskin

Left: Erin Mucu making soup

Update from Valle Nuevo

Excerpted from a recent Trip Report by Neil Miller, Executive Director at the World Hunger Relief Farm in Waco, Texas, which has been building a working relationship with Valle Nuevo and has worked with SMC. Neil is also a member of Hope Fellowship. The December issue of Shalom Connections reported that SMC had agreed to contribute toward the purchase of a truck that would allow the agricultural cooperative to complete a grant for some equipment that would help make their community more economically self-sufficient. We are happy to report that the money has been received, the truck has been purchased and the farmers are using the new equipment to harvest this season.

The Valle Nuevo agricultural Cooperative, originally formed to provide mutual support in the years following their return from Honduras, has been relatively inactive for the past 15-20 years. In 2012 they were asked by the Salvadoran Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to apply for an IICA-funded donation of a diesel-powered corn sheller, grinder, and feed mixer. The sheller should save a significant amount of labor since corn and sorghum are normally shelled by hand. A couple privately-owned shellers come to the community each work to do custom shelling, but by owning the equipment themselves, the Cooperative hopes to keep prices lower, and retain income within the community.

As a part of the project, the Cooperative was required to provide land, a building, labor, and a pickup to transport the sheller from farm to farm. For the latter item, they requested and received funding from SMC, and purchased a four-wheel-drive diesel Toyota pickup. They seemed proud to point out that the value of their contribution (including the SMC donation) nearly matched the \$24,000 grant issued by the MOA.

In addition to grain processing equipment, the MOA grant is being used to buy office equipment, including a computer so that they can prepare mandatory monthly financial reports. They don't currently have an accounting system, but keep records and issue a written report to the MOA each month. Since none of the adult Cooperative members are computer literate, they decided to recruit youth from the community to attend the training sessions and begin a one-year associate status after which they will be eligible to join the cooperative. Their hope is that this will result in not only computer literacy and accounting skills, but also an opportunity for the youth to assume leadership of both the cooperative and the *Directiva*.

Roughly 60,000 lbs of corn has been shelled to date, providing an income of around \$3,000. They're currently shelling 150-200 200 pound bags per day, but could do 400 if organized to keep moving. Their business plan also includes grinding, mixing and selling animal feed in addition to shelling corn for human consumption. Two Valle Nuevo youth are employed to run the machinery, including one with two years of diesel mechanic experience (a good thing given the age of the truck they are using!)

We will be watching the revival of the Cooperative with interest. They are already talking about what projects they will undertake next, and our hope is that part of their vision will include employment of the three Valle Nuevo university students who have now completed agriculture degrees. WHRI hopes to serve as a resource as they develop strategic plans and undertake future projects. ☞



Shelling corn with the new Cooperative machinery.



Douglas Membreño fixes the water pump on the Cooperative's "new" truck

Introducing **Fernando Llor**

This summer, SMC has the privilege of hosting world-renowned Salvadoran artist Fernando Llor as a special guest at the SMC Reunion, August 1-4 at Reba Place Fellowship in Chicago (for more information about the gathering, see the flyer on the back of this issue). Llor has strongly influenced social, political and religious life in his native El Salvador, but may be new to some of us in SMC.

Llor trained to be a priest in the 1970's but decided instead to serve God in his vocation as a gifted artist on behalf of the Salvadoran people. As the chaos of civil war engulfed his country Fernando retreated to the small town of Las Palmas in northern El Salvador. There he founded a workshop called Semilla de Dios (Seed of God), where scores of young people, instead of turning to guns took up painting and created a style of art with bold and colorful images blending campesino life, indigenous symbols and Biblical themes. These simple yet striking illuminated crosses and other brightly colored wooden objects have made a living for hundreds in his home country and are now for sale in import and craft shops around the world, and have been on display as widely as the Vatican and the Whitehouse.

With the coming of Peace Accords to El Salvador, Fernando Llor opened a gallery and workshop in the capitol city, San Salvador, called Arbol de Dios (Tree of God), and was asked to decorate the façade of the National Cathedral with a monumental collage in the

Las Palmas style. This

two-hundred-foot-tall work in ceramic tiles was Fernando Llor's crowning achievement and stood in the Plaza Central as a statement that the poor beloved by Jesus, the campesinos, the indigenous people had a place of honor alongside their champion and martyr, Archbishop Romero. But in 2011, the current archbishop, without dialogue or advance notice, had the façade dismantled and trashed -- another round, this time on the cultural level, of that ongoing struggle by the despised poor for justice and a voice in their church and country's story.



The National Cathedral in San Salvador where this facade by Fernando Llor could be seen until its destruction by the Church in 2011



“Oh Lord, my God and my all!

You who grant artists the inspiration to shape the beauty that originates from you, grant that my works increase the joy, the hope and the peace of all people, that I may share with happiness the gifts you have loaned me, for all is yours, everything comes from you, from you I have my inventive faculty and I want to plant it in others, especially in the poorest, so that it may give abundant fruit and shine in them their human and spiritual dignity!” (Fernando Llor, October 23, 1984)

You're Invited to the SMC Reunion!

August 1-4, Evanston IL - the Reba Place Neighborhood, we will hold our biennial reunion of SMC communities. **Save the Date!**

The theme is **Telling of God's Faithfulness** (Ex 15: 17-18). We'll emphasize the arts in workshops, seminars, worship and special guest, Salvadoran artist **Fernando Lloret**.

We invite guests of all ages - come and stay with a Reba household for a few days. Take in some great teaching, fellowship, worship, and of course - meal prep! The kids will have fun programming, as will the youth. Meet some "distant relatives" in the Christian Community family.

Artists: We need your contributions - visual, written, performed, whatever. Plan to bring your work and share it. Email Josh McCallister if you have questions: joshwmccallister@gmail.com.

Let us know if you're thinking about attending. First session starts at 5:30PM Thursday, last session ends at noon on Sunday the 4th.

For more information about registration, please go through... [Renata \(SOjo\)](#), [David S \(PCF\)](#), [Natalie \(Third Way\)](#), [Gabriela \(HF\)](#), [David H \(RPF\)](#)

[Make travel plans to arrive by 5:30PM Thursday, and depart after lunch Sunday.]

Shalom Connections
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Waco, TX 76707

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