



## Crossing the Great Chasm: *Compañeros in a Transnational Communion*

*The following is an excerpt from the draft introduction of the book, Crossing the Great Chasm, about the relationship between Valle Nuevo and SMC.*

*Edited by Joe Gatlin, Nancy Gatlin, and Joel Scott and excerpted by Christiana Peterson and Bethany J. Smith*

March 18, 1981, the chasm was fixed in the Lempa River valley, the political border that separates El Salvador and Honduras. That day will never be forgotten because the stories are now told by many, not just those who made it safely across the river, but also by their children, their grandchildren, and their friends from Shalom Mission Communities (Shalom Mission).

During the annual Shalom Mission delegation visit to Valle Nuevo of Santa Marta (Valle Nuevo), a number of us will fill a microbus or two and make the pilgrimage to the Lempa. It is a long car ride, and when we have gone as far as we can go we'll get out and follow a path through the cow pasture, under or over a couple of barbed wire fences, and then down the rocky slope to the banks of the river.

Partway through the descent, when we stop to make sure everyone has kept up, we'll rest and watch the Lempa flow by as it makes a sweeping bend through the mountains. It is beautiful and peaceful, and it is difficult to imagine that on March 18, 1981, it was filled with suffering and was a chasm of death many were not able to cross. At that mid-point view the sadness of the *campesinos*, some of whom may not have made this trek in a decade or more, is often expressed in low, mournful humming or a softly sung ballad about their journey across the chasm.

When we are finally sitting with our feet in the river, stories are inevitably shared as the people of



Valle Nuevo identify rocks where they attempted to hide from bullets, or a particular spot or two or three where a loved one fell, mortally wounded, or the place on the bank where they managed to tie a rope and stretch it across the river, or the bend further down where they last saw a mother or child flailing and being washed away.

Civil war had erupted in El Salvador after generations of festering discontent over the lack of land tenure, employment, wages, and political rights. On March 17 word traveled from village to village in the northern department of Cabañas that government-sponsored death squads were advancing through the district, scorching the earth and slaughtering the people. That evening the *campesinos* fled their homes and took to the mountain paths under the cover of dark.

*Continued next page...*



Even 30 years after these events the fear of these two fateful days is reflected in the eyes of the Valle Nuevo elders as they tell the stories. It was a night of panic and chaos as they tried to escape and find their way to Honduras where they hoped they would be safe. They tripped over roots and rocks as men, women, and youth carried babies and guided the children and the elderly. They were hungry, thirsty, and exhausted.

The *campesinos* had lived as peasants for generations, abjectly working the fields and serving as slaves of the landowners. In recent years some of them had found hope

for dignity and a voice through the scriptures as they read the words of Jesus, “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,” and heard in their souls the song of Mary, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” Regardless of their source or inspiration, the landowners declared these sentiments subversive, and the people had to gather on the sly in caves and other hidden places to read their Bibles and reflect on the relevance of the gospel to their world.

Some in their determination to put food on the table and provide for their families had taken up arms and

joined guerrilla forces. Any effort to bring down the government was, however, quixotic since the military was well-armed, well-equipped, and well-funded -- courtesy of U.S. taxpayers -- and was therefore capable of squashing any perceived conspiracy as well as any actual insurgency. As the turmoil in the country increased, the authorities concluded that the only solution for some rural areas they considered totally infested with guerrillas and guerilla-supporters was eradication, total extermination.

Up in the Honduran hills Yvonne Dilling, a young Church of the Brethren volunteer from Ft. Wayne, Indiana, was bandaging the wounds of recently arrived Salvadoran refugees. About 3:00 that afternoon the flow of refugees stopped, and in Yvonne’s own words:

*I asked those who were still resting under the tree whether more people would be coming, and they answered, “Oh, there are hundreds! Hundreds and hundreds!” But they weren’t arriving... I asked, “What is taking them so long to get up here?” A man responded, “Well, they need to cross a deep river, and the few swimmers who can carry them across are exhausted. They, too, have been without food for three days...” (In Search of Refuge, pp. 42-43)*

Yvonne said she could not bear the frustration of “watching helicopters fly around and listening to bombs fall” so she went down to the river where she discovered there were five swimmers. She became the sixth, and as a result additional *campesinos* were able cross the chasm that day.

The Lempa survivors would live for the next eight years as exiles in refugee

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## Shalom Connections

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camps, long enough for children to be born and know nothing other than refugee life and long enough for some to die of old age. Others died from starvation and disease. Although life was very hard, the people banded together to teach and educate their children and take care of the elderly and sick. Their sense of community, organizational skills, and social capital developed during these years would serve them well when they returned in 1989 to create a new economy, homes, and social institutions in the Salvadoran jungle.

Throughout the war Yvonne Dilling continued her work in Honduras as a friend, supporter, and co-laborer with the refugees. When the war ended she too moved to rural El Salvador and continued her ministry as a connecting person, helping build relationships between church groups in the United States and the newly settled *campesino* communities. In 1992 she introduced Valle Nuevo of Santa Marta to Shalom Mission Communities.

Many of the members of Shalom Mission talk about Valle Nuevo as a fifth member of the association, a concept which all of us, both Shalom Mission and Valle Nuevo, realize is a stretch. The difficulty is in essence the great chasm.

In a series of very challenging economic parables recorded in the gospel of Luke (vv. 19-31), Jesus told the story of a poor man named Lazarus and a rich, nameless man. The rich man lived lavishly and selfishly and ignored Lazarus who sat destitute, hungry, and ill outside his gate. When Lazarus died he was carried away to rest with Father Abraham. Meanwhile the rich man also died, but found himself in Hades tormented by flames. The rich man begged for mercy and asked for Abraham to send Lazarus with just a drop of water to cool his parched and burnt tongue. Abraham, though, pointed out an irreversible reverse. In the former life the rich man received good things, Lazarus received “evil” things. In the afterlife, the poor man is comforted and the rich man is in agony. Despite repeated pleas, Father Abraham with no explicit sense of moral judgment concludes, “Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so so, and no one can cross from there to us.” The chasm between Lazarus and the rich man was great according to Father Abraham.

The chasm between Valle Nuevo and Shalom Mission is also great. For starters we have the very visible and relatively benign and universal aspects of social chasm: language, culture, education, and religious traditions. More specifically and inimically, since we share North America, we can trace the roots of our chasm back to pre-historic migrations that populated this continent with various indigenous groups and then in more recent centuries diverse conquests, wars, and rebellions resulting in the creation of nation states called El Salvador and the United States. Nations by definition favor their respective interests and their own populations (or at least the privileged classes or races of their populations) over the interests and peoples of other countries. The result is a specific intra-North American story of colonialism, imperialism, and economic exploitation. Those on the north side of our chasm are economically privileged and those on the south are not.

The El Salvador civil war and United States foreign and economic policy in recent decades have only increased the profoundness of our separation. On the one side are the financiers of war; on the other side are its victims. On the one side are those who have benefitted greatly with access to less expensive goods through

*Continued on page 5...*

# Poetry on the Bluff

by Rich Foss

*After something like three years of meditations on the Sermon on the Mount, I began writing three-line poems as part of my morning meditations. I find this sermon endlessly fascinating, challenging, and stimulating.*

## *Poor in spirit*

You are poor in spirit;  
You have been robbed and blessed,  
And yet you belong like the nightingale's song.  
9/19/2013

## *Mournful*

I am stripped bare;  
No hiding from bullets and bullies,  
No concealing my wounds, defeats, and flaws.  
9/20/2013

## *Meek*

Open your clenched fist  
And quell your lightning and thunder arguments  
Because the meek inherit the earth. 9/21/2013

## *Hungry*

Honor emptiness and thirst  
And you will be filled like a kite caught by the  
currents,  
Soaring like a decent and joyous eagle. 9/22/2013

## *Mercy*

A rapist is merciless  
As is her enraged brother,  
But lovemaking in marriage is the giving and  
receiving of mercy. 9/23/2013

## *Pure*

Pure is as endless as an artesian well  
And chases the disgusting  
Until we see God in the reflecting pool. 9/24/2013



## *Peacemaking*

Violence shreds like shrapnel  
While peacemaking rips like a woman in labor  
Whose core leads to life-making and the comfort of  
baby at breast. 9/25/2013

## *Persecution*

Welcome the slap of being accused of evil  
intentions when you know they're good  
Because there is a flow to unreturned anger  
That tumbles to theirs is the kingdom of heaven  
and even friendship. 9/26/2013

## *Insult*

It's good to be insulted for good  
Like being stung as you tenderly caring for a  
hive;  
Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in  
heaven and honey. 9/27/2013

“free trade” agreements; on the other side are those with a diminished hope for a viable local economy.

The chasm also has its psychological aspects. Shalom Mission members are subject to a sense of guilt about unmerited privileges and complicity as U.S. citizens in the persecution and deprivation of the people of Valle Nuevo. Conversely, as is often the case with those who have suffered, some of the Valle Nuevo people feel a deep-seated sense of inferiority and inadequacy when they are with the more affluent. These emotions are not solid building blocks for building a positive, healthy relationship.

In Jesus’ parable the chasm was not just great, but it became permanent. We, therefore, are eternally grateful Yvonne not only descended to the Lempa but also stepped into the socio-political abyss and brought us together. At first the sights were strange when the *campesinos* were introduced to an odd bunch of *gringos*, and early Shalom Mission visitors including Reba Place member David Janzen watched United Nations helicopters land in the soccer field while guerrillas came down from the mountains and surrendered their guns. Since then we have been given the opportunity to grow in our relationships through repeated and shared experiences of delegation visits, projects, and correspondence between individuals which in turn have built new spiritual constructs and increased our understanding of each other’s stories and lives.

All of us have had those experiences when our cultural horizons have been expanded. Doña Tomasa, the president of Valle Nuevo’s *directiva* for many years, talks about the strange food she encountered on her first visit to the United States. “After 3 days at one of the SMC communities, my stomach hurt. I kept smelling tortillas but I couldn’t find any. I could only eat the brown rice and lettuce.” And the new visitors on Shalom Mission annual delegations have to adjust to meals on the veranda with chickens running under the table while pigs or at least several dogs lounge nearby, composting toilets, concrete holding pools or *pilas* for the household water, and calling June *invierno* which translates as ‘winter’.

At some point, though, we became aware of the stereotypes, which are so tenacious, so pernicious, and so deeply rooted in our spirits. “Be very careful in these relationships,” goes the conventional wisdom confirmed by the instincts of those from the north, “because what the Central Americans really want is our money.” And the distrust felt by those from the south “All the *gringos* care about is money and exploiting the *campesinos*” seems validated by generations of experience. This depersonalization represents the void of the chasm. We, however, have been given the gift of more than two decades in this relationship, enough time for our perspectives to change.

Shalom Mission members have come to see the Salvadorans’ incredible commitment to their community as exemplified in the young university students from Valle Nuevo of Santa Marta who, despite the difficult economic circumstances, return to work and lead in their community. The corporate sense of identity present in Valle Nuevo has challenged some members of the Shalom Mission communities who may have a more individualistic and mobile understanding of their commitment to their respective communities.

The people of Valle Nuevo meanwhile have come to appreciate a plurality of Christian faith expressions they have not encountered before. Many of them have found the Anabaptist commitments of their Shalom Mission friends -- to communal welfare as well as the pursuit of justice and grace within the larger society -- attractive and compatible with their Roman Catholic faith. And, even more importantly they have discovered their relationship with the people from the north can be characterized in the most core human terms as explained by Felipa, one of the perennial hosts during the delegation, “Our friendship is like a knot. Sadly, some of my family are gone because they died during the war. .... but we have seen Shalom Mission as a family.”

Healing has resulted for members of both communities. SMC member David tells the story of his crossing of the chasm,

*At the 2004 SMC Conference in Waco I was moved to hear Tomasa Torres, Salomé Ascencio, and Margarita Aviles’ stories of their people’s suffering during the Salvadoran civil war. After they spoke, translator Nancy Gatlin encouraged us to ask what it meant to be sister communities with Valle Nuevo. It meant that we were interested in what was happening in each other’s lives. It meant that we would write and visit each other. After hearing this, I decided to visit Valle Nuevo in March, 2005.*

*We ate dinner in the homes of different families each evening where they told us their stories of the civil war. I felt trusted and privileged to hear such honest and vulnerable sharing. We participated in the stations of the cross march through all the neighborhoods of Valle Nuevo and Santa Marata. At each station the sufferings of Jesus paralleled a point where the people suffered in their flight to Honduras.*

*When I was 13 my family moved to Ethiopia to work with the Mennonite Central Committee. I witnessed much poverty. Barriers of culture, language, and privilege were overwhelming to me, and I did not get to know any Ethiopian people on a deep level. I felt strongly the discrepancy between my standard of living and that of others, but didn’t know what could be done about it. Visiting Valle Nuevo was a healing experience for me. We were welcomed deeply into the lives of the people, stayed in their homes, and recognized our common bond.*

Doña Tomasa concludes on behalf of all of us, “the relationship with the brothers and sisters has brought about a healing of our wounds the past has left us.”

Both communities now lean into our shared convictions and spiritual longings despite the cultural and language differences. Morena, a university-trained leader and daughter of Felipa, says, “I’m able to be a part of a beautiful relationship. It’s an important friendship because it’s built through the years and continues growing; it’s fertilized with the most valuable thing that humans have, love.” When we come together we are able to sing “Vamos Todos al Banquete,” not just as a wish, but as a testimony of joy.

*Come, let’s go to the banquet,  
To the table of creation,  
Where everyone has a stool,  
And each has a place and mission.*



# News From Hope Fellowship

by Michelle Porter

For Hope Fellowship, 2013 has been a time of change, transition, listening, growing, grieving, and maturing. After moving into a new structure of three clusters for worship in 2012, this year we were faced with problems that were not as obvious as the overcrowding of our Meeting House.

Once the obvious tensions and conflicts were diminished or eliminated, some of us were left to face our deeper conflicts and wounds. We could no longer attribute our unrest, our feelings of annoyance, our unspoken resentments to the fact that there were too many people in one space.

One of the things that we heard from the SMC Visitation led by David Janzen, Sally Youngquist, and Rusty Bonham in March was that we were lacking in maturity. Many of us felt wounded and needed a more constructive way to communally address these issues, so that we could allow God to help us move to reconciliation.

As suggested by the SMC Visitation team, many of us chose to read *The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You*, either with our Koinonia groups or on our own. And for the past few months, we have spent our adult teaching times on Sundays studying the book.

We have learned that all people experience traumas as they grow up and continue into adulthood, but we must address these wounds in our life to recover and fully live from our hearts. God has a role to save us, and we have the job of maturity. This maturing allows us to experience joy and life in the community of God in the everyday meetings, worship services, meals, and activities.

During the last quarter of 2013, we continued having monthly members' meetings and all-church gatherings to talk about the areas of growth pointed out by the Visitation Team. The women revived their monthly Saturday breakfasts, and the youth continued enjoying a monthly activity with HF participants.

In October, Diamante Maya and Sarah and Lucas Land became members and were officially welcomed at our All-Church worship with the much-coveted bilingual Bible presented to new members in more recent years.

Neil Rowe-Miller and Ivette Herryman spent many hours working on our songbooks and teaching us unfamiliar Spanish songs before they both move on to new areas of faithful service. Neil and Christy Rowe-Miller have accepted a position with Mennonite Central Committee serving in Tanzania, Africa. Ivette will visit her family in Cuba in December before moving to Michigan to pursue her PhD in composition.

In November, a small group from HF traveled to the Texas Mennonite Relief Sale in Houston and witnessed a 1920s quilt sold at auction for more than \$9,000. Fifteen of the women went on their annual retreat to Three Mountain Ranch with this year being a silent retreat. Unfortunately, the youth group who shared the retreat center that weekend with the women was definitely NOT on silent retreat at 11 PM or 6 AM as they ran screaming through the area!

In December, we look forward to our annual Posada reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for a place to stay, as well as a Christmas Eve Service. Barbara and Phillip Bridgewater will also host their annual New Year's Eve party that also serves as a birthday celebration for Phillip and Ellie Boardman Alexander. This year is a monumental year as Phillip turns 50, and Ellie turns 18. Happy birthday!

2013 was a year to acknowledge our wounds, address them, and ask God to help heal us. At our last all church gathering in November, we reflected on our year-long theme of Healing and Wholeness, and many people shared specific instances of healing this year. It was a time of renewed hope and love as we remembered and acknowledged how the Spirit of God continues to unify us around the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

I look forward to 2014 with hope and excitement for Hope Fellowship as I remember Psalm 46:10, "Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

# Harvest Festival at Plow Creek



*Top left and top right: Mark Stahnke competes in pudding contest with Joe and Chris Begly; bottom left: Matt Adams makes giant bubbles for the kids; bottom right: folks compete in a Bags Tournament*

# The News from Plow Creek

by Christiana Peterson



We feel the seasons deeply at Plow Creek, experiencing in our very hearts and bodies the change in weather, the slowing down of certain kinds of work, the ancient rhythms of lives lived close to the earth. From the view at the valley, the bluff where acorn trail leads up to the meadow is a tangible example of the seasonal changes here as its trees bloom, brighten, alight with flame and then fade to the grey of coming winter.

As summer spun into fall at Plow Creek, we took the opportunity to celebrate God's faithfulness in our lives with a Harvest Festival in early October. We played games, painted faces, made giant bubbles, and ended with a good old-fashioned barn dance lead by a neighbor.

A few weeks later the Harvest brought more fruit as Paul and Heather Munn welcomed their son Ian George Munn into the world.

We were so thankful for the work and financial contribution by folks from Reba, Plow Creek, and other communities who contributed to the building of a new sidewalk from the East House to the Common Building and laid the groundwork to finish the last phase in the spring.

Sarah Foss continues to serve faithfully both in her work as a nurse at Greenfield Retirement Home and in her care for her husband Rich Foss as he faced the challenges of hospital stays and a bronchoscopy to clear his lungs at the beginning of November.

Matt Adams had surgery on both his wrists in November and is recovering while his wife Angela continues to work and take classes at Bethany College in Indiana.

Our November monthly evening worship was an opportunity to celebrate Lantern Festival, a time coinciding with All Saint's Day when we worship the God of light and remember the saints of the church, both living and gone. Traditionally, Lantern Festival concludes at a bonfire where we speak the names of faithful loved ones who have gone before us, tossing incense into the fire to mark our remembrance of them.

On the farm, the conclusion of the growing season means a letting go of animals that have been raised for food. Life on a farm gives us a chance to learn about the beauty of life and the sadness of death as we butcher geese and bring the steers to the meat locker. Mark and Rich from the farm management team also conducted the first ever exit interviews with summer farm workers and learned things that can improve the experience of workers in future summers.

As we tear down our gardens, both literally and metaphorically, we look toward winter as a time to reflect on the changes of this year when we watch parts of the world delve into dormancy:

*Deep in the heart of the white  
we'll remember the end of it  
when we discover pressed leaves  
forgotten in an old heavy book  
on the shelf  
crackled and nearly brown  
but for the vein of life that promises  
that seasons continue  
to run over themselves*

*and next year  
we'll tear it all down again.*

# Reba Place Fellowship News

by David Hovde

On November 9, 92 year-old Dorothy Konsterlie was in a cheerful, excited mood as her Reba Place Fellowship companions moved her things from her apartment on Monroe to the house on Reba where the Vaughan family lives. Dorothy and the Vaughans (Adam, Stephanie, Seth and Adrian) looked forward to this move, and sharing life in household together, with anticipation. Eight days later, on November 17, Dorothy moved on to heaven. Sally and Orwin Youngquist and Vicky Caleb were with her singing as she took her final breaths between, "Take Thou My Hand, O Father," and "Abide with Me." Barb Grimsley, Adam and Stephanie Vaughan, Joseph Marshak, Sally Youngquist, Living Water Church member, Zawadi Silas, and many others cared exceptionally well for Dorothy these past months as her health declined. Dorothy's increased need for help enabled many of us to spend time caring for her and getting to know her better. We remember with gratitude the way Dorothy welcomed us into her life.

We had a memorial service for Tim Johnson, good friend of Vicky Caleb, on October 2. Tim had ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and died in hospice. At the service, it was moving to hear Vicky and others describe how God cared for Tim through the many difficulties he faced during his life. October 26 we had a memorial service for Reba Place Church member, Phil Carlsen, who died of cancer. As the cancer progressed, Phil used the sharing time at church to keep people updated about his situation. He expressed his gratitude to God and to the church for the love he received during his illness and throughout his life. When Peggy Belser's brother, Harold Eberly, died in Pennsylvania, we had a memorial service for him in the Clearing household living room November 10, since it would be difficult for the Belsers to travel to the service in Pennsylvania. Harold lived at the Clearing, sharing his good humor there, for over a year, about 10-15 years ago. At the service, Peggy's husband, Julius, shared on the theme of God's grace in Harold's life.

We are grateful that Tim Otto from Church of the Sojourners visited us in September to consult with us about how to maintain a spirit of unity while having different perspectives on gay marriage. Tim gave a teaching on Biblical interpretation showing that preconceptions people have about an issue affect how they interpret what scripture says about the issue. Tim explained interpretations of scripture that seemed to prohibit gay marriage, and interpretations of scripture that seemed to permit gay marriage. Tim encouraged us to keep our focus on loving, respecting, and listening to each other, and trusting God to show us how to proceed in unity.

Early October we hosted eighteen visitors from the Institute for Biblical Community Development (IBCD) in Arkansas. The IBCD is an institute, founded by a Korean pastor, that trains people in missions and community development. High school students from a boarding school in South Korea, run by a Christian community called "the

Dandelion Community", were at the IBCD for a semester, and wanted to visit Reba. A panel of Reba people shared with the group and asked them questions through an interpreter. The group also joined us for a Monday night potluck, which again this year includes students from Greg Clark's Christian community class at North Park University. This year Greg's class uses Peter Maurin's Easy Essays as a take off point for reflection. For our monthly Friday night potluck in October, we hosted a dozen students from Valparaiso University taking a class called "American Utopias". (We told them we don't qualify.)



At our annual time of clarifying commitment levels for the coming year, Ben Anderson, Judy Friberg, Dan Leroy, Camille and Dan Walker, and Celina and Peter Varela all stepped back from formal levels of commitment to Reba Place Fellowship but will continue relating in informal ways. Rachel Daley, Jim Fitz, Derek and Heather Jung, David and Chizu Lottich, and Russell Baldocchi will be practicing members. (Russell is a recent graduate from Biola University in California. Russell came to Reba this September because he is interested in Christian community and he wants to live in the Chicago area. He is a member of the household known as the Greenhouse.) Susie Kauffman and Carol Youngquist are continuing as novices. Alan and Becky Gallivan are planning to become covenant members. (We look forward to their membership celebration sometime in the new year.) Some are still discerning what level of involvement is right for them: Andrea Buchanan, Ric and Helen Hudgens, and Jason Brown. Also noteworthy: a group of four women at or graduated from North Park University began a new household in the house vacated by Jeanne and Allan Howe after thirty-four years of living there. We praise God for all those who are part of our spiritual family.



Above: Reba Place kids play in the leaves. Below: Orwin Youngquist helps other Reba Place and Plow Creek folks with the PC sidewalk



**A cross-community work project.**

Folks from Reba place and Plow Creek construct the sidewalk around the PC meadow for wheelchair access.



# Church of the Sojourners News

by Katie Rivers

## ***A Prologue to the Fall:***

Please imagine Sojourners going about their weekly worship rituals on a late Sunday afternoon. Now imagine the service comes to a halt. “Daniel, our new apprentice has arrived.” All of the Sojourners file down the stairs and out of our own “upper room” used for gathering, pour out into the street, and form a moving chain. Daniel empties his vehicle into our hands, and in about seven minutes all of his belongings are in his new room. Seven minutes ago the room was bare, but it has now been transformed into what looks like an outdoor gear supply center. All the Sojourners return to the upper

moved in a week ago. Her stuff is next door in the Monastery.

Another Sojourner year begins.

## ***The Sojourner Update:***

We are taking this year to look at our history and our vision. Where have we come from? Where are we going? We are giving ourselves to a year of growing in honesty and trust and discernment. And we ask ourselves the question: What is God doing among us?

## ***An Epilogue to the Fall:***

All of the Sojourners are sitting in the upper room on a Friday night. The sun dives down early now, so it is dark outside. Dinner has just been consumed, and the dishes have just been washed. “Alright,

also what should we put in the Sojo update for next time because that news is due today.” “What has happened since the last one?” Katie is left to record a historical update on her own.

And now unbeknownst to these unsuspecting Sojourners, a game of lost and found is about to begin:

Tim: I have lost two items. My Harper Collins Bible and...

Ben: It’s on top of the microwave. Your glasses are on top of it.

Tim expresses gratitude because Ben has just read his mind and taken away the great burden of his need to announce the misplacement of the second item.

Daniel: I can’t find my blue sweatshirt, last seen in the blue van.

Debbie: It’s at our house.

“Any one else have a lost item?” The Sojourners laugh and make some jokes about lost and found. Then the prayer requests come out: Zoe’s mom needs a biopsy, Debbie’s first case for a new adoption job, Vicki’s Dad, the Toney family’s health, Edith is off to visit her daughter (her granddaughter has a neck injury), Katie’s right leg is crooked in her hip socket, Allan’s family is still grieving the recent passing of his father, Renata’s student at work...

It is among these kinds of moments that these Sojourners can be found sitting in an upper room together for now.



*Sojourners folks Dawn, Jody, Renata, Katie, Nate, Lee at a Radical Face concert.*

room, and worship resumes. It is almost as if the service had never been interrupted, except it had been, because now Daniel is in the room with us and his stuff is the room underneath us. Vicki, our other apprentice, is there too. She

are there any announcements? Yes, Katie.” And the floor is open. “I would like to distribute the most recent issue of the SMC Newsletter.” Half the newsletters go round the circle wise to the clock and the other half to its counter. “And

## My 24 Special Places

by Gigi Mullery

1. My special place is the car when I am asleep. The car rocks me to sleep just like a stroller rocks a baby to sleep. You can take me in a car ride for 5 minutes and I am asleep in 30 seconds.

2. Farm School is the most beautiful place to be. I sit next to the pond and look at the dragonflies slide across the water. Everyone is quiet. The birds fly by through the sky chirping as they go by. My special place is Farm School at Oceansong.

3. My special place is using my voice. Feeling like nobody is watching me. Feeling like there is nothing to worry about. I don't need to be smart and say everything correctly. My special place is to be singing.

4. My special place is to move my body. There's nothing around me. I don't care what people say. I just care that I'm just feeling like myself. My special place is to dance.

5. Me laying down on the bounce floor. Not thinking about much. Just feeling calm and quiet. Smelling and feeling what's around me. My special place is my trampoline.

6. I look around me watching my guinea pig run around the yard. Looking at the birds flying by. Looking at the trampoline still with nobody on it. The wind blows the leaves back and forth. My special place is my back yard.

7. It is dark and warm. I can't see anything. My floor covered with clothes and other things. I think about what's going on through my life. Feeling my hand touch things. Feeling the warmth. My special place is my room.

8. Thinking about all the things I could think of. I live in my imagination. I live when I am asleep. I live in myself. My special place is my dreams.

9. I walk inside and see all of my friends. I learn every day five days a week. I see my teacher up in the front of the classroom writing on the board. My special place is to be at school.(synergy School.)

10. I am always with them at school. I talk to them and hear them. I sit with them at lunch and snack. We laugh a lot together. We play games together, sing songs together and tell secrets to each other. My special place is to be with my friends at school or on play dates.

11. *Swish, swish* I hear. I sit on the smooth but kind of bumpy ground. The wetness splashes and then I'm wet. I play with my friend until we get soaked. My special place is at the beach with friends of mine.

12. Setting by the fire nice and cozy. My family and I playing card games. We all laugh, having a great time. We go down to the Yuba River. We take long hikes together. My special place is my grandparent's cabin with all my family.

13. Going out into the wilderness. Being with bugs and animals. Sleeping in tents, letting the cool breeze go through me. My special place is to go camping with other people.

14. The splashes and drips off the house and into the puddles. Cold, dark and windy nighttime. The leaves on the trees go back and forth. I'm dancing while the water pours all over me. My special place is to be dancing in the rain.

15. With my family flying to see my other family. It's very warm and humid there. Their dog Ely is a big and black dog, very friendly to everyone. We talk to one another. We turn the A.C. on so that it would get cooler in the house. My special place is Virginia.

16. Nice and warm but the snow cools me down. Me and my friends built a snowman and a snowwoman. We aren't at the top at this mountain but the mountain is 14,162 feet tall. The water there is as amazing nice and cold right out of the spring hole. My special place is Mt .Shasta with my friends and family.

17. I glide through the water without breathing. I come to the surface to get more air. I feel like a bird through the water. I feel free: nobody is the boss of me. I can do anything I want to do. My special place is to be swimming.

18. My big mouth I can't keep it shut. I always make sounds and words come out of it. Making my friends laugh to a lot of the things that come out of my mouth. My special place is to be talking to all of my friends and family.

19. Just making art with a pencil and a blank piece of paper. Not really knowing what it is or what it is going to be. But knowing it's going to be something beautiful. My special place is to draw with colors.

20. To move my pencil moving across the lined paper. Feeling like myself no one around me. Making life with the words I put on my piece of paper. My special place is to write.

21. Being with the people I feel the most comfortable. They make me feel so welcome. They make me laugh a lot. My special place is with my cousin and aunt and uncle.

22. Watch a movie by the heater with her. She makes me feel loved. She tells me I'm beautiful; I make a drawing she tells me it's pretty or good etc. My special place is to be with my adopted mom.

23. She is the nicest person I could ever know. She and I went shopping together. She has known me for all my life. She has always been there for me. I love her so much. My special place is to be with my sister.

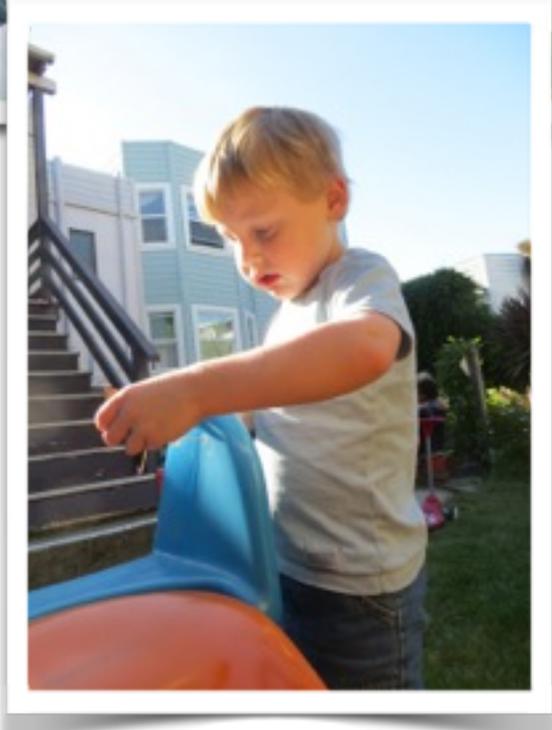
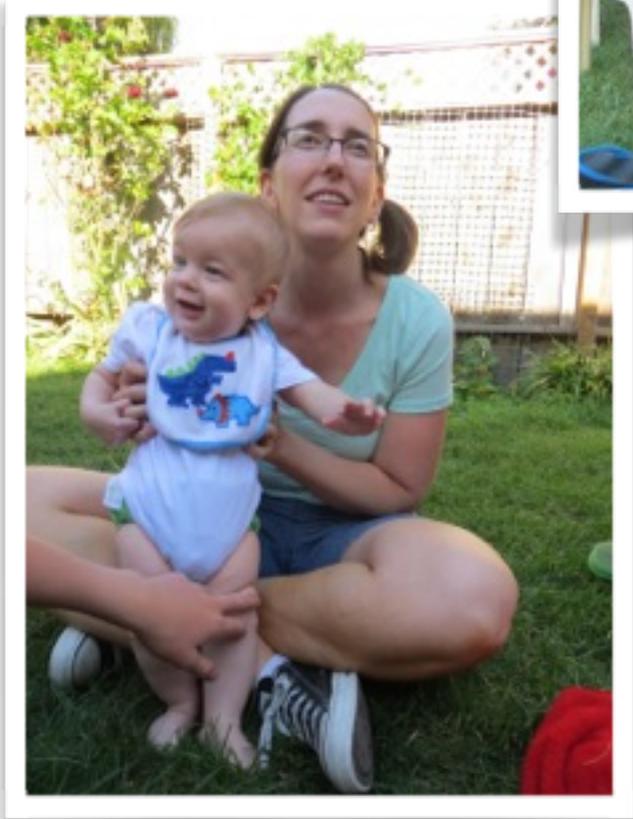
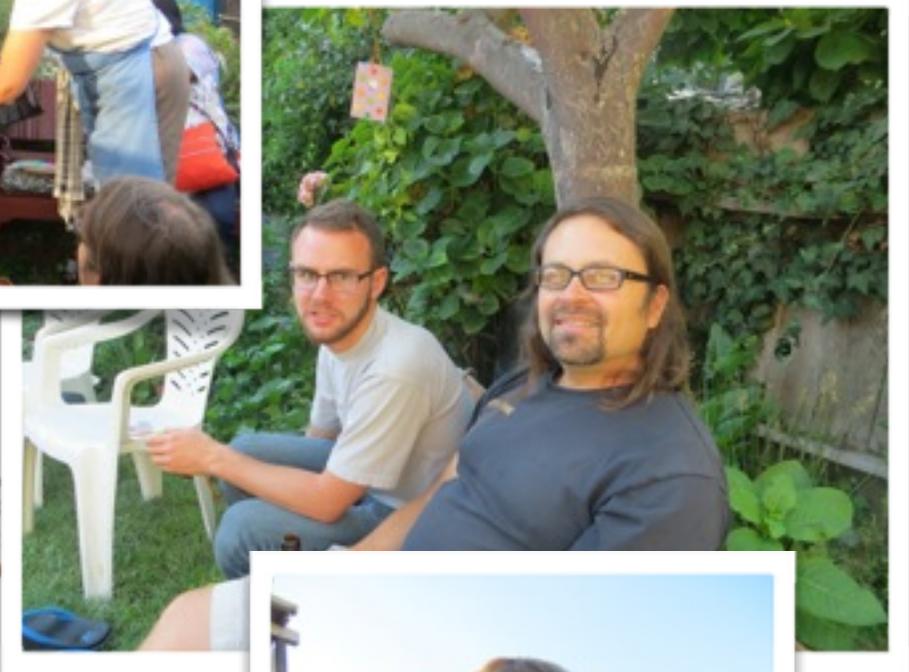
24. Even though I don't really know her very well. I still love her so much; I wish she could still be alive right now. I'm so glad that I could be alive right now with everybody. I'm glad that she has been in my life, but I know no matter what happens she will always be in my heart. My special place is my birth mom, that's dead, but still is in my heart everywhere I go and everything I do.



*Sojourner's Leo: King of the Hill Above The River*



*Sojourners folks celebrate Laura Todd Hare's belated 50th birthday. Clockwise from top left: Laura Todd Hare blows out the candles; Nate Pequette and Greg Shafer (Greg is on his way to Calcutta for a year with International Justice Mission); Caedmon; Mary Toney with Baby Jack*



# News from Thirdway

by Natalie Potts

Thank you all for your warm reception of the Third Way community, into the SMC, at the Reunion this summer. It's official. Speak now or forever hold your peace? That moment has passed. Well, we hope y'all are holding peace anyway.

This fall, of course, was a busy one for us. Fall is a time, for our community, when new things get started. It seems contrary to the seasons of the earth, but for various reasons, makes a whole lotta sense for us.

We kicked things off in September with a brief experience of some desert-ish wandering (much like our forefathers, we'd like to think). We were without a meeting space for several weeks! Our worship gathering had outgrown the space we'd been meeting in for the past 2 years. Unfortunately for us, because that space was the right price--free! Jen McCoy, Bryan Ward, and Rudy Arnold spent much of the summer, and all of September, patiently yet urgently looking for a new space to meet. We found a temporary space on Como Ave and worshipped there for 3 weeks, before crash-landing in an Episcopal Church a little closer to home. We are grateful for the search team's efforts, and grateful for a space to meet. It's a woodsy, cabin-y little sanctuary with lovely stained glass, ghastly overhead lighting, and exceptionally comfy pews with communion kneelers! And plush, scarlet-red carpet upfront. It has a wonderful space for our kids to meet and plenty of room for them to run around. We have just what we need for the time being. Meanwhile, our search committee continues to look for spaces. We'd like to meet in the mornings, recognizing that the current 5pm meeting time is not optimal for us.

We started the month of October with our annual fall retreat. It was characteristically drizzly the entire weekend. But that didn't stop Tim Gilbert from rising to the top in our First Annual Ping Pong Tournament, closely followed by Larry Potts, who took 2nd Place. Nor did it stop merry evening festivities around a bonfire. The drizzling rain did not stop us from engaging in worship through sign language, painting a work of art communally, or being led in storytelling and reflection by Daleen Ward and Terri Churchill.

The major topic of conversation on the retreat (besides the advent of our Romans teaching series) was what are we to do about small groups. We spent some time as a group identifying what our major frustrations and disappointments are with our small group structure. We also spent some time brainstorming ideas. The conversation has continued throughout the fall in our covenant member meetings and leadership team meetings. I know you are all eager to hear the results of that conversation, but you'll have to stay tuned for more news about that in a future issue of SMC Connections.

The School of Love observed its opening semester with a Wednesday night Bible study on the book of Romans, and is continuing in December with a book study on Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*. The School of Love is very

new and very informal at this point. It is a series of opportunities for discipleship and spiritual growth that take place during the week. Anyone and everyone is invited. It has included silent retreats, book studies, and worship nights. The doors are open for much more growth here.

At the end of October we had our annual "Oktoberfest" --pumpkin carving/chili glut/hot apple cider imbibing event in the Ward's backyard.

In November, Karna Larson celebrated her birthday with a house concert fundraiser for Breaking Free, an organization which helps women break free from involvement in the sex trade.

Larry Potts also celebrated his birthday in November, with a party at Groundswell and an epic spaceshuttle cake made by Megan Greulich!

Danny and Amanda Churchill got married on September 8th! It was a raucous party, let me tell you. We ate chili and apple pie, we danced our bottoms off, we hooted and hollered and generally made a big deal over the both of them.

Justin James continues to lead Poetry for Thought, a monthly spoken word and storytelling event. In case you're wondering if it's cool or not, let me tell you some more about it: POETRY FOR THOUGHT continues to bring conscious poets, community organizers, storytellers, musicians, and neighbors together to hear and experience righteous art and build community through interactive discussions. There are spoken word and storytelling performances followed by a community dialogue based on what was said, what it means, how it relates to our lives and what we can do about it. POETRY FOR THOUGHT is about forgetting to speak proper: poetry as dialogical force in the public sphere

In September, Kevin Kneisl left Saint Paul to study the Bible at a YWAM school in Madison, WI. He requests prayer for his YWAM missions team as they travel to Japan in the New Year!

Our youth continue to meet regularly with their mentors, whether it's over-indulging at those serve-yourself frozen yogurt places, arguing the political intricacies of *The Hunger Games*, or discussing subtle social nuances experienced by teenager and adult alike!

We're putting our Romans series on hold to celebrate Advent. This most recent Sunday began our observation of Advent, with song and poetry. We await the coming of Christ, cultivating deep awareness of our need for God and cultivating hope that Jesus will meet our needs. Join us in making space for the Messiah to come to us. Join us in praying that the Spirit will be as close to us as our own breath, our breath which we literally take into our bodies. Join us in hope-filled search for signs of God in the world, signs that God is with us.

Happy Advent,  
Love from Third Way Community in Saint Paul!



In November this year, after several years as editor of the Shalom Connections newsletter, Bethany J. Smith stepped down from her position. I know everyone will join me in thanking her for her time and service to this wonderful newsletter that reminds us of our intentional and spiritual connection to one another. She has graciously handed over the reins to me.

My family and I moved to Plow Creek in May 2009. At that time, our daughter was seven months old. Now, over four years later, my husband Matthew is one of the farm managers and we have added a son to our brood. I spend my hours with fairy dresses, muck boots, kid's songs, dirty dishes, and preparing farm fresh food. I also attempt to write poetry, fiction, and songs in the stolen quiet moments of motherhood.

I'm excited about taking on this position and hope to meet many of you in the coming months and years.

*Christiana Peterson*

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