



# SHALOM MISSION COMMUNITIES

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## June 2014: The Role of Creativity and the Artist in Community

### Dancing with the unexpected

by *Rich Foss*

Every community has to deal with the unexpected, either creatively or derisively. When I was a student at the University of North Dakota, I was part of a fledgling literary community on campus, eventually editing the campus literary journal for a year while I was a graduate student.

When I first entered the literary community through creative writing classes, I did what was expected of me. I wrote poetry and fiction with no reference to my life being shaped as a Christian. After all, this was a secular university.

Eventually, I did the unexpected. One day I turned in a batch of poems that were explicitly Christian. On the evening that the class critiqued my Christian writing, they had a heyday. The teacher, Professor John Little, read with mockery one of the poems I submitted. The rest of the class was equally scathing in their critiques.

"Tonight," one of my fellow students said at the end of the class, as if keeping a scoreboard ready, "it was the Lions 27, the Christians 0."

Derision is one way communities handle the unexpected.

While I was involved with the university literary community, I was also part of a Christian undergraduate community on campus, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Naturally I looked to my Christian community for guidance on how to integrate my faith and my writing. One of my fellow Christian students said, "Rich, you should include Jesus in everything you write."

Her advice seemed both right and awkward. Jesus was and is central to my life and it made sense that he should be central in my writing. At the same time, trying to fit Jesus into everything I wrote felt like committing to always carrying a 50 cent piece in my shoe.

Thankfully, an older, wiser IVCF staff member pointed out that the Psalms say the stars display the handiwork of God and yet God didn't hang a sign in the stars to point out that fact. His comment freed me to write, assuming that my literary work would display that handiwork of God, which was my deepest desire, even if I didn't include a sign proclaiming Jesus.

When I completed my Master's degree in 1977, my wife Sarah and I moved to Plow Creek Fellowship and since then we've been part of this intentional Christian community. Over the last 37 years I've written and published poetry, published a novel, and served the



*Continued next page...*

Every Christian community and artist needs to fit together the old and the new, the expected and the unexpected, the mundane and breakthroughs of the Holy Spirit.

Several years ago I was working in my office when I saw dark blur out of the corner of my eye. I swung my head in time to see a mouse streaking along the wall. In the subsequent years, I've occasionally thought I saw another dark blur in the corner of my eye and I felt a surge of fear. So far it hasn't been another mouse but the fear returns every time I see a dark blur in the corner of my eye.

As human beings we have a built in bias against the new and the unexpected. Our brains see the unexpected as a threat and our brains try to neutralize the threat as a way to return to safety. I check out the dark blur in the corner of my eye to see if it's a mouse invading my space and, when it isn't a mouse, I can relax and return to equilibrium.

Jesus is an artist at handling the unexpected.

In first century Palestine, Jesus was a new leader on the Jewish scene and he was starting a new community. He had to deal with people who thought he was invading their territory. He knew that through his inaugural address, the Sermon on the Mount, he was going to be saying some unexpected things and when you say the unexpected, people are immediately afraid. They were likely to say things like, "You are throwing the baby out with the bathwater," or "You are going overboard".

Early in his Sermon Jesus addresses the fears of the unexpected among his listeners: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." In essence, Jesus was saying, "Do not be afraid. I am not throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

As Christian communities, it's important to show the connections between the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles and our life together. We are not abolishing Scripture but fulfilling it through our life together.

A few lines later in his Sermon, Jesus pivots from saying, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets..." to saying, "...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus was the leader of a renewal movement. He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but neither did he come to rubber stamp the standard religious thinking of his day. He came to teach his followers to exceed, to move beyond the religious practices of his day.

He taught his followers how to go beyond standard religious practices through a series of statements in which he quotes the standard teaching on an issue, such as "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' Then he follows up with a statement that goes beyond the standard teaching such as 'But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.'"

He covers issues such as money, sex, and power and many more.

When Sarah and I joined Plow Creek I remember someone in the community quoting one of our neighbors as saying, "It's just a matter of time until someone at Plow Creek steals from the common treasury or runs off with someone else's wife."

Sin is one category of the unexpected that communities need to deal with creatively. Gossip and vengeance are common human responses to sin. Forgiveness is a creative response. At one point one of our early leaders disclosed sexual misconduct when one of his victims became an adult and disclosed the abuse to family members.

It was a very difficult time for the community as we sought to be faithful to the victims and to the brother who had sinned. In the next few years two-thirds of the community left. Eventually those of us who remained in the community forgave the brother, and even though we were scarred, we once again began to grow as a community.

Most sins in community are not as dramatic and yet forgiveness that happens day by day releases creativity and makes it possible a community to thrive.

"I keep track of holy moments at Plow Creek and this meeting we just had was a holy moment." I said recently to a participant after a meeting of a few of us at PCF. In the meeting we had discussed a difficult situation and we were not divided. A year ago we would not have been able to discuss the situation with such grace and creativity. What had changed? I'm sure that part of the change was due to forgiveness, part of it was due to prayer, and part due to the wonder of the Holy Spirit at work.

Sin muddies the mechanisms of creativity in community. The lack of forgiveness casts grit into the gears of grace. Faithfulness and forgiveness grease the gears of creativity in community.

Artists are known to invest literally thousands of hours into their craft. The gift of artists to community is their passion for creating unexpected beauty out of the ordinary.

For a number of years I shot slides of people at Plow Creek. Most people enjoyed the slide shows because they liked seeing photos of themselves and other people of PCF. But I also shot photos of the burn barrels at PCF. There was nothing extraordinary about the burn barrels. They were simply the place where PCF people burned paper products to save on landfill costs.

When, in a slide show, I flashed two or three burn barrel slides on the screen, there were often groans. Artists often see beauty where others do not. Much of community is as mundane as burning paper products in a burn barrel and yet, I also believed, that much of community is as beautiful as the barrels we used to burn paper products.

One Friday evening, I announced that I was going to do a burn barrel slide show. I had sorted through years of burn barrel slides and selected the 24 best slides shot in all kinds of light, all seasons, and all angles.

I suspect that most people were expecting to groan but as we watched the slides there was silence, perhaps even a bit of awe, as people were struck by the beauty of the burn barrels in moments of snow, moments of apple blossoms, and even an accidental double exposure that showed the Plow Creek Fellowship sign at the entrance to our community in the flames from a burn barrel.

Artists teach us to be enchanted by the unexpected, to incorporate the unexpected into the life of community, to build our life together on Jesus's words, and to see the beauty in the mundane moments of life together.

# News from Hope Fellowship



*Hope Fellowship folks participate in the annual Easter Retreat*

*by Michelle Porter*

*John 14: 5-6*

*“Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'*

*Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'”*

As we continue our year-long theme of “Crossing into Samaria,” many of us at Hope Fellowship are experiencing literal and figurative journeys in our lives. We are entering the summer with three teaching themes to help us to know and to see the Father: discernment, covenant, and creation.

Our teaching on discernment focused on the passage in John 14:1-8

where Thomas and Phillip question how they will walk the way of Jesus without his physical presence with them. As we continue our discussions of what it means to be part of the Sanger-Heights neighborhood and the commitments that we want to make to each other as part of Hope Fellowship, we sometimes echo Thomas' question in verse 5, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Some of the ways that God has answered this question throughout history is to remind God's people of the faithfulness they have experienced in the past. On our annual Easter retreat, we spent Saturday afternoon telling stories from our twenty-year history as a church body. We enjoyed reminiscing about our lives together as Hope Fellowship and remembering how God has and continues to lead us.

The past few months have also given us plenty of opportunities to celebrate things that are currently happening among the body and to see God's active faithfulness in our daily lives.

Diamante Maya and Barbara Bridgewater organized two progressive dinners in March and May for Hope Fellowship people living in close proximity to our meeting house. With a different course at each house, the fun and fellowship lasted four hours!

Joe Gatlin visited South Africa with a long-time friend and Habitat colleague, and David Cramer traveled in May to Africa to visit his brother and sister-in-law and meet his new nephew. Jessie Hunter also visited South Africa with Reeve's mom. Reeve is originally from South Africa, and Jessie enjoyed seeing his birth country.

In April, we had our semi-annual clothing swap. It is a great time to get new clothes without having to

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spend any money, and it gives us a chance to examine our closets and think about how what we wear reflects our lives as disciples of Jesus. Kent McKeever, a lawyer with Mission Waco and a friend to many at HF, also helped our community think about how how others think of us as he wore an orange jail jumpsuit during Lent. Local Waco articles were written well as a story in the *New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/19/opinion/an-orange-jumpsuit-for-lent.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/19/opinion/an-orange-jumpsuit-for-lent.html?_r=0)

John Alexander is in the process of remodeling the kitchen and downstairs bathroom in the meeting house, which is a much appreciated project. We look forward to having a more functional space for our common times together.

We continue the journey of raising our youth to be disciples of Jesus and to learn how they fit into the larger body of HF and the bigger story of being the people of God. One way that this is happening this year is with a playground project led by Evan Alexander. With the guidance of JB Smith, Evan organized a playground build in May. People at HF were asked to contribute to the project financially and by helping with the build.

This time of year is always full of birthday, graduations, and anniversary celebrations, and this year marks Joe and Nancy Gatlin's fortieth wedding anniversary! We also celebrated three graduations: Analí Gatlin from law school, Teresa Mullet from college, and Hannah Bridgewater from high school.

As we continue crossing into Samarias and questioning if we really know the way, God is faithful to remind us that we are the people of God.

### ***Hope Fellowship's commemoration of the crossing of the Lempa River.***

*by Lucas Land*

This year Hope Fellowship marked a first. Under the inspiration and leadership of Diamante Maya and Nancy Gatlin we held the first march commemorating the March 18th crossing of the Lempa river in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Valle Nuevo. Art played a central role in the commemoration and telling of the story, especially with our children.

We were very fortunate to have the help of local Mexican artist, Rocio Ramirez de Landoll, and her

husband. During Kids' Club the Sunday before the march the story of the community of Valle Nuevo was our central theme. We told the story of the Exodus in which the Israelites had to flee the oppressive and violent rule of the Pharaoh. Then Nancy Gatlin shared the story of the people of Valle Nuevo being forced to flee their land and cross the Lempa river into Honduras.

Rocio then helped the kids create banners for the march using stamps that she made. Similarly to Fernando Llort, Rocio's simple stamps made the art accessible to 6-8 year olds and gave them tools to express themselves and participate together in this expression of solidarity.

On Tuesday, March 18, 2014 we gathered at the meeting house to march through the neighborhood with our banners. We made several stops along the way to read the history of the community of Valle Nuevo, El Salvador both past and present, sing songs and pray. Some of the kids helped to carry the banners they made and participated in the march.

We work with kids in Kids' Club to learn about the nonviolent way of Jesus and develop skills for conflict resolution and peacemaking. We try to engage them in different ways through games and activities that are fun, but sometimes difficult. Art engages all of our senses. Painting involves touch and sight. Storytelling and singing engage our sense of hearing. The art of cooking uses our senses of smell and taste, such as the delicious *pupusas* we ate before the march. In this way art can help us to absorb, understand and process difficult stories.





**Letter from the editor:**

For this June 2014 issue, I sent out a call for writing from all the people of our SMC communities who are artists, creative-types, or just interested in the unique intersection of art and community. I believe that all of us have creative capacities that manifest in as many areas as there are people so I was moved by the ways that the members of our communities see how art and creativity can make intentional community into a richer place. Rich Foss talks about Jesus' creative power to spark the imaginative capacity of his followers. Lucas Land shares how folks at Hope Fellowship used art to teach children about the crossing of the Lempa River by the people of Valle Nuevo. We are privileged to include visual and word pieces in this newsletter from talented artists like Terri Churchill, Matt Adams, Anne Gavitt, Angela Adams, and Heather Ashcroft-Clark. If you wish to see the lovely visual pieces in more vivid detail, I encourage you to visit our website [www.shalommissioncommunities.org](http://www.shalommissioncommunities.org) to view a color version of the newsletter. I hope we can continue to encourage art and creativity in our communities and find better ways to include them in our lives together. I'm so glad we could not only talk about art but witness its creation among our community members.

—Christiana N. Peterson

# Shalom Connections

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

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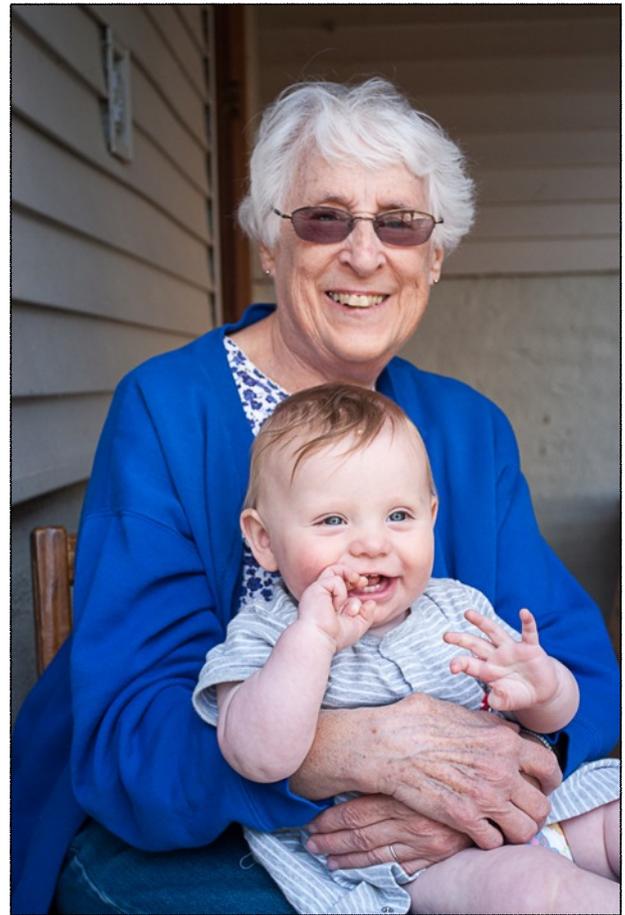
# Plow Creek News

by *Christiana Peterson*

We are experiencing the summer blooms with hopefulness at Plow Creek. With the winter thaw and new life abounding, we are enjoying additions to our rural community. Matt and Angela Adams have welcomed back their foster children O and J, who have brought liveliness and joy in abundance to us. Michele, a lovely woman from the area, has joined our church and membership meetings. The Petersons are expecting a baby in early fall, which will add to the already growing brood of babies. That includes our new community neighbors, Dan, Camille, and Finn Walker. They moved here in May. We are so happy they are here and we love their dandelion cookies and the skill at which they have already taught some of us to use more of the plants that grow on these 180 acres.



*The Walkers on moving day;  
Margaret holds Finn Walker during the move*



Natalie Potts is with the farm again this year as a paid employee. We also have new interns, Jonathan and Emily. Their youth and energy has brought a liveliness to meals and times of common work. We owe an enormous “Thank You!” to the folks from Reba who spent another weekend with us to, at long last, finish the sidewalk around the meadow.

Rich Foss spent time in and out of the hospital this spring. After his latest hospital stay, he blessed the community with a teaching during worship titled, “The Mystery of Goodness and Suffering: A Biblical Reflection on my Death.” Pray for Rich, Sarah, and this community for wisdom and comfort during this time of illness and transition.

After many years living in a house in Tiskilwa, Margaret and David Gale are planning to move into the upstairs room of the East House this fall. Preparations and repairs will be necessary before they can move in but the folks on the property will be glad to have them back at the farm where they spent many years building homes and providing wise leadership to the community.



*Playing with fire* by Heather Ashcroft-Clark  
for Anne

You've been playing with fire lately,  
breathing in a bracing freedom  
that fans a vital spark within,  
a live coal long lodged at your core,  
sometimes glowing boldly  
sometimes banked and ashy white.

It's only right to take the time  
to tend this ember, not knowing  
what it may ignite, what  
vermilion swan might ride  
the updrafts of your inspiration  
setting skies ablaze with wingéd light.  
*hac 4.23.14*

*Savior's gaze*  
by Heather Ashcroft-Clark

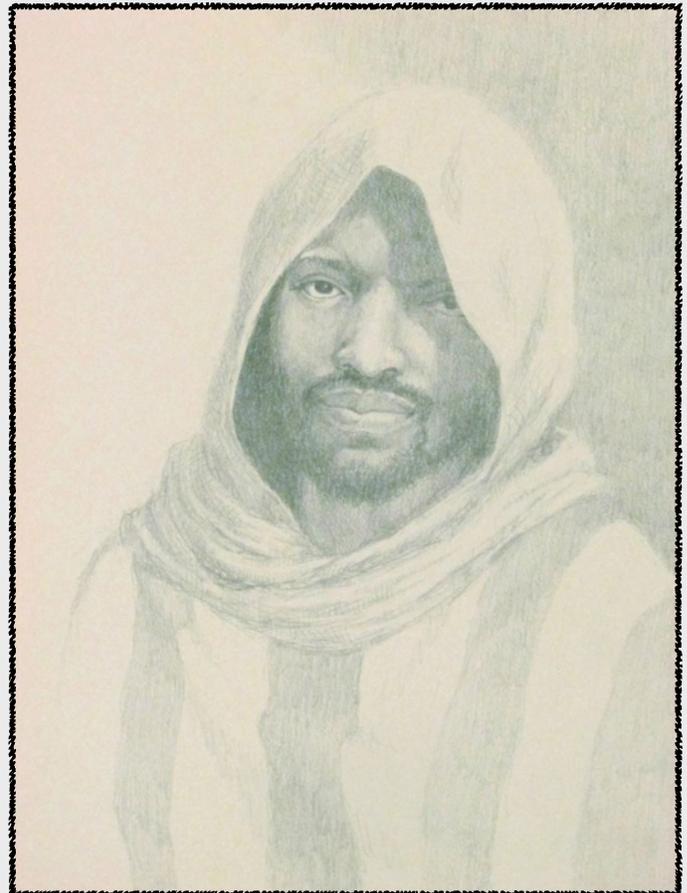
Thanks to a soul sister's vision  
our eyes meet once again  
here in the 'hood:

you with your face partway  
shaded, at your back yet again

*Drawings "Firework Swan" (above) and  
"Jesus" (right) and reflection by Anne Gavitt*

I'm not sure what my art does for others; I have much more awareness of the role community plays in art. Heather [Ashcroft-Clark] and I have a "writer's group of two"--we regularly send each other new poems, or talk about the pain of the blank page, or air ideas for projects of all kinds. There are others, too, who are early readers and viewers of writings and drawings. This year I convened a "What are you going to do with the rest of your life" committee, which is helping me develop ideas and possible marketing plans, generally cheering me on when things go right, and encouraging me when I am slow, depressed, or can't draw to save my life.

Almost anything inspires art: a conversation, story, song, worship time, conflict, question, answer, joy, sorrow, anger, peace...you get the idea. I am grateful to be able to offer gifts to my family in community, and to be in an environment that points me to Jesus and his love.



# The Challenge of Creation: from Third Way



by Terri Churchill

It's not easy being an artist.

I'm sitting here trying to figure out why that's true, and I think it has something to do with the risk of creation. It's a very naked experience to create something and then share it with others. It's revealing and vulnerable and even a little frightening.

Our world doesn't always understand or value the work of artists beyond the entertainment or decorative value of the finished "product". What good is it, really? Isn't it just a giant waste of time to sit around and paint or write songs or poetry or sculpt or whatever it is

that we do? Aren't there better ways to spend our time on earth?

But when I'm in my right mind, I know that when I'm creating I'm acting on impulses from God.

When I came to Third Way nearly two years ago, I found myself in a community of artists of all kinds. There were painters, musicians, dancers, actors, potters, poets, writers and more. For such a small community, it was really kind of astounding. I felt at home here, and that was relatively new to me.

I had spent a lot of time on art when I was younger, but it had been 20 years since I gave it much of my attention. I was too busy raising a family, working, and

doing all the things that I was *supposed to*. Art always came last when it came at all. I never made any space for it. It seemed selfish, trivial and pointless compared to the more important things on my to-do list.

I don't think of it that way anymore.

Something about this community woke up the sleeping artist inside me. Suddenly I not only had permission to create; it was being demanded of me in the most loving way possible. Somehow my creativity seemed important, even necessary. And it wasn't just me. There's a sense here that everyone has something to contribute to what God is creating in us.

I believe that creativity is the place where we are most vulnerable to the voice of God. It allows us to hear things and see things that are unexpected. It calls things into being that were not there before. When we are inspired, it is the very breath of God challenging us to listen and respond. We have a choice, of course. But there is an invitation in the moment of inspiration that has the potential to propel us forward.

And I believe that creativity and inspiration is for us all. If we can all regularly settle into a place of listening and allow ourselves to be inspired, it really doesn't matter what the outcome is (in terms of a "piece of art"). The process itself can become a pathway to the heart of God.

So I want to challenge all of us with an exercise that has been helpful for me:

1. Sit down in a quiet place with some kind of art materials. It can be as simple as some colored pencils (or crayons) and paper or some clay...it really doesn't matter.

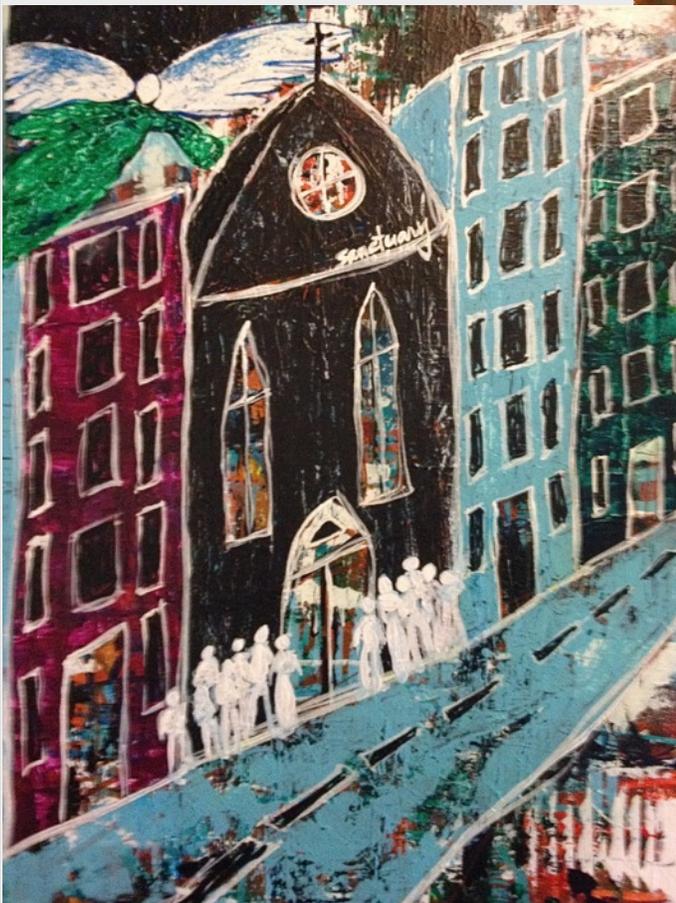
2. Set a timer for 15-20 minutes.

3. Now spend some time just quietly listening. Notice what comes up whether it's body sensations, memories, worries, hopes, whatever. Your only job is to notice what's there without trying to control it.

4. When you feel ready, start to play with the art materials you've chosen. It doesn't have to be beautiful or profound or anything of the sort. Just express yourself to God using color and form...and words if you must.

5. When the timer sounds, take a moment to thank God.

This exercise is a form of prayer that is



totally unconcerned with an outcome or product. If you happen to like the outcome, that's fine, but if you don't, that's OK too. The only important thing is that you show up with all your heart. Try it a few times, and if it's helpful, make this a regular part of your prayer life.

I'll leave you with a few of the pieces that have felt particularly healing or inspiring for me.

Peace, Terri

# Church of the Sojourners News



by *Katie Rivers*

In San Francisco it's usually a good time to be out of doors (not to rub it in the face of any community that may suffer from severe heat or extreme cold!). Edith Bernard and Renata Browne have devoted themselves to tending the garden behind the Florida and Monastery houses. They installed a drip irrigation system and have "upgraded" some of the plants.

This year's apprenticeship is coming to a close. Daniel Boettcher will be headed up to Church of the Servant King in Portland, but not before he leads a mini Sojourner expedition to summit the likes of Mt. Shasta! Vicki Walker has returned to her faith community in Sacramento, but not before gracing the church with an affirmation and flower ceremony in which she stated the ways she had been blessed by each person. This coming year we will have the first break from the apprenticeship since we started ten years ago.

Ben Fisk just spent three months at Koinonia as an intern. He is back in San Francisco for the summer, but will be discerning with us if he is to return to Koinonia for a year-long internship. Sage Johnson and Lee Kuiper have discerned to stay on at Sojourners for another year as practicing members.

Quick kidney stone update: As faithful readers of this publication you may recall that the last episode of the Sojo News chronicled Nate Pequette's adventures with a kidney stone. I predicted that by the time you were reading the Spring 2014 edition, he would have passed the stone. Ladies and gentlemen, it was a long and arduous battle that Nate fought with the stone. At the time you were reading the last newsletter, it had not passed. However, at the writing of this article, we can give thanks that Nate has defeated the stone that plagued his kidney. That battle has been won and the stone laid to rest.

A few weeks after the passing of the stone, Nate took the youth on a retreat to Jon and Iva Jo Pedersen's "Sojo Retreat Center" in rural Northern California. Together the youth studied the foot washing scene and the death of Christ; they asked themselves how they can be servants. This was appropriate for a retreat happening at the end of Lent, but it

wasn't all dark. The adventures included: Rubén catching the only fish on the fishing trip; Leo planting a tree; Gigi winning the laughing award; Naomi winning the rock collecting contest that took place in the garden; Mateo building a campfire to provide light to laugh by.

Easter! While all our communities could be found celebrating this most holy day, only at Sojourners could one listen to Rebecca's flute accompaniment as the crowd sang Jim Croegaert's "Was It A Morning Like This?"

Tim Otto's book on homosexuality and the church, *Oriented to Faith*, is going to be published by CASCADE books. Keep an eye out!

Zoe has been blessed with employment. It turns out she didn't lose her job after all!

As a church, Dale Gish and Lee Kuiper have been leading out in a series of discussions and sermons on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives both together and individually. The conversations are timely as we continue to go deeper in developing conflict resolution skills.



*Church of the Sojourners celebrates the Resurrection*



What kind of bird doesn't fly?  
Certainly not a purple martin

Making its way north  
to Illinois in deep winter  
the week Dallas  
was under sheets of ice.

Purple martin painted in studio --  
salvaged wood, permanent marker  
tree branch, blue sky,  
no song.

Purple martin desired and longed for  
by Grandma Neechie bent over and singing.  
Walter will build a house and will them to come;  
spread their wings and show off and eat bugs.

What kind of bird doesn't fly?  
Certainly not a purple martin.

(c) Angela Adams, December 2013.  
(above painting by Matt Adams; poem was written for the painting)

One of the privileges of living in community  
with other artists is the opportunity to  
encourage each other in creative endeavors. I  
wrote this little poem as a response to Anne's  
story about a fateful encounter with a high  
school guidance counselor who labelled as  
mere "pipe dreams" her interests in writing and  
visual art. I rejoice to see her finding new  
freedom to develop and use those gifts.

*A belated response*  
Pipe dreams, eh?

**Not.**  
No way, Jose.  
Sorry, but no cigar.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

hac 1.31.14 (Heather Ashcroft-Clark)

# Reba Place Fellowship News

*by Susan Kauffman*

Topics, anyone? Come to RPF. Here you will find no shortage of opportunity for discussion and study. Our LGBTQ Dialogue has included Bible study, reading articles from differing perspectives, small group sharing about some of our own experiences of sexuality, and large group prayer for this process and for the process the broader Mennonite Church is in. Over the summer we'll have optional meetings that focus on hearing from LGBTQ people and their families, how church history addresses this topic, and what research/science can contribute to our understanding. At members' meetings we'll discuss Church history and tradition, Bible study, how RPF's teachings on human sexuality & marriage relate to gay marriage, discernment of issues in an Anabaptist context, issues related to taking the "unity in diversity" path, and prayer and listening.

Discipleship classes have continued on Saturday afternoons, focused on interpersonal reconciliation, relating to people on the margins, keeping company

with Jesus as he prays, Emmanuel (God with us) prayer, a smorgasbord of various types of prayer, and prayer for group discernment.

Monday night seminars included local author Robert McClory presenting his latest book, [From the back of the Pews to the Head of the Class](#) about the lives of African-American students who attended a small Catholic school in the 60's in Mobile, Alabama. We also discussed Lenten practices, the whys and hows of lasting marriages, singleness in this culture, Celtic spirituality, centering prayer, listening to God and other spiritual disciplines. Sandra Stevens reported on CPT's work in Kurdistan. Jesus People USA leaders shared openly about learning from their mistakes and being thankful for problems. We spent one evening sharing our art, literature, and music with one another.

Given our wide range of ages and abilities, our annual spring retreat took place in a "split location" format this year, beginning with a Fun Night all together on Friday evening (picture Lisa Selph convincing the church to paint its walls



*Folks from Reba Place and Third Way helped the Walkers move into their new place at Plow Creek*

Broccoli Slaw, or David Lukens expounding the virtues of Elbow Golf.) Saturday morning brought sharing on the retreat theme of “Jesus as our center.” Saturday afternoon we either did recreational activities in Wisconsin and spent the night there (those who camped out were COLD) or stayed in Evanston for quiet reflection, a simple shared meal, and sleeping in our own beds. Sunday morning we all gathered at Emmanuel Lodge for worship and more sharing re: “How have you been re-called to follow Jesus, despite failure and disappointment? What signs of resurrection do you see?” All three gatherings included skits depicting Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances, and much singing. Thanks to Sally Youngquist, Stephanie Vaughan, and Alan Gallivan for their creative planning, and to Anne Gavitt for her beautiful hand-drawn portrait of Jesus used as the cover art for the retreat program.

We are pondering Virgil Vogt’s observation that if healing and evangelism (“signs and wonders”) were major parts of the life of the early Christians featured in Acts 2, why shouldn’t these to be central parts of our life and witness here?

Potlucks and luncheons with practicing members and novices continue to serve as part of the membership decision/preparation process. It is likely that no apprentice program will be offered next year but that the young adults relating to RPF will be polled on what RPF could offer to enhance their growth in discipleship. Two of those young adult households are looking for new members – as seekers and/or to cover costs. Could this be your call to the Chicago area?

There is also plenty here for the “do-ers” among us. Novice Susie Kauffman and friend Bob Erck, with help from several others, have worked hard at clearing Evil Buckthorn from the small peninsula on Camp Lake that can be viewed from Emmanuel Lodge. In preparation for having the full

group there for the retreat, Ronn Frantz installed a bathroom in the basement.



John Bergen, an Oberland University student who grew up in New Creation Fellowship in Kansas, visited in late March and is considering moving to RPF in the fall. The McCallister family is exploring moving to Little Rock, Arkansas, to start an intentional Christian community. They are seeking others interested in joining them. Nina Frantz flew out to Calgary, Alberta to join Ronn for the final week of his

sabbatical MDS volunteering, and they drove back cross-country together, stopping to see friends along the way. Dan, Camille, and Finn Walker moved to Plow Creek in early May. We will miss them but look forward to hearing about their farming efforts. One former member was remembered at his memorial service and another experienced much reconciliation when he visited and shared painful experiences from the past. Ammon Allen-Doucot, a college ministry intern, will be coming for the summer and will divide his time between RPF and Living Water Community Church.

Please pray for Barb Grimsley, who took a fall in early April that left her with cracked ribs, a broken shoulder and a punctured lung. She had been recovering steadily but in mid-May news came that she needed surgery to deal with resulting lung problems.

Jeanne and Allan Howe have new twin granddaughters as of March.

Chico and Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin (our members who have now lived in Ford Heights, a far south suburb, for five years) hope to raise money to purchase their house. They feel called to put down roots there as they share life with their neighbors.

*Reba Place and Plow Creek kids enjoy the delights of the farm at Plow Creek*



# The news from Lotus House, novices of SMC



*by Stephen Lawson*

The Lotus House began this year with a community retreat in a cabin in rural Missouri. It was good to have the space to reflect upon our past year together as well as to dream and pray about the future of our life together. As we do every year, we read through our community rule together paragraph by paragraph, pausing to discuss the ways that we had faithfully embodied, or failed to embody, the life to which we've covenanted ourselves. When we read, "the Lotus House is open to all who have need, as the community determines," we reflected briefly that we did not practice hospitality in 2013 in the same ways as we have in the past. Far from an intentional decision on our part, we simply did not encounter anyone who had need for temporary housing. I, for one, believe this was providential since it added stability to the house, which was especially important to help the children Alden and Candace adopted in 2012 feel secure in their new home. At our retreat we recommitted ourselves to being open to neighbors and strangers in need, not knowing what God had in store for us.

Not long after we returned from retreat, a neighbor who had been staying temporarily with some extended relatives asked if we could give her and her three children a place to stay for three weeks. Our house had become well-acquainted with her children, as they had spent nearly every

hour of daylight at our house since they came to our street, often eating two meals a day with us. The house, at the Spirit-led prodding of one of our members, elected to invite her to stay with us without any preconditions or expectations on her part (cf. Luke 6:35). We sought to allow our relationship with this family to be directed by friendship and trust rather than contracts and stipulations.

That was over four months ago. While contracts and spreadsheets can be judged pretty easily, relationships are far more difficult to evaluate. This situation has brought about interruptions of unexpected grace and joy into our daily routines. It has also caused stress, sorrow, and frustration. We continue to pray and discern how best to proceed with this relationship. One thing is clear, whereas last year radical hospitality was not a significant feature of our life together, this year it has become a major element. This has provided us opportunity to reflect upon the ongoing tension between having a healing and deep community among covenanted members and having a community committed to mission in our neighborhood.

Other Lotus House happenings this spring include:

—William Terry, long time member of the Lotus House, moved to Nashville recently to pursue some personal opportunities. We miss his joyful and animated presence in our life, but are grateful for the time we had to share life with him.

—We added a new novice in April, Amy Cadwallader. Amy, a physical therapist, had been joining our weekly community dinners for months and had become good friends with all of us. We are glad she has chosen to join our community.

—Alden Bass, one of our founding members, successfully defended his historical theology dissertation recently. We celebrate with (Doctor!) Alden and Candace on this major accomplishment.

We continue to celebrate our weekly community dinners. The weather has finally begun cooperating and we've been able to eat outside more recently. The garden harvest is just beginning. We are eagerly awaiting the tomatoes and cucumbers that are sure to come. If you're in St. Louis on a Friday, come on by and have supper in our backyard with our friends and us.



*Alden celebrates his dissertation defense with family; Scott celebrates his birthday with friends*

From Sojourners:

This is a photo of Katie Rivers, Zoe Mullery, Michael and Deborah Kuany. Michael Kuany has been written about in the SMC newsletter before. He is one of the "Lost Boys" of South Sudan, and he founded the organization Rebuild South Sudan ([rebuildsouthsudan.org](http://rebuildsouthsudan.org)) of which Katie Rivers is currently the Board President. The organization has been working hard to build a school in his home village of Jalle in South Sudan, but with the current violence there, are focusing on simply providing emergency supplies for the displaced.



Dear SMC Friends,

This past January we celebrated our fifth anniversary of life in Ford Heights. That's five years of tending gardens, sitting on front stoops, and slowly becoming friends and family with neighbors on the block. God has been good to us here in this small, forgotten town—we have found home.

Speaking of home, after months of prayer, discernment with elders at Reba, and conversations with our landlord, it seems God is laying out the path for us to purchase the house we moved into five and a half years ago. It's a good little place, right down the street from our Missionary Baptist church and located on a block that's nearly half abandoned, but still lively with neighbors chillin' on front porches and kids romping around on the sidewalk. We love our block and are proud to call it ours. And we'd like to invite you, fellow followers of Jesus, to consider helping us sink our roots down deeper into this place.

Heeding Jesus' teachings about not storing up for the future, we've been intentional over these years about not holding on to sums of money larger than a couple months' worth of living expenses. So we've not been saving up for a venture like this. But we believe that if God so leads, God will also provide.

We'd like to ask you all to seek the Spirit's leading on whether you or your community might be a part of the way God will provide for us. Our landlord has agreed to sell us the house for \$15,000 and we hope to be able to gather another \$5000 to cover some needed repairs (like a leaky roof). We'd be grateful for whatever gift you'd be able to share, no matter how small.

Thanks for allowing us to share some pieces of our story and needs with you. We pray for God's manna and mercy to be with you all,

Chico and Tatiana

p.s. For ease of administration, the folks in the Reba Place Fellowship office have agreed to store all financial contributions until we reach our needed amount. If you or your community would like to send a financial contribution, please mail it to us (1236 Kennedy lane, Ford Heights, IL 60411) with all checks made out to Reba Place Fellowship with "Ford Heights House" in the memo.

Also, note that Reba Place Fellowship is not a 501c3 non-profit organization; therefore your gift will not be tax-deductible. Please keep this in mind if it matters to you.

**A teacher's reflection**

by Sage Johnson

I teach first grade Spanish dual immersion in San Francisco. My coworker gave me the list of the students' English spelling words for the following week, and as I went down the list reading them, I felt like it was a poem about poverty, wealth, and simplicity. Since they're spelling words, my coworker didn't use any punctuation, but this is how I read it:

*Many  
who  
own,  
eat.  
Why  
add?  
Subtract.  
Wanted.  
Ate.  
Fortune.*

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

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